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The Televised Community

Culture, Politics, and the Market of Visual Representation in India

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TO ALEX

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1. Introduction

This book was not meant to be a study on Hindu nationalism and television in India, at least not to the degree it has turned out to be. It was meant to be a study on the negotiation of the nation-state in a transnationalised and privatised television landscape. Seeing television not as a distinct field but taking it as an intrinsic part of contemporary society and thus as a form of looking at and understanding its processes, it aimed at attempting an anthropology of the nation's cultural and political production in a transnationalised and globalised context.

To a large extent, this is what it has become. The vagaries of fieldwork, however, always entail the aspect of incalculability as they catapult the researcher, however well prepared he or she might be, into a particular historical moment in time of the society he or she travels to. This general aspect of the momentary was in my case anyway enhanced by the inherently ephemeral character of the television image that I was directly dependent on (in the very practical sense of spending many of my hours in front of the TV). But it became even more intensified by accidentally starting my work at the very moment (in late February 2002) of the outbreak of fierce violence in the West Indian state of Gujarat, whose government – like that of the Indian state government – was constituted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the parliamentary affiliate of the Sangh Parivar (the ‘family’ of Hindu nationalist organisations). The violence quickly turned out to represent the most thoroughly state orchestrated and most encompassing pogrom against the Muslim population in the country's long history of Hindu-Muslim violence and a culmination point in the sway of Hindu nationalism over Indian politics and society.

This coincidence had not only an immediate impact particularly on my visual material - because news television channels were continuously reporting on the violence in Gujarat - and, as it turned out, on many of my informants – executives of the leading national news and entertainment channels as well as related journalists, directors and writers. It also forced me to take a stand. Thomas Blom Hansen, in his study on the changing city of Bombay under the impression of the violent politics of the Shiv Sena, a regional affiliate of the Sangh Parivar, has pointed out that “one cannot remain neutral when working with violent nationalist organizations such as Shiv Sena, or the Hindu nationalist movement. [...] Indeed, one must take a stand, not as the waving of certain flags but as a reflection on where one's allegiances

and emotions are, what sympathies and empathies drive one to interpret events in certain ways rather than others.”¹

I cannot say that my position towards Hindu nationalism, developed during earlier work in India, had been really neutral beforehand, and the incoming reports on the atrocities committed in Gujarat and the acute feelings of despair and helplessness amongst Muslims made an emotional neutrality anyway impossible. But beyond that gave me the immediacy of the ongoing pogrom, the spectacular agency of Sangh Parivar-outfits in the public sphere and the politics of the BJP-led central government the opportunity to study most directly the movement’s strategies of dealing with the media and of organising and conducting a public discourse that in itself was characterised by an open partiality. The government’s demand to the news media to remain ‘impartial’ in their reporting and analysis of the violence became in this acute situation the ultimate sign that any ‘neutrality’ – of the media as much as of scientific research – would inevitably align itself with the Sangh Parivar’s increasingly obvious design.

Under this preliminary, the present study is constructed in the way of a long and partly historical trajectory that in large parts revolves around Star TV, the first transnational satellite broadcaster in India, owned since 1993 by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation. The book ‘follows’, so to speak, the journey of Star TV – taking into account its many side-effects and concurrent developments – from being a broadcaster that arrived in India in 1991 with exclusively Western/American programming and that ‘thought’ it could ignore the nation-state, via its difficult transformation into a – extremely successful - Indianised broadcaster aiming at catering to an Indian national audience and thereby changing profoundly the fashion in which this audience was watching television. In a way, this trajectory parallels my own journey, with a time difference of just over ten years, from theoretically thinking about the significance of the nation-state in the context of globalisation and my encounter with its current contesting formations in India. While Star TV with its arrival triggered off the process of television’s open privatisation in India and the quick development of a vast TV landscape, my own arrival coincided with the above-described moment of Hindu nationalist dominance and violence. The concurrence of these two developments, Hindu nationalism and (televisual) privatisation, form the basic focus of the analysis in the attempt to provide insights into the

¹ Thomas Blom Hansen, 2001, *Urban Violence in India. Identity Politics, ‘Mumbai’, and the Postcolonial City*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, pp. 16/17.

ways in which right-wing culturalist nationalist politics and the privatisation of the medium and the commercialisation of its images interact.

The book is subdivided in three parts. The first part deals with the changing position of the nation-state in a transnationalising and globalising world, trying to make three basic points. For one, the nation-state is not only *not* becoming irrelevant with globalisation, the obvious absence of alternative institutions that could take its place particularly regarding legal, social and economic security make the nation-state the foremost agent in *dealing with* globalisation (or defying to do so). Secondly, given the historical ties between the medium of television and the institution of the nation-state, both are – under the impression of globalisation and the emergence of new media – under the pressure to reinvent themselves. The absence of alternative institutions to the nation-state meets here with the actual absence of what one might call a global public sphere, thus realigning a re-inventing television to its ‘old partner’ and making it an important proponent of a re-configuring nation-state. Thirdly, before this background and in the process of what Arjun Appadurai has referred to as the “disjunctive relationship between the nation and the state”² the state ceases to be the overpowering establishment as which it has been perceived particularly in postcolonial contexts, giving space, though, for an overpowering interpretation of a culturally defined nation. Television, which remains despite its changing nature in some way or the other tied to being a conventional and not a ‘new’ medium, is in this context imbricated with the equally conventional form of the (conjunctive) nation-state and its representative mechanisms and guarantees and thus with democracy and the question of representation itself. While the very concept of representation, in the sense of claiming (and being entrusted with) the right to speak for (and about) others, has since the 1980s come increasingly under scrutiny (not least within the discipline of anthropology itself), the aligned re-invention processes of television and the nation-state can be seen as pointing to the dangers that lie in negating representative mechanisms (and necessities). While a nation without the representative guarantees (that the state provides) runs not only the risk of turning non-democratic but also of being inherently a-political (in the sense that the belonging to a pre-defined community overrides the effort to negotiate and interact with others that lies at the heart of the political), a television that tries,

² Arjun Appadurai, 1997, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p. 39. (The first edition was published in 1996 by the University of Minnesota Press, but I use here throughout the reprint that was brought out by Oxford University Press India in 1997.)

in the endeavour to re-invent itself, to defy its representative function runs the risk of becoming a mere agent of projecting that community.

In order to illustrate these points, I start off with a critical discussion of two interrelated concepts that have decisively coined the debate on media, globalisation and the resurgence of culture in that context. Whereas the theorems of the Subaltern Studies Group, and here particularly those of Ashis Nandy, have introduced the notion of cultural resistance in their evaluation of India's colonial and postcolonial history and its constitutive and representative claims, Arjun Appadurai saw in an unfolding globalisation, and particularly in the salience that the media play in it, the prospect of a varied and multiple reconstitution and (self-) representation of cultural identities. My contention is that, while bringing forward a number of valid aspects, both these thought avenues represent in their basic intention, by essentialising the premise of cultural difference, escape routes from theorising the reality of the nation-state in India that, moreover, follow a teleological perception in leading in one case 'back to the community' and the other 'forward into the world'. They thus consider neither that Hindu nationalism is a historical reality in modern India nor that 'global media', and particularly television, will, in order to unfold, substantially interact with the (postcolonial) nation-state. The following empirical chapters (3 and 4) deal against this background with Star TV's controversial advent in India and its successive steps, in the form of the fostering of a 'nation of numbers' and the foregrounding of language politics, towards shaping a commercialising and Indianising image of the nation up until the end of the 1990s.

The second part focuses on the 'ethnographic moment' – as an extreme antidote to an 'ethnographic present' – of the particular situation at the time of my fieldwork. The departure point form reflections on the specific conditions, contingencies and options of doing media-related anthropological research and, also with regard to my interview partners in the various channels, on increasing simultaneities and similarities in class formations as well as in professional profiles and in common patterns concerning questions (and national policies) of nationalism, democracy, minority politics, ethnic, religious and gender discrimination and social and economic exclusion on a global scale. In trying to determine what differentiated the pogrom of Gujarat from earlier Hindu-Muslim violence, especially in the context of the 'global war on terror', I propose a shift in the relation between the ideological and the economic that takes into account the increasing significance of the Indian regional states and of regional nationalisms in relation to regional, national and global media. The comparison between Gujarat 2002 and the Bombay riots of 1993 shows that in the first case a new quality

of 'the local' has developed that manages to submit social and economic forces, including global investments, to the majoritarian ideology of Hindutva (Hindu-ness), which becomes naturalised as the 'will' and 'the expression' of a moral majority of 'the Gujarati people'. This 'model' was endorsed by the majority of the Gujarati voters in the Assembly elections later in 2002 and can be seen as the attempt to re-invent the state on an economic culturalist level. The Bombay riots, by contrast, thrived on the Hindutva-ideology of the Shiv Sena and stabilised the position of the party and organisation but also indicated a pattern in which its claims of Hindutva have to compete with global forces and tend to be continuously compromised by them (and by the Sena's own interest in cooperating with them on various levels).

Taking these two antagonistic developments of Hindu nationalism in two of the most affluent regions of India as the backdrop for the possible options of Hindutva in the wider national context under the BJP-led government, I explore in the following (in chapter 6) the particular discourse of defense that the Sangh Parivar organised in the national arena at the time of the Gujarat pogrom and that systematically disabled the discussion and exposure of its responsibility for the violence. I rest this exploration, on the one hand, on a description of the public atmosphere at the time of the pogrom which lets appear voices that emanated from everyday conversations in my surroundings and my travels through the cities of Bombay and Delhi on my way to and from my 'regular' interviews in the broadcasters and elsewhere. As my research consciously refrained from conducting any coherent interviews amongst audiences in order to focus, for a change, on producers' views on the making of programming and the construction of images, these voices, coming all from people who were very likely to be amongst the audiences of the private national channels, are yet to underline the interaction between commercialised television (and politics) and 'the mood of the people' in a broader sense.

On the other hand rests this exploration on the appearance of the Sangh Parivar's discourse on the national news channels (and here particularly on Star TV's Star News channel), which cannot quite be said any more to have represented this discourse but which involuntarily and unwittingly became part of its orchestration. The analysis of this televised discourse shows not only the methodical limitation of the news media to report 'impartially', thus resonating with the overall observable deadlock of democracy at the time. It also foregrounds their own historical tendency, which has translated from the press into television, to reproduce apparently given contexts rather than exposing their construction. This tendency fed into as

well as was reinforced by a privatising and personalising public sphere, in which the representation of 'facts' was becoming replaced by a projection of 'truths' and in which the reliability of information made way for the subjectivity of its interpretation.

The third part has to do with the mutual reinforcement-processes of the visualisation of the media and that of the Sangh Parivar and was written in view of the highly unexpected BJP-led government's debacle in the general elections 2004. In describing a 'hierarchy', or rather pyramid, with regard to the forms in which different media reported on and related to the Gujarat pogrom I try to demonstrate the intrinsic connection between the appeal of the commercial image and the numbers of viewers that were to be reached by the respective medium – which again put television into a salient position. The 'way from text to image' that Villem Flusser has in the 1980s pictured as the most significant development for the (then) coming century and that has translated into theories concerning a 'pictorial turn', materialised itself here in the sense that the more visual the medium was, the more susceptible it became towards the spectacular and highly image-based public performances of the Sangh Parivar and the more open it tended to leave itself towards the consumers' interpretation. This refraining from pre-defined messages and explaining commentary and the politics of a 'neutrality' towards competing views was exemplified strongest by the Hindi language news channel Aaj Tak, at the time the market leader, which I (in 7.2.) also show to thus have started to integrate increasingly modes of entertainment television.

The last chapter deals against this background with the historical connection between entertainment television and the Sangh Parivar's inner 'division of labour' and its conscious development towards a visually captivating, commercialised performance. Analysing in detail the interplay between the commercialisation first of Doordarshan, the state broadcaster, in course of its screening of the Hindu epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* (1987-1990) and successively of the incoming transnational (like Star TV) and private channels with the endeavour of the BJP and the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) to shape and organise a 'Hindu sangathan' (unity of Hindus), I argue that the different 'waves' of Hindutva since the 1980s – the latest of which I witnessed during my fieldwork - were intrinsically tied to the emergence of new technological facilities and of new television formats. While in the area of news this concerned the format of the 'on the spot' 24-hour news coverage, the current programming of Star Plus, Star TV's mass-oriented entertainment channel, appeared in this context not only as the finally sweepingly successful outcome of Star TV's efforts to Indianise itself and to reinvent television in the Indian context, but also as providing the latest formats – the global

game show and the Indian soap opera – for the Sangh Parivar’s public agency. However, while the convergence between television and Hindutva seemed almost complete in 2003, the elections showed that it had just been the reliance of the BJP on a mere image – with its pompous ‘Shining India’-campaign - that brought about its, temporary, downfall on the national level. While this underlined, despite growing analogies and interplays between media and politics, that the visual media have, in the end, to deliver merely on the level of the image itself, whereas politics has, however much it tries to dilute it, to deliver ‘in reality’, it also marked a tentative re-invention of the social liberal state. Yet there remains an inversion. While the election result appeared to represent the toppling of the last of ‘Hindutva’s waves’, it also anticipated with its clear mandate for real (economic) delivery Hindu nationalism’s next option, which Gujarat’s ‘economic Hindutva’ seems to entail.

A word on the interdisciplinary approach of the study. The announcement that a work employs interdisciplinary methods can be frequently found in the introduction of books, yet do most of these turn out to remain basically confined to the principles of one academic discipline, while allowing some infusions from others. The fashionable ring that ‘interdisciplinary’ has and that derives from the growing insight in irrefutable developments of convergence and interrelatedness, seems to be directly conditioned upon the strong reflex in different faculties to protect and defend their boundaries. I owe in this respect a lot to Arvind Rajagopal’s study “Politics after Television. Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India” (Cambridge 2001), which repeatedly figures in this book, even though not always in a thoroughly affirming way. When I started to work on this project, my insecurities regarding its ‘firm anchoring’ reached occasionally the level of despair, while at the same time the sheer evidences of what I had simply *seen*, during my preparations, to play a role for my research did neither easily connect with this inherent demand nor with what had been written so far in various disciplines (even though I obviously profited much from these writings). I am not trying to suggest that what I provide is groundbreaking, it is certainly far from it, but attempts a small step in a direction that so far seems little attended and walks on thin ice even as far as its single components are concerned. While Hindi cinema and Bollywood (which is not quite the same), for instance, have meanwhile been the focus of numerous academic evaluations, a critical history or anthropological account of the Indian press, that is even older than Indian cinema and equally thriving, remains largely unwritten, which also seems to mirror the association of India with ‘colourful images’ rather than with highly professional journalism. On the development of the, admittedly very recent, television

news channels exists so far not even an article, and I hope that whatever I have shown here can be the trigger for their further study in different contexts (even though they themselves seem to follow the trend that everything is about quick appropriation and little about deeper analysis). The longer I worked on this project, on the other hand, the more did the various fields and aspects that revealed themselves as being relevant in my material itself virtually demonstrate that there exists no such thing as a political anthropology of the nation-state or the (globalising/re-nationalising) media, without which, however, many of the processes I have only attempt to outline here, cannot be followed and understood in the longer run. Rajagopal's study was before this background the first that not only provided an analysis of the Indian press but that also insisted to take television – at the time of his research not even 'fully transnationalised' – as not merely signifying an agent of cultural representation or modernity but as being deeply imbricated with India's political, social, cultural and economic fabric and development. As the nation-state defies its predicted demise and re-invents itself – or refuses to do so – the media are less and less something that 'adds to' a society but show increasingly to be an intrinsic part of the world we live in and can thus neither be merely grasped by 'media studies' or 'image theory' nor can be excluded from anthropology, sociology, history, or political science. This development will probably increase the more global we become and take at the same time very varying forms in different nations – which supports the argument that this kind of an approach be applied and further developed by non-Western scholars with regard to Western nations.

The interviews for this study were carried out between 2002 and 2004 during two longer and one shorter stay. I spoke with altogether around 70 people in and affiliated with the television business in India, leading executives and employed journalists, as well as producers and free-lance writers, directors and researchers in and for the six leading national channels: Star Plus, Zee TV, and Sony, as well as Star News/NDTV, Zee News, and Aaj Tak. In quotes the year of the interview is related to its 'chronological number', i.e. I for 2002 and 01 for the first interview during that stay. These 'regular interviews' were complemented by conversations with people in my everyday surroundings outside the TV stations and production houses (and are marked, if quoted, as 'irregular interviews'). I have ultimately decided to anonymise all interview-partners, not least because none of them were actually 'guilty' of anything grave, which would have made a naming more worth thinking about. Most of them did at the beginning of our talks not mind being quoted, in the greater part of the interviews, however, which were partly recorded and partly noted, there came the point, particularly regarding the

acute political situation, where the respective person said ‘Don’t quote me on this’. These were often, obviously, not only the statements that were the most interesting but which also made it in the evaluation increasingly difficult to differentiate. There are a few exceptions, where, like in the case of the historian Romila Thapar, her narrative was largely congruent with what she stands for in the Indian public, or where I quote somebody anonymously while he or she appears elsewhere by name. This is the case especially with the two ‘leading faces’ of news television at the time, Barkha Dutt and Rajdeep Sardesai.

The introduction of interviews with ‘television people’ has four functions in this study. First, they served to map the discourse amongst them regarding the state of television, the issues at stake, the requirements and pressures of the field. Secondly, they enabled me to draw a picture of that class, largely the middle to upper middle class, and its acute sense of crisis not merely regarding its standing in Indian society but also regarding the supposed ‘power’ of the medium they worked in. Thirdly, they helped me to understand the decision for or against certain programmes and thus to get a grasp of the larger narrative and logic of representation they created. And finally, they played a leading role in developing the overall argument of this study.

Part I

2. *Reinventing the Nation and its Medium*

In the academic and also public debate of the 1990s there occurred a rather sudden shift in attention towards the phenomenon of globalisation and the many undercurrents it carries, a shift that was particularly noticable in the fields of cultural studies (including sections of anthropology and sociology) and media studies, as these disciplines seemed to be concerned with areas of research in which the most direct changes were looming or already perceivably in the making: people, cultures and communication.

One of the most striking features of this shift was the considerable ease with which the growing irrelevance of the nation-state was suggested in course of it. This suggestion itself was often not even discussed, but revealed itself in an absence of the nation-state in the texts. Unless the concern was specifically with emerging ethnic nationalisms or the forming of new states, in course, for instance, of the breakdown of the Sowjet Union or the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the nation-state as a globally existing social, cultural, political, economic and judicial field virtually vanished behind the tandem of the global and the local; it was, so to speak, written out of the analysis and terminologically replaced, even though it seemed most curious how one could possibly think – given the enduring, even though transformed existence of phenomena as ancient as villages, regions, even the nobility and the monarchy – that a framework that has coined the political organisation of our lives for better or worse for a rather long time would just disappear at the sight of a new development that, moreover, is quite difficult to determine in its concrete shapes and characteristics.

What appeared to happen, was, on the one hand, that globalisation functioned as a kind of index for the kinetics of change rather than as a field of actual analysis. Change, which basically occurs constantly, was as a term not strong enough to capture the dimensions and the suddenness of post-Cold War transformation, particularly regarding the revolution in information technology and physical as well as virtual mobility options (and necessities). Globalisation itself stepped in as a signifier-cum-signified in order to mark a turning point. The readiness with which the traditional nation-state was dismissed, ignored or openly

declared unnecessary for the future seemed to almost underline the fact that its dissolution was *not* yet serious and its dismissal had not much to do with describing a ‘reality’ but was related to an altered mode of perceiving the world that was quickly gaining priority.

On the other hand, there evolved a qualitatively different and more political impetus in the sense that globalisation was directly pitted against the nation-state, and the former stood in mainly for the opportunity of fulfilling an anti-national(istic) project. This in itself seemed politically apt as many of us had been uncomfortable with using the terms of the nation-state anyway, and particularly that of the nation, because it stands for features such as exclusivism on the basis of cultural and religious homogeneity, militarism and subordination, that symbolise modernity’s refined measures of rule and that have generated often dramatic restrictions on human liberties (as well as their legitimation), and not least a eurocentrism that had sufficiently proven its disastrous effects on the rest of the world. Yet, it may not have been a coincidence that just the one-sidedness of this notion had already during the 1980s been challenged by Benedict Anderson, as if in wise anticipation of the demands that would confront a globalising nation-state. In contrast to mere apologetics of nationalism, he singles out the human capacity of imagining oneself as living in a limited communion with others (‘fellow-members’) without ever meeting them in person or even knowing of their existence as being at the core of the forming and sustenance of the nation. Moreover, he re-assesses this forming process not as a European model, but rather reveals the very idea, be it in a positive or a negative evaluation, that “everything important in the modern world originated in Europe”³ as representing the actual substance of eurocentrism (see below). By accentuating the citizen’s active creation rather than passive subjugation or mere acceptance of rule and power, the nation becomes potentially inclusive of all those who, regardless of their descent, participate in its imagination and are allowed or encouraged to do so, respectively.

Yet, while the state is – in favour of the nation – conspicuously absent from Anderson’s argument, the “disjunctive relationship between the nation and the state”⁴ that Arjun Appadurai has diagnosed in the 1990s entails the question if an increasingly remote state actually contributes towards the imaginative construction of the nation in Anderson’s sense. The development since the 1990s has thrown considerable doubts on such an expectation. It

³ Benedict Anderson, 1991, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso (Revised Edition), Preface p.xiii.

⁴ Arjun Appadurai, 1997, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p. 39. (The first edition was published in 1996 by the University of Minnesota Press, but I use here throughout the reprint that was brought out by Oxford University Press India in 1997.)

seems clear to most today that the nation-state is shaken dramatically in its earlier self-evidence, especially as far as economic matters and governmentality are concerned, but also with regard to long unquestioned ideas of democracy, freedom and secularism, and in what seems to be a most significant proof of globalisation this development accounts for Western nation-states as well, if not particularly, accelerating the dissolution of their function as models and points of orientation. However, given the often more metaphysical or instrumental dealings with globalisation, it seems relevant to argue that over the past few years it has also become increasingly clear that, despite globalisation's obvious and far-reaching influence on various levels, none of the processes associated with it – amongst others transnationalisation, decentralisation, privatisation, liberalisation, deregulation, migration – has really managed to completely push aside the nation as a framework of reference, to replace the state as an institution, or to eradicate nationalism as a claim. On the contrary: just like the students' movement, even though following different national and local claims, spanned across the globe from Calcutta to Berkeley in the 1960s and 1970s, attempts at re-defining national identity and tendencies of re-nationalisation have been tangible since the 1980s in many parts of the world, thus forming a global development in themselves. This makes it difficult to argue that “the many varieties of nationalism” are predominantly “responses to – reactions against, even – the pressure of a modernizing globalization.”⁵ Even though this may partly be the case, it also seems that these tendencies are facilitated and generated through their various interactions *with* globalisation. The ‘local’ is thus only partly referring to a locality in the sense that the term suggests; it is (more) often a synonym for the national.

As far as the nation-state is concerned, it is rather evident that we so far have no other terminology for describing a particular form of community which is hardly anywhere allowed to be imagined sufficiently in Anderson's sense, but which continues to be held together by a particular administrative, judicial and representative framework, and despite – and also because - of globalisation there is no other institution as yet that would demand the same duties, but also none that could, at least theoretically, guarantee the same rights. Before this background, it is the basic argument of this chapter, but underlying the whole study, that a mere focus on globalisation and on developments that seem to lead away from the ‘old world order’ almost necessarily dims attention towards *what is being globalised* and to what extent.

⁵ Stuart Hall, 2002, “Democracy, Globalization, and Difference”, in: Enwezor/Basualdo/Bauer/Ghez/Maharaj/Nash/Zaya (eds.), *Democracy Unrealized. Documenta 11_Platform 1*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, p. 30.

As the nation-state has factually not vanished so far, it is actually one of the main fields *within which* globalisation unfolds – with questions of national sovereignty and power of decision and participation, struggles particularly in the areas of labour and occupation, migration, social security, education and health care, citizenship and minority rights as well as representation (political and otherwise) testifying to this – and one of the few instances that can actually effectively manage and mitigate its consequences.

In this sense, ignoring the nation-state as a historical, political, socio-economic and cultural field means, for a start, giving away an understanding of *what actually happens*. Secondly, as the old concept of the nation-state seems to be in urgent need of re-definition, also and particularly with regard to cultural nationalisms and majoritanisms, the problems of a nation-state that is in its very existence not recognised or recognised only *as* a problem in the first place, can hardly be assessed adequately. To put it more bluntly: even if the nation-state is increasingly unable – and also unwilling - to shoulder many developments in ignorance of its surroundings, its collapse still spells disaster, not least for the underprivileged and the minorities. Finally, despite overarching, ‘global’ features in the areas mentioned above, the interaction with globalisation does vary significantly from state to state, depending on the respective historical and political preconditions as well as the state’s ability and interest to pursue its duties and to invest its options. In this context it is also important to note that, while globalisation has become an index for a turning point in time, it also serves – particularly to the state – as a sometimes welcome diffuse force onto which responsibilities can be projected that the state itself is not ready or willing to face (see 3.2.).

While the nation and nationalism, on the other hand, have pretty early been discovered as a field of future relevance⁶, there so far exist hardly any examples in the field of anthropology and cultural and media studies of how the altering existence and position of the (respective) state could be framed and analysed in a global context, a question that, as I see it, acquires increasing importance particularly in the wake of a ‘cultural turn’ which has left disciplines classically concerned with issues of organisational and legal formations like the state and ideologies such as and nationalism, like political science, in some kind of a limbo. The ‘disjunctive relationship between nation and state’ thus seems to be promoted not least by the development in scholarship itself, with the nation and nationalism, often in the guise of ‘the

⁶ See Richard G. Fox (ed), 1990, *Nationalist Ideologies and the Production of National Cultures*, American Anthropological Association; Ulf Hannerz, 1996, “The Withering Away of the Nation?” in: Hannerz, *Transnational Connections. Culture, People, Places*, London/New York: Routledge, pp. 81-90, and Akhil Gupta/James Ferguson, 1992, Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference, in: *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1), pp. 6-23.

local', being framed in terms of culture and identity politics, which leaves the state as the representative, organisational and legal framework, and thus the field of political power and negotiation, aside. This carries the danger, as, for instance, the historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam has pointed out, that "western academics, whether studying Indian society from a 'Hindu point of view', or making sweeping generalizations between the iconoclasm of the Peoples of the Book as contrasted to the comportment of Hindus, Buddhists and Jainas" may become complicit in "distortions" between the political and cultural.⁷ With regard to the construction of cultural identity through and in television, for instance, which is one of the salient fields in this regard in India, the latest greater studies that explicitly refer to the transformation of the nation-state and the evolving prominence of a political (Hindu-) nationalism and that offer important insights into then emerging developments that have taken more concrete shapes today, finalised their fieldwork in the beginning of the 1990s, i.e. before globalisation in its current form actually unfolded.⁸ Thereafter, the thread they have laid out has hardly been followed up in the favour of analysis in which culture and technology take the lead, thus underlining the tendency to classify the nation-state in its conjunction not so much as a historical entity, but as a category of the past.

Meanwhile, though, there seems to be a growing consciousness that globalisation, or at least its first wake, increasingly comes of age, accompanied by an atmosphere of a progressively tangible fatigue and also impatience with poststructuralist framings of globalisation, media and culture, whose rather repetitive, codified and largely a-historical terminology of mapped identities, spaces of resistance, the local and the global, hybridity, agency and mobility has increasingly turned out to pre-frame fieldwork results rather than being discussed in course of the research and to often fail to describe 'real' developments. In this spirit, quite a few advances have been made, particularly in the field of media studies (see 2.5.). Interestingly, though, they so far mainly exhaust themselves in a critique of the existing paradigm rather than setting a new tone, which may point towards the pervasiveness of the shift that occurred in the 1990s but also towards the actual usefulness of many parameters it introduced. As of now, especially as far as the link between a necessary overhaul of the anthropological canon and the study of globalisation and media is concerned, there has not emerged a text that would

⁷ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 1996, "Before the Leviathan: Sectarian Violence and the State in Pre-Colonial India", in: Kaushik Basu/Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *Unravelling the Nation. Sectarian Conflict and India's Secular Identity*, New Delhi: Penguin, p. 46.

⁸ Purnima Mankekar, 2000, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics. Television, Womanhood and Nation in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Arvind Rajagopal, 2001, *Politics after Television. Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

have had a comparably sustainable impact onto the academic debate and also to a considerable degree onto the conduct of empirical research as had Arjun Appadurai's essays "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1991) and "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology" (1991). Both of them are contained in his widely received monograph "Modernity at Large" (1996) and played a leading role in directing scholarly attention away from the continuing existence of the state and towards a cultural understanding of 'the local', i.e. of the nation and nationalism. Maybe there will not again surface a text of comparable directive power, suggesting that we might only now have reached the end of the era of meta-narratives, the last of which would then, paradoxically, have been provided by one of those who most expressively declared their demise.

In the following four subchapters, together with related texts, I will engage with Appadurai's analytical framework, but the reason is not merely that no other source of comparably directive calibre exists, but also that it most directly relates to nearly all aspects that play a role in this study. For one, Appadurai's examples largely refer to India, even though, in compliance with his overall approach, he struggles to make plain that he does not invoke India as "a natural fact", but as "a site for the examination of how locality emerges in a globalizing world", and urges the reader "to see India as an optic, and not as a reified social fact or a crude nationalist reflex."⁹ India as a rather concrete place and nation-state (which is where I flew to), however, not only connects directly to my own fieldwork but also makes evident Appadurai's links to the rather influential postcolonial theories of the Indian Subaltern Studies Group. This intellectual relationship has hardly been overtly contextualised in the vast reception of Appadurai's texts, even though it is substantially built around corresponding ideas of a critique of Western modernity, as one of the foremost manifestations of which the nation-state is seen. In both cases, a pre- and, respectively, a post-national form of community becomes a form of resistance against the state (see 2.1. and 2.2.).

Secondly, the comparable age of Appadurai's approach – which has only tentatively been updated by himself (see 2.4.) – and the meanwhile occurred developments enable a 'look back', a revisiting of its basic premises and perceptions with a different impetus than one that seeks to 'work with' his approach. With regard to my fieldwork, the revisiting concerns particularly the problem of Hindu nationalism, which signifies, as I will argue, precisely a politics of setting a de-politicised and culturalised nationalism and a naturalised form of

⁹ Appadurai, 1997, p.18.

community above the political and legal framework of the state. The phenomenon of Hindu nationalism has shown itself not merely in the form of a violent and well-organised supremacist and anti-minority movement, but has become increasingly obvious to be an intrinsic part of India's political, societal and economic fabric, or, as M.J. Akbar has put it already at the end of the 1980s: "The RSS [the core organisation of the Hindu nationalist Sangh Parivar, B.O.] is not so much an organization (cultural or political, take your pick) as a state of mind."¹⁰ However, while the approach of the Subaltern Studies Group has over the years been exposed to mounting criticism regarding its "fairly deafening silence"¹¹ vis-à-vis the growing prominence of Hindu nationalism in India itself (see 2.4.), such criticism has somewhat resisted globalisation in that it has not extended to the theoretical assumptions of Appadurai's work, which mark, however, as I will try and show, in crucial respects its 'global flip-side' (see 2.3.).

The fifth subchapter refers in this context to the revolutionary role that Appadurai ascribes to the electronic media in the process of globalisation and the proposed dissolution of the nation-state into a "deterritorialized" existence, a scenario that has seen critique from the side of media scholars more recently. My main concern in that subchapter, leading up to the more empirical parts of the book, is to draw attention to the traditionally intimate relationship between the medium of television and the nation-state, and to the logic of transnational (rather than global) television in this context. The question that arises is that after the relationship and interplay between transnational media agents, the reinvention of the nation and the role of the state in the process. Given that one of the most salient tropes in the theoretical approaches both of the Subaltern Studies Group and Arjun Appadurai is that of cultural '*resistance*', closely connected questions concern the *actual forms* that resistance takes in this development as much as the very *possibility of* and *interest in* resistance and not least its *adequacy* particularly as far as the state in its role as a carrier of representative mechanisms is concerned.

¹⁰ M.J. Akbar, 2003, *Riot after Riot. Reports on Caste and Communal Violence in India*, New Delhi: Roli Books (reprint of the 1991 revised edition, originally published in 1988), p. 25.

¹¹ Sumit Sarkar, 1996, "Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva", in: David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 293.

2.1. *Difference Instead of Distinction:*

The Nation-State in Appadurai and the Subaltern Studies Group

Despite a debate on the changing options and conditions of anthropology in a rapidly modernising world, that was at the end of the 1980s initiated by Richard Fox's quest for an "anthropology of the present"¹² (which has lately been expanded by his laudable quest for an "anthropology beyond culture")¹³, Arjun Appadurai was the first (and is to date the last) anthropologist who attempted to underscore his demand for a revision of anthropological premises and foci in framing research areas and questions in the age of an unfolding globalisation with a comprehensive and holistic scenario of the profound transformations we are dealing with. Maybe the 'totality' of his scenario related at least to some degree to the considerable resistances within classical anthropology and ethnology to recognise the increasing, but also long-standing interactions with modernity of people and different cultural groups outside the Western hemisphere and even outside urban centres.

Appadurai describes globalisation not coincidentally as "Modernity at Large", which implies a modernity that is unfettered from its earlier (supposed) confinement to the West and refers to a new, encompassing form. A globalisation that has, not least through a growing ubiquity of media, become irrefutable in its visibility and impact was for Appadurai the ultimate signal that anthropology has to start growing out of thinking in terms of "culture as a noun" which "appears to privilege the sort of sharing, agreeing, and bounding that fly in the face of the facts of unequal knowledge and the differential prestige of lifestyles, and to discourage attention to the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated."¹⁴ A modernity that looms large and wide with globalisation points toward the necessity of recognising "the changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity. As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic projects, the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will have to respond."¹⁵ Central to this quest of Appadurai's is an emphasis of the adjective 'cultural' over 'culture', as this is more able to capture the quality of a process in time as well as of active production rather than of ontological substance (of locality as much as of cultures themselves). On the other hand does

¹² Richard G. Fox (ed.), 1991, *Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

¹³ Richard G. Fox/Barbara J. King (eds.), 2002, *Anthropology Beyond Culture*. Oxford/New York: Berg.

¹⁴ Appadurai, p. 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 48.

it leave space for the perception of a politics of *culturalism* which refers to “the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics”¹⁶ and whose violent increase is in his view another proof for the inadequacy of what he calls the primordialist thesis, calling for an “account of ethnicity that explores its modernity.”¹⁷

Appadurai’s approach still clearly favours group identities over individual identities, which form an aspect of modernity that he dismisses as one of the Western “master narratives.”¹⁸ Culture in a collective sense, even if reframed as an adjective, remains thus at the core of his approach and he sees even marginalised groups exclusively as being culturally defined and driven by cultural concerns, which excludes categories of profession, class, caste, and political conviction, the question to what degree and under what definition these different groups see themselves predominantly as cultural as well as the individualising effects of mass media themselves. But despite this rather conventional anthropological approach, his suggestions did not receive the critical attention at least of certain sections of classical anthropology and ethnology that they deserve. It is in this context that the belated and to date not generally supported study of media, especially the mass media, in anthropology has to be seen. They do not coincidentally figure prominently in Appadurai’s whole argument, which has since found further expression in titles such as “The Interpretation of Culture(s) after Television”¹⁹ or “Politics after Television”²⁰, with the ‘after’ signifying not only an already long-standing existence but also a profound transformation in the construction, framing and representation of culture as well as in the logic of identity politics in interaction with the televisual as well as other media.

Reservations against such scholarly endeavours were brought forward in arguments of an “ersatz anthropology”²¹, which raised the concern that anthropologists engaging with and researching on mass media necessarily displayed some preliminary acceptance of the

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 15.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 139.

¹⁸ “The emergence of the individual as a master narrative suffers not only from the counterexamples of our major twentieth-century totalitarian experiences but also from the many deconstructions of the idea of self, person and agency in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology” (Ibid, p.52). Yet, it is hard to imagine how much more horrific totalitarianism might have been without the agency of individuals, who refused in different forms to be absorbed into totalitarianism.

¹⁹ Lila Abu-Lughod, 1997, “The Interpretations of Culture(s) after Television,” in: Sherry Ortner (ed.), *The Fate of “Culture”: Geertz and Beyond*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 110-135.

²⁰ Rajagopal, 2001.

²¹ Term used by Ginsburg in her dispute with Weiner: Faye D. Ginsburg/Lila Abu-Lughod/Brian Larkin (eds.), 2002, Introduction, in: *Media Worlds. Anthropology on New Terrain*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 9; see James F. Weiner, 1997, *Televisualist Anthropology. Representation, Aesthetics, Politics*, in: *Current Anthropology* 38 (2), pp. 197-235.

ontology and processes of Western mass production that might prove destructive for the cultures of indigenous peoples. Whilst this worry as such has its plausible aspects, particularly as far as the dimension of definitional power and the successive contingency is concerned (the overnight appearance of Western satellite channels in India, for instance, created factually a new environment that thereafter could only be criticised by accepting its very existence), it seemed somewhat more self-centred – in the sense of protecting the discipline of anthropology and its authoritative claim of interpretation and representation – in its suggestion that ‘real’ anthropology and media analysis exclude each other, which might as well be read in a way that ‘real’ people and modernity do not go together.

While, on the other hand, media studies have traditionally been very aware of the nation-state, because conventional media were predominantly produced and disseminated within its framework and for the very purpose of shaping the nation, “anthropologists”, as Lila Abu-Lughod has pointed out, “had not, until recently, been much concerned with nationalism and national processes.”²² This might explain to a degree why Appadurai’s uncompromising and appreciative stand on the limited longevity of the nation-state in the context of globalisation received rather uncritical acclaim. But unlike many cultural researchers who followed in his footsteps, Appadurai does not simply sideline or ignore the nation-state, replacing it by the tandem of global-local and thus indirectly pointing out its insignificance. He openly formulates his conviction “that the nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is on its last legs”, which, as he goes on to clarify, does not merely mean that “some nation-states are in crisis”, but that “the very epoch of the nation-state is near its end.”²³

To my mind, there were already several problems attached to so bold a statement even at the time that Appadurai was making it. The most basic maybe is that even measured by his own parameters, he quickly ends up in a contradiction, because while he claims that “mine is not a teleological theory”²⁴, he simultaneously makes a success of globalisation’s cultural dimensions inherently dependent on the nation-state’s demise. For Appadurai, the very possibility of the „imaginative construction and mobilization of differences“²⁵ is necessarily linked to the downfall of the nation-state: “[...], free of the constraints of the nation form, we may find that cultural freedom and sustainable justice in the world do not presuppose the

²² Lila Abu-Lughod, 2005, *Dramas of Nationhood. The Politics of Television in Egypt*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 8.

²³ Appadurai, p. 19.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 9.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 14.

uniform and general existence of the nation-state.”²⁶ The possibility of shedding homogeneity and enabling the simultaneity of cultural differences, whose supposed structural inhibition is, without openly formulating this, Appadurai’s actual accusation against the nation-state, precludes that a re-defined nation-state itself could be – and evidently *has to be* - one of many forms in a heterogeneous scenario (in interaction with global/international, regional, local/grassroots organisations, individual, private or other forms of agency). For Appadurai, the nation-state is inherently non-reformable and –reinventable, even though it so clearly is a human construction, and by transferring the essentialism and ontology that has commonly been applied to ‘cultures’ onto the nation-state itself, his own projection becomes as teleological as conventional models of development have been, that saw traditional practises and beliefs as a necessary hindrance to modernisation.

Secondly, and more gravely, Appadurai does neither seem to differ much between the nation-state as a form and nationalism as an ideology, nor does he see the ambivalences of either, inscribed in which is a lacking differentiation between autocracy and democracy as well as between the cultural and the political. The nation-state is not only a political institution with authoritarian aspirations – which it is basically in its non-democratic form -, but also a guarantor of political rights, when practising democracy. Nationalism, on the other hand, may raise its head as an exclusivist and supremacist dogma, but it can also have the quality of a liberating movement. It is no coincidence that the former occurs mainly when nationalism is understood in cultural terms, and the latter when it is practised in political terms, even though there exist many mixed forms. In Appadurai’s view, however, the nation-state represents per definitionem a form and a hegemonic system that necessarily stipulates a nationalist ideology of cultural dominance and homogeneous existence, whose abolition alone is the guarantor of freedom. It seems important to note that Hannah Arendt, for instance, has pointed out that the politics of the German National Socialist Regime essentially did consist of the abolition of the nation-state as a political, legal and democratic entity and that “*denationalization* became a powerful weapon in the hands of totalitarian politics”²⁷, causing the greatest wave of refugees and stateless people the world had yet seen and thus substantially creating the modern ‘minority question’ as a virtual antidote to any form of freedom. In the Indian history, it was at the time of Partition just the denationalisation of Muslims and Hindus alike in the newly emerging states of India and Pakistan, at the core of which lay the notion of a Hindu India and

²⁶ Ibid, p. 23.

²⁷ Hannah Arendt, 1951, *Imperialism. Part Two of The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York/London: Harcourt Brace, p. 149 (italics mine).

a Muslim Pakistan rather than a republican understanding (even though the Indian state allowed for that), that generated the largest amount of dead and refugees so far in Asia. In this context has Benedict Anderson, to whom Appadurai explicitly refers on the topic of mass media and post-nationalism (see 2.5.), emphasised how strongly British Imperialism was racially and culturally inclined by classifying the Indian subcontinent as unfit to *ever become* a nation – an arrogance *against which* one of the main motivations of Indian political nationalism emerged.²⁸ The political was thus systematically withheld under the pretext of the cultural. Anderson in particular makes plain the janus-headed psychology of Western hegemony, which set a model, namely itself, as an ideal, whilst at the same time suggesting (and also practically ensuring) that this ideal state could not be reached by anyone *but* itself, thus also underestimating that the inherent merits of this model would actually be acknowledged and taken seriously by those it was (and continues to be) displayed to.

This is of course not to say that not many cultural imprints of British domination survived in virtually every field of the institutionalised public as well as the private sphere in India, constituting and supporting hierarchies (particularly in interaction with the caste system) and structures of conflict (with regard to Hindu-Muslim violence) that are still largely intact or have again reproduced with economic liberalisation. It may just serve as a small example here that a few interview-partners of mine who worked for private and transnational television channels felt compelled to point out that they worked there despite coming from a lower caste and being “not convent-educated”, and it was still very few who came into the position to point that out in the first place (see chapter 4). But just considering this basically culturally justified hierarchy it is remarkable how readily Western and Indian scholars alike seem to have accepted the one-sided thesis of nationalism and the nation-state as generally authoritarian concepts, and, in the case of India, as unsuitable for its fabric, thus (unwittingly) acquiring one of the basic arguments of the British claim of cultural supremacy.

Finally, Appadurai does not only *not* formulate an idea of what institution could possibly replace some of the most important tasks of the nation-state. While being aware of the

²⁸ See Anderson, pp. 90-94. Nehru, who has often been seen as representing, in Anderson’s terms, ‘official nationalism’ rather than ‘popular nationalism’, took an unmistakable stand in this regard when he wrote: “We in India have known racialism in all its forms ever since the commencement of British rule. The whole ideology of this rule was that of the *herrenvolk* and the master race, and the structure of the government was based upon it; indeed the idea of a master race is inherent in imperialism” (1996, reprint of the first edition 1946, *The Discovery of India*, New Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund/Oxford University Press, p.326) The ‘Discovery of India’ in this sense meant not only Nehru’s travels around the subcontinent, and, as Sudipta Kaviraj (1992) has pointed out, the discovery that ‘India’ had to be an invention, but literally also the discovery of a nation that had been denied.

question, he openly contends that he is not very interested in it: “The ethical question I am often faced with is, if the nation-state disappears, what mechanism will assure the protection of minorities, the minimal distribution of democratic rights, and the reasonable possibility of the growth of civil society? My answer is that I do not know, but this admission is hardly an ethical recommendation for a system that seems plagued by endemic disease.”²⁹ On the other hand, this dismissal notwithstanding, Appadurai does not really come up with much evidence for his claim of the nation-state’s limited existence, apart from the appearance of globalisation itself, whereas the nation-state has a permanent and permanently negative presence throughout his book to an extent that it almost seems that his *actual* passion lies not with framing globalisation but with bashing the nation-state. The descriptions of its obvious shortcomings not as ‘problems’ (which suggests the necessity of debate) but as “disease” (which in this case suggests not the need for cure but the legitimacy of extinction) imply a strong and rather problematic qualitative prepossession. In the face of this hardly concealed aversion, on the other hand, globalisation can only feature as a rescuer and healer and thus remains largely free of critical inspection.

Appadurai’s book is replete with references to his personal life and development, and in this context what is quite fascinating to see is the – subtextual - inner struggle that he himself seems to be caught in with his own rather leftist intellectual descend and his almost absolute interest in developing an entirely different perspective. Indeed, he does come forward with substantial critique of globalisation’s economic and commercial features that, however, in effect remains undeveloped and contained by the superior focus of the nation-state’s demise. He contents, for instance, that “global advertising is the key technology for the worldwide dissemination of a plethora of creative and culturally well-chosen ideas of consumer agency. These images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser.”³⁰ This description of a Baudrillard-like scenario of simulation could well be mistaken for an account of the devious operations of the figure of the all-pervasive and invisible ‘parasite’ in Hardt/Negri’s “Empire”, that stands in for the non-graspable conglomerate of power which rules through the virtuality of the human multitude itself and does everything to prevent this virtuality from becoming “real.”³¹ Yet, this criticism of Appadurai’s remains subtle in itself and without ‘real’ consequences for his overall picture

²⁹ Appadurai, p. 19/20.

³⁰ Appadurai, p. 42.

³¹ Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri, 2001, *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 359.

of globalisation that is coined by phrases such as: “Nevertheless, where there is consumption there is pleasure, and where there is pleasure there is agency.”³²

It is this trapped-ness and unresolved-ness of Appadurai’s critique, which does not grow into an analysis of globalisation’s ambivalences but remains predicated upon the unambiguous stand on the inherent negativity of the nation-state, that make evident Appadurai’s theoretical links to the intellectual development of the Subaltern Studies Group, a meanwhile well-known group of postcolonial historians and surrounding intellectuals amongst whom the dimensions, implications and consequences of colonial rule traditionally form the centre of interest. The Group had started to gain influence in India during the 1980s, then with a Marxist-Gramscian outlook, that saw the subaltern in its Gramscian definition predominantly embodied in the Indian peasant who had been made into a colonial subject and subordinated to a hegemonic colonial discourse that had no space for his or her voice. “They *must* ask, Can the subaltern speak?” as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak advocated the Group’s work in her meanwhile famous essay (1988)³³, not least because “the social groups and elements included in this category [of the subaltern, B.O.] represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the ‘elite’”³⁴ - a difference which illustrated an hitherto unrealised dimension of speechlessness and non-articulation.

The basic questions that the Subaltern Studies Group raised, inculcated by the realisation of an unwritten history of the colonial subjects, are of great importance, because they actively challenged and de-naturalised the notion that history is merely the outcome of great men’s achievements and argued for the recognition of their dependency on the agency of the non-elite population. Significantly, what underlay this approach at the time was specifically the claim to realise the subalterns’ substantial share in the development of an anti-colonial political nationalism. As Ranajit Guha put it: “The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism...shar[ing] the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness – nationalism – which confirmed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, and

³² Appadurai, p. 7

³³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1988, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in: Cary Nelson/Larry Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, p. 283 (italics in the original).

³⁴ Spivak foregrounding Ranajit Guha’s definition of subalternity, quoted from: Donna Landry/Gerald MacLean (eds.), 1996, *The Spivak Reader*, London/New York: Routledge, p. 213.

culture; in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings – to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas.”³⁵

The radical change of perspective towards the historical significance of the subaltern was crucial, because it enabled in the postcolonial context for the first time a critical evaluation of the interconnected-ness of power and public representation in the Indian context as well as an assessment of the many far-reaching implications of colonialism – most prominently, the very brutality of being made a colonial subject and thereby rendered speechless itself - that were for long not recognised or booked under the unfortunate but necessary side effects of a civilisational mammoth project and that no colonial power has ever taken responsibility for.

Moreover, the Group’s initial methodological approach itself, which was confined to being a paradox, very graphically demonstrated the dimensions of the unheard and unrepresented, not merely in numbers, but also in quality. Besides the Marxist-Gramscian outlook, the Group’s basic approach had from the beginning a strong poststructuralist element, because it was the objective – in the words of Foucault, whose “Subject and Power” was published the same year that the first “Subaltern Studies” came out (1982), indicating a rather global intellectual movement – “to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects”³⁶, and “in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations.”³⁷

In the case of colonial India, these resistances and efforts were documented in the official historical record, enshrined in the colonial archives, in the form of peasant revolts and popular insurgencies against the colonial occupation. It was the recordings through the colonial administration themselves which pointed not only to the naturalised character of its power, but also to the *absence* of any non-elite testimonials and empirical evidence of the same revolts, and it was this absence, which in the approach of the Subaltern Studies Group testified to the very *existence* of the subaltern national consciousness. Its reality manifested itself in the *gaps* of the official historical record and in the shapes of the colonial administrators’ written will, that does not stand for itself but is predicated upon the unwritten will of the insurgent peasant, signifying colonial power’s resistance *against* popular nationalist resistance.

³⁵ Ranajit Guha, 1982, *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 83.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, 1982, “The Subject and Power”, in: Hubert L. Dreyfuß/Paul Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 208.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 211.

The contingent concentration on inscriptions and gaps rather than on concrete historical material implied the problem of presumption and construction – and thus the question of representation - from the beginning, as it involved the detection of something that cannot materialise ever again, and the reading of something that is not written. This itself posed the problem at that time most immediate to the Subaltern Studies Group, namely the writing of something that is not documented, making the Subaltern project less into one of research than into one of problematising the very act of history writing in a postcolonial context, which walked on the other end of positivism: “The peasants’ view of the struggle will probably never be recovered, and whatever we say about it at this stage must be very tentative.”³⁸ Spivak, herself a scholar of literature rather than of history, put it, citing Derrida, thus: “Thought [here the thought of subaltern consciousness] is here for me a perfectly neutral name, the blank part of the text, the necessarily indeterminate index of a future epoch of difference.”³⁹ *Difference*, however, can be understood here as a qualitative difference of political options as well as a description of different cultural groups, people and situations, and in the same breath, Spivak spoke probably not coincidentally of a “slightly esoteric register of the language of French poststructuralism.”⁴⁰ It was also Spivak who pointed out that “the ‘subaltern’ cannot appear without the thought of the ‘elite’.”⁴¹ “In other words, every moment that is noticed as a case of subalternity is undermined. We are never looking at the pure subaltern. There is, then, something of a not-speakingness in the very notion of subalternity.”⁴² In many ways, this could be seen as a clarification that the ‘real’ subaltern does not exist in the first place, but rather has to be seen (and continuously realised) as a “*deviation from an ideal*”.⁴³ And it could also be understood as a warning: the recognition and continuous consciousness of non-speakingness should not be mixed up with a proportionate demand for its representation.

³⁸ *Subaltern Studies I*, p. 50.

³⁹ Spivak, in: Landry/MacLean, p. 213 (brackets in the original).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁴³ Spivak, 1988, p. 285 (italics in the original).

2.2. *The Anthropologicalisation of the Subaltern*

What seemed to evolve in this context, however, was another form of difference, namely a growing schism between Western poststructuralists and the postcolonial researchers in India during the 1980s. For Western poststructuralists, notably for Foucault, postmodern thought increasingly went together with a dissolution of a monolithic or even hegemonic concept of power into a decentred network of power relations, a development that provoked “Edward Said’s critique of power in Foucault as a captivating and mystifying category that allows him ‘to obliterate the role of classes, the role of economics, the role of insurgency and rebellion’”⁴⁴ and thus, in a sense, the role of empirical reality, a critique that was also endorsed by Spivak. For the postcolonialists, on the other hand, the same development could be stated regarding the first two categories, class and economics, including caste and gender, but not with regard to hegemony as such. Partha Chatterjee has recently recapitulated the genealogy of the Group’s work, pointing out that at that time it showed “unambiguously” that the image one had drawn of the subaltern so far was not adequate (even though he fails to explain how such a clear result could be achieved with the same absence of historical material as before).⁴⁵ Popular insurgencies and rebellions had not been all that common, it now turned out, large numbers of the population had not taken part in the resistance, which, in turn, seemed to necessitate a serious doubting of the formerly proposed national(ist) consciousness amongst the peasants.

This realisation of the constructed-ness of the subaltern as an active participant in the political national discourse and practice was actually promising as it finally addressed the problem of representation with regard to the Group’s work itself, pointing out the difference, so to speak, between the subaltern with a capital and a small ‘S’. The question of who speaks for whom with what intention now – mercilessly – proved to be as relevant to the Subaltern researchers as it had been to the colonial administrators (inherent in which *were* already the factors of class and caste). However, a debate within the Group on the consequences of this insight into representational contingencies and power for their own work was not really led to the degree that the detected problem itself seemed to demand. What seems most decisive was that very important questions, e.g. if the detected lack of participation in anti-colonial rebellions could at least theoretically and partly be explained by factors such as time and space, workload and

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 280.

⁴⁵ Partha Chatterjee, 2006, *Historikerstreit in Indien. Die Schwierigkeiten, Kolonialgeschichte von unten zu erzählen*, in: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Feb., p. 23.

physical conditions, lack of information and coordination, suppression through zamindars⁴⁶ or other power-holders, mistrust in the leadership of the respective revolt, considerations of the family or the reasoning about an insecure future, fear of detainment or death, hopes for advantages, or even the simple *unwillingness* or *disinterest* to take part because one could indeed not quite imagine anything else (yet), or was not in close enough contact with the colonial administrators to see them as occupiers respectively, i.e. questions that involve political, economic and social factors and rational decisions on the part of the subaltern, were suddenly almost completely disdained. Instead, the conclusion that tended to be drawn by the Subaltern theorists was that the lack of participation in the revolts pointed towards a resistance on the part of the subaltern against being represented through an ideology – nationalism - that was already pre-defined by the same source that had in their view also produced, or at least informed, colonialism, namely Western rationalism and the Enlightenment, and that this resistance was substantially conditioned by the subaltern's different cultural disposition.

With this move from a political and economic towards a cultural framing of the subaltern, the problem of a pre-defined Western, that is particularly European modernity, became the focus of an even intensified critique of hegemonic power amongst Subaltern analysts, who thereby also seemed to make the move from being political historians to becoming cultural theorists. This modernity was not merely ascribed to the colonial domination but extended to the successive nation-building process that was now seen as a *factually* elitist, yet intentionally thorough enterprise, which was met with a twofold resistance on the part of the subaltern: he or she could neither relate to the concept of the nation, because it was the offspring of an 'alien' thinking, nor was the cultural diversity of India, re-figuring in the fragmented, lending itself to the nationalist endeavour at all. While political categories such as exploitation and, particularly, exclusion and discrimination, vanished from the analytical framework of the Subaltern Studies, the concept of Western modernity was itself culturalised and became understood mainly in terms of ideas such as secularism, liberal democracy and nationalism itself. Most interesting was in this context the re-definition of the question of history and history-writing, which was fundamentally revised from its former anti-positivist framing into

⁴⁶ Literally (Persian) 'holder of real estate'. Zamindars were originally tax collectors amongst peasants under the Mughal Empire, a practise that was initially continued under the British Raj. Later, zamindars were basically landowners, who employed and subjected large numbers of landless peasants.

declaring it an essentially European category and knowledge system that not necessarily applied to India, where time was supposedly experienced in different parameters.⁴⁷

What can be seen as the postmodern turn of the Subaltern Studies Group was thus substantially invested with a cultural turn or what one might even call an anthropologicalisation of the subaltern, who in the same breath became increasingly synonymous with being 'Indian'. While the merits of this turn doubtlessly lay in pointing out that modernity can take different forms, the emerging Indian version of modernity – despite insisting on the very term modernity – started to be framed merely in terms of difference rather than of correspondences and interactions. Power became not overall diffused but shifted in a way that translated Lyotard's early "incredulity towards meta-narratives"⁴⁸ into a critique of modernity through the simultaneity and continuity of the traditional, the indigenous, and, most crucially, the fragmented, the non-homogeneous, which also implied that *difference* came to be understood merely in cultural (and notably in religious) terms and was transferred from a negative, exclusivist into a positive and affirmative meaning. The subaltern as an index of resistance as well as India as a fragmented assembly – together with other non-Western cultural formations – were thus seen to be in a natural position of subalternity that is defiant of the nation-state's homogenising powers through their very cultural difference(s).

The consequences of this shift in the framing of the subaltern become most clear in the changed objective of critique. As Ranajit Guha's earlier quote exemplifies, the initial demand had been one of *recognition* and *inclusion* of a subaltern whose disregarded consciousness rebels against being *excluded* from a place in history and nation-building, the acceptance of which would result in a fundamentally different and rather interrupted narrative of nationalism and the nation-state itself. Quite contrary to that, the objective was now a *salvation* from Western modernity's force which is ascribed to a subaltern who acquires a quasi-religious aura already through his or her re-definition as his or her structural as well as mental disposition has remained resistant to the "normalizing project" of "nationalist

⁴⁷ See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" in: Ranajit Guha (ed.), 1998, *A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 263-294. Chakrabarty, for instance, explicitly hails "the occasional brave and heroic attempts by individual historians to liberate "history" from the metanarrative of the nation-state" (p. 285).

⁴⁸ Jean-Francois Lyotard, 1990, *The Postmodern Condition*, in: Jeffrey C. Alexander/Steven Seidman (eds.), *Culture and Society. Contemporary Debates*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 330.

modernity”⁴⁹ as much as to the related “artifice of history” and the “hegemonic language of secularism.”⁵⁰

It is here that Appadurai’s view on cultural globalisation and the post-Gramscian approach of the Subaltern Studies Group correspond and, in fact, become two sides of the same coin. The subaltern consciousness, that is now framed as modern *through* its bonding with a diverse tradition and culture and is yet never associated, despite emerging in the 1990s, with media and mobility but merely with religion and locality, takes a similar position to that of a globalisation that is signified by exactly those features: both inhabiting the possibility of the fragment, representing two extremes in an equidistance to the secular, liberal democratic nation-state (and somewhat reifying the local and the global), they both allegedly provide ultimate relief from it. To the global, the cultural and the local are thus attributed options of agency that are seen not merely as being limited but as being inherently impossible with regard to Western modernity and the nation-state.

To be sure, my intention here is not merely a critique of the ‘cultural turn’ of Subaltern Studies as such. Insofar as this was essentially also a turn towards the question of representation, their scholars have in this context brought forward very important points that had been left unaddressed by the Gramscian approach’s negligence of dimensions of the cultural and cultural differences as well as the meaning and importance of religion. They call for (still more of) serious debate and have partly already found entry in further analysis and discussion, notably in the post-‘Writing Culture’ debate. For instance has Dipesh Chakrabarty asked, referring to the European self-confidence in explaining (and judging) ‘other cultures’: “What allowed the modern European sages to develop such clairvoyance with regard to societies of which they were empirically ignorant? Why cannot we, once again, return the gaze?”⁵¹ Elsewhere he argued that “the problem is rather that we do not have analytical categories in academic discourse that do justice to the real, everyday and multiple ‘connections’ we have to what we, in becoming modern, have come to see as ‘non-rational.’ ‘Tradition/modernity’, ‘rational/non-rational’, ‘intellectual/emotion’ – these untenable and problematic binaries have haunted our self-representations in social science language since

⁴⁹ Partha Chatterjee, 1993, *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Ashis Nandy, 1990, “The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance”, in: Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence. Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 70.

⁵¹ Chakrabarty, 1998, p. 265.

the 19th century.”⁵² However, the ‘writing culture’-problem is not only writing itself forth *within* ‘cultures’ and contexts perceived as largely coherent, with Hindus writing within a (re-inventing) ‘Indian culture’ largely the ‘culture’ of Muslims and minorities (and privileged sections writing the cultures of the deprived – see chapter 4, 5 and 8). Even though it is Chakrabarty’s proposed interest to go beyond these dichotomies⁵³, his uncompromising stand on the mere negativity and ‘totality’ of Western modernity is also bound to actually reproducing them, missing out on noticing that the felt urgency of a debate on the limits of rationality is perceivable not merely in non-Western societies but particularly in the West itself, where the demonising of (supposedly ‘underdeveloped’ and ‘backward’) ‘others’ has a long tradition of going hand in hand with their idealising and romanticising. Yet, it is also nearly inescapable that a debate on the limits of rationality would in itself have to be rational.

Touching upon a related field has Gyanendra Pandey, with regard to the Bhagalpur Hindu-Muslim riots in 1989 (in the state of Bihar), argued against the perception that communal violence does “not represent the real flow of Indian history.” To see riots as “exceptional, the result of unusual conjunctures” is “to pretend that their occurrence on the scale and with the frequency that we have seen in the 1980s still makes no fundamental difference to the essential “secularism” of the people and to our cherished national traditions: ‘secularism’, ‘non-violence’, ‘peaceful coexistence.’”⁵⁴ Pandey already stresses a point that has later been taken up by Thomas Blom Hansen who also argues against a dichotomy between “the normal and the pathological” in the analysis and representation of communal violence: “This construction of communalism as the irrational force of primitive and atavistic hatred emanating from the ‘masses’ steeped in tradition and superstition, and easy targets for manipulators, has remained dominant within the ‘educated’ middle classes and the political elite in India to this day, albeit in slightly changed forms. [...] Communalism was now a ‘pathological’ upsetting of the proper historical course of events, and by virtue of its divisive effects on the secular nation the issue of religious community had to be ‘depoliticized’ and moved to the realm of culture and religion, beyond politics.”⁵⁵ Yet, while Hansen’s argument

⁵² Dipesh Chakrabarty, 1995, Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism. Some Recent Critiques of *Subaltern Studies*, in: *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, April 8, p. 753.

⁵³ See in this context also his article “Modernity and Ethnicity in India”, in: John McGuire/Peter Reeves/Howard Brasted (eds.), 1996, *Politics of Violence. From Ayodhya to Behrampada*, Studies on Contemporary Asia No. 1, New Delhi: Sage, pp. 207-218.

⁵⁴ Gyanendra Pandey, 1992, “In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today”, in: Guha (ed.), 1998, *A Subaltern Studies Reader*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Thomas Blom Hansen, 1999, *The Saffron Wave. Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press), p. 201.

is directed at an understanding of the sidelining and indeed culturalising of communal identities and communal politics in the rhetoric of the secular state, Pandey's critique is informed by the perception that communalism is an *outcome* of enforced secularisation that otherwise would not have existed.⁵⁶ It is this, at first sight rather fine distinction, which marks an important difference. It is the same distinction as that between the argument that with each Hindu-Muslim violence one has to come to terms more with the fact that Hindus and Muslims cannot live together, and the argument that each riot (particularly in the form of organised violence) makes this more difficult.

The basic problem with the Subalterns' cultural and representational turn was thus that, for one, it seemed to lack an understanding of the problem that the rejection of one form of representation entails a basic addressing of the very question of representation as such rather than the advocacy of merely the opposite form: peasants, who had been represented – or rather imagined – as perfectly rational in their *strive for* participation were now seen as applying a culturally informed rationality in their *lack of* participation, translating into an act of mere resistance, rather than discussing the problem of rationality – particularly in its differing from Enlightenment. Similarly, the critique of being patronised and othered by the West was directly transferred into the power of othering the West, rather than discussing the problem of othering as such. Moreover, and crucially, a debate on unwanted correspondences of the revised Subaltern approach with the culturalist politics of Hindutva (Hindu-ness), that has gained increasing prominence and visibility in the Indian public realm since the 1980s, does not seem to have taken place within the Group. Even though Hindu nationalism focuses in its pursuit of a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation) on the Muslim Other even more than on the West and has appropriated rather than rejected secularism (see below), a basic idea of an unperturbed and self-sufficient 'original state' preceding disturbances though 'outside forces' (in Hindutva's concept through the Mughal invasion/Islam, in the Subaltern concept through Western modernity) is common between the two, with both, moreover, emphasising the inclusivist strength of Hinduism. A critical discourse on these correspondences is not documented in publications of the Group, apart from the rare engagement with issues raised by those who, like Sumit Sarkar, distanced themselves from the Subalterns for that very reason, arguing that "an uncritical cult of the 'popular' or 'subaltern', particularly when

⁵⁶ See Pandey's *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1990.

combined with the rejection of Enlightenment rationalism ... can lead even radical historians down strange paths.”⁵⁷

Sarkar hints quite clearly at the problem of diminishing space for a critique of, or even distance from, Hindu nationalism: “Within such a framework, again, a critique of Hindutva can only take the form of presenting it as a Western or modern distortion of a basically pure and problem-free precolonial Hindu world.” In the same breath, he argues that with regard to the study and understanding of power relations in terms of gender, class and caste the speechlessness has with this move been transferred onto the analyst him- or herself: “Arguments like [a pre-colonial innocence, B.O.] threaten to leave us today with no language adequate for analyzing many of the most basic issues of contemporary society and history”⁵⁸, which also seemed to emphasise that the idealisation of the pre-modern essentially represents a privilege of being a ‘white’, upper class, upper caste male.

Sarkar’s critique illustrates the tightrope walk that the Subaltern Studies group commenced with its cultural turn without, apparently, being much aware of it. It could be argued that this tightrope itself as much as the demand to reflect about it replicated the power structure between West and East, with the East having to fight two features of modernity – secular nationalism and Hindu nationalism – while the West, having sown the seeds, in the end stays unaffected of either. However, the fixation on ‘the West’ in its position as the powerful and thoroughly modern other and the insistency on (post)modern imperfection as only applicable to ‘the Third World’ seemed to involve some arbitration against turning the tables and questioning the proposed monolithic and perfect character of modernity in the West itself, where it, increasingly obvious since the 1980s, has shown itself as having remained in many respects, including rationalism and particularly secularism, remarkably incoherent (with the popstar-status that the pope has acquired amongst parts of the youth and in the media and the ‘Christianisation’ of Hollywood with films like *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2004) marking only the peak of the iceberg). The ascription – indeed, construction - of near-complete modern ideological power of the West itself – that was extended onto the modern Indian state - seemed predicated upon the re-construction of the subaltern as culturally fundamentally different, even though the very idea of an ‘own’ and different modernity, particularly in the way that it was formulated by Partha Chatterjee, actually *does* speak of a

⁵⁷ Sumit Sarkar, quoted in Chakrabarty, 1995, p. 751.

⁵⁸ Sarkar, 1996, p. 293.

very rational, vivid and decision-based agency and interaction with the concept of Western modernity rather than of mere non-autonomy and resistance.⁵⁹

Moreover, the subaltern continued not so much not to speak, but not to be asked to do so. The ongoing absence of empirical research by the majority of affiliates of the Subaltern Studies Group in particular seemed to facilitate the drift towards a mainly anti-modern and anti-Enlightenment discourse. This lack of examining the different contemporary forms of speechlessness or, in Spivak's terminology, not-speakingness amongst the underprivileged, who were not any more reduced to gaps in the text and indirect imprints but could at least be seen and approached, suggested a certain indifference towards the problem of maintaining and deepening the gaps in the ongoing, postcolonial record, a position that has tellingly been justified by Ashis Nandy with "the limits of 'empiricism' divorced from normative concerns"⁶⁰ (an attitude which Chakrabarty had rightfully accused the Europeans of).

Finally, the decision for a priority of critique against Western modernity, particularly in the form of secular nationalism and Enlightenment, which almost automatically implied a lack of intellectual backing for the minority communities, was also substantially supported by scholars in the West who tended not to critically engage with the more differentiated aspects brought forward by Chakrabarty, Pandey and Guha in the same way as they (often approvingly) turned towards the interpretations particularly of Ashis Nandy, whose rejection of Western modernity and the nation-state is most unequivocal.

2.3. *The Local and the Global: Visions of Salvation in Nandy and Appadurai*

Nandy's psychological approach seems the most radical – and therefore at first sight maybe the most attractive - insofar as the West is defined here not only as the 'other' in terms of modernity but as the absolute cause of alienation from the self. This 'self' is described in

⁵⁹ "My subject is 'modernity', but more specifically, 'our' modernity. In making the distinction, I am trying to point out that there might be modernities that are not ours, or, to put it another way, that there are certain peculiarities about our modernity. It could be the case that what others think of as modern, we have found unacceptable, whereas what we have cherished as valuable elements of our modernity, others do not consider to be modern at all" (Our Modernity, concluding chapter in: 1997, *The Present History of West Bengal. Essays in Political Criticism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 193).

⁶⁰ Ashis Nandy/D.L. Sheth (eds.), 1996, *The Multiverse of Democracy*, New Delhi: Sage, p. 9 (quotation marks in the original).

terms of a (lost) “innocence”⁶¹, that is implying an essentialist idea of (contaminated) purity, (hidden) ‘reality’ and (spoiled) authenticity, embodied after the colonial encounter in those who have managed to remain as much out of the reach of the modern as possible – in villagers, peasants, Adivasis – and otherwise – in the urban sphere and the middle and upper classes – lingering below a surface of postcolonial modernity and alienation that needs to be disposed of in order to enable Indians to “develop political institutions of democracy on the basis of their own political-cultural traditions.”⁶² Even an ‘own’ modernity is here still a distant project that first requires a reclamation of the estranged self.

More than other writers from the sphere of Subaltern Studies, Nandy opposes the ‘whole package’ of Western modernity in the sense that he includes not merely the nation-state and the concept of history in it but most explicitly turns against secularism and its linkage with liberal democracy, which is particularly disturbing considering that India is one of the longest-standing democracies, not merely in the ‘Third World’, and that secularism and democracy seem less intrinsically connected than Nandy assumes. While it is observable that states which are democratic also tend to be secularised, there are and have been on the other hand a number of states that are secular but are barely or not democratic (the former Soviet Union, China, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Cuba, North Korea and Turkey are only a few examples). An opposition against this form of an often ostentatious and militarily secured secularism almost inevitably carries democratising potential as it is immanently political. Resistance against secularism in a democratic context, however, implies a different responsibility to evaluate the inherently increased likelihood of basically anti-democratic (and anti-political) prospects in the own stand.

It is hardly disputed today that the inner logic of the “civilizing, and essentially pedagogical, mission”⁶³ of the postcolonial Indian state, which was also essentially a developmental state, putting its faith in the (then global) belief and ‘normality’ of linear progress, followed in many respects – but just by far not all⁶⁴ - in the footsteps of the colonial administration and was largely congruent with the Congress system. Its “elitist political culture, seeking to mass-produce national citizens in its own image” has been critiqued as lacking a basic democratic

⁶¹ Ashis Nandy, 1983, *The Intimate Enemy. Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Preface, p. ix.

⁶² Nandy/Sheth, p. 14.

⁶³ Hansen 1999, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Components such as the federal organisation of the union state and the economic organisation in five-year plans based on strong state interventionism after the Soviet model, let alone the constitutional set up of India as a socialist republic, were clearly diverting significantly from the British colonial framework.

understanding by other scholars as well⁶⁵, provoking questions for what I have called elsewhere a “democratising of democracy.”⁶⁶ Democratising democracy, however, is not the same as establishing democracy in the first place but is a more subtle and tricky process, as it carries the danger of violating existing democratic guarantees. Nandy does in this context clearly not criticise a shortage of factual democratic options in a formal democracy. In his approach the very idea of liberal democracy becomes a concept culturally alien to India – despite more than 50 years of its existence and fairly uninterrupted practice - which needs to be disposed of in order to develop a form out of India’s ‘self’ (concrete proposals for which, however, he fails to deliver). The facile dismissal of liberal democracy - that empirically quite clearly finds more resonance with the ‘alienated’ middle classes than with the actual ‘subalterns’⁶⁷ in India– is thus not merely disturbing considering the complete absence of an alternative model (and the likeliness of more authoritarian forces filling the vacuum). It also plays off cultural identity against legal security, which is a point where Nandy’s approach most thoroughly resonates with Hindu nationalism (see 3.2.).

At the same time, Nandy’s apparent radicality paradoxically goes not only furthest in moving away from the original and certainly most radical Subaltern approach to think of something as readable that is not written and thus enabling the perception – or rather imagination - of a subaltern consciousness in the first place (statements about which Guha had still classed as “necessarily tentative”). He also defies or ignores most distinctly the meanwhile identified problem of representation, because in his writings the subaltern re-figures by far in the most concrete and manifest manner as ‘Indian’ and, particularly, as Hindu and at the same time as least driven by any consciousness. In a way that becomes very difficult to distinguish from Hindu nationalist framings, Nandy sees the ‘authentic subaltern’ as practising “the peculiar mix of classical and folk Hinduism and the unselfconscious Hinduism by which most Indians, Hindus as well as non-Hindus, live”⁶⁸, thus constituting a society where “the borderlines of communities and cultures have not been traditionally defined by census operations or

⁶⁵ Hansen, 1999, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Britta Ohm, 1999, “Doordarshan: Representing the Nation’s State”, in: Christiane Brosius/Melissa Butcher (eds.), *Image Journeys. Audio-Visual Media and Cultural Change in India*, New Delhi: Sage, p. 88.

⁶⁷ See Hansen, 1999, p. 8; Pradip Kumar Datta, 2003, “*Hindutva* and the New Indian Middle Class”, in: Indira Chandrasekhar/Peter C. Seel (eds.), *body.city. siting contemporary culture in India*, Berlin and Delhi: The House of World Cultures/Tulika Books, pp. 186-197; Pavan Varma, 1998, *The Great Indian Middle Class*, New Delhi: Viking; and Zoya Hasan, 2003, “The Changing Political Orientations of the Middle Classes in India”, in: K.N. Panikkar/Sukumar Muralidharan (eds.): *Communalism, Civil Society & The State. Ayodhya 1992-Gujarat 2002: Reflections on a Decade of Turbulence*, New Delhi: Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (SAHMAT), pp. 60-74.

⁶⁸ Nandy, 1983, p. 104.

elections rolls and where traditional ideas of community life and inter-community relations survive.”⁶⁹

What shows most clearly in this description is the complete diffusion of power relations with regard to class, caste, and gender, all of which vanish behind a naturalised “unselfconscious” Hindu who is opposed to the onslaught of modern practices. At the same time, while the (Hindu) community is set as the natural (and historically never quite specified) site of Indian existence, this binary conception also virtually swallows up differences between religious communities and details of their relations. It is certainly true that particularly in Mughal India (which was less relevant for South India) there existed considerable evidence of cultural parallels and religious syncretism between Hindus and Muslims that partly survives even today despite having successively been subjected to British Divide-and-Rule politics. These relations, however, get in Nandy’s work romanticised into a peaceful, fluent and basically timeless coexistence whose overarching point of reference is a kind of natural Hinduism, which was not only wilfully disrupted by the mechanisms of the nation-state (which, in fact, was as much withheld from as it was eventually pushed upon India), but notably of the formalised democratic process (which only ensued after Independence). Against this rather arbitrary handling of historical processes has the historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam produced a range of historical sources on Hindu-Muslim violence between the 13th and 18th century, arguing that to “Golden Age theorists [...] the actual history of communal (or sectarian) relations in *pre-colonial* India is largely irrelevant.”⁷⁰

While such theories are thus basically enabled by a deliberate oblivion towards historical data and evidence – made plausible through the supposed inapplicability of ‘history’ in changeless India⁷¹ -, Nandy also, as has become common with the Subaltern approach, puts Hindu nationalism in the same category as secular nationalism and the state, because in his view both of them, being variations of the same logic of nationalism, in an equal way “sanctioned the concept of a ‘mainstream national culture’ that is fearful of diversities, intolerant of dissent unless it is cast in the language of the mainstream, and panicky about self-assertion or search for autonomy by ethnic groups.”⁷² Curiously, though, it seems rather in Nandy’s proposed pre-national ideal world of an overarching unselfconscious Hinduism that diversity and

⁶⁹ Nandy et al., 1995, *Creating a Nationality. The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Preface, p. vi.

⁷⁰ Subrahmanyam, 1996, p. 55 (italics in the original).

⁷¹ See in this context Romila Thapar, 1996, *Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

⁷² Nandy et al., 1995, p. 19 (quotation marks in the original).

dissent were largely absent.⁷³ Moreover, whilst resistance against – politically inclusivist - secular nationalism is explicitly endorsed, the lack of resistance against – culturally exclusivist - Hindu nationalism does not really seem to constitute a problem (see 6.1.).

Especially illuminating in this regard is the interpretation that Nandy (together with co-authors) gives of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement, which largely overlaps with the Hindutva movement that took shape in the 1980s (see 8.1.). The larger Hindutva movement was based on the naturalisation of Hindu majority rule and claimed to ‘protect’ an encompassing Hindu culture that is constructed as being ‘inherently secular’ against the ‘pseudo-secularism’ of political majorities and the Nehruvian state (see 6.2.1.)⁷⁴ The embedded Ramjanmabhoomi Movement, led by the Sangh Parivar, the ‘family’ (parivar) of Hindu nationalist organisations (sangh), has been demanding (and continues to do so) the erection of a monumental temple (mandir) at the proposed birthplace (janmabhoomi) of Lord Ram in the North Indian town of Ayodhya, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, as a signifier of a culturally united ‘Hindu Rashtra’ (nation of Hindus). Today’s Sangh Parivar consists of an ideological core-organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS – National Corps of Volunteers), founded as early as 1925, that was successively extended through related organisations in what A.G. Noorani has called “a division of labour”⁷⁵: in 1964, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP – World Hindu Council) was established, followed in 1984 by the latter’s action force Bajrang Dal (Hanuman’s Team). The first parliamentarian arm of the Sangh Parivar in independent India was the 1951-founded Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS – Indian People’s Congregation) that dissolved in the Janata Party-government following Indira Gandhi’s Emergency (1975-1977) and was succeeded by the creation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980. The Ramjanmabhoomi Movement, that accompanied the BJP’s growing electoral successes, saw, as is well known by now, a first culmination in December 1992 with the complete destruction of the medieval Babri mosque (masjid) which had so far occupied the proclaimed birthplace in Ayodhya, by the hands of organised kar sevaks (Hindu nationalist volunteers), leading to communal violence across the country, but particularly in Bombay. The large majority of the over 1700 dead, like in all other riots since Independence, were Muslims (see 5.2).⁷⁶

⁷³ For a most unsparing account of caste and communal violence in the 1970s and 1980s that also assesses the role of state involvement see M.J. Akbar, 2003, particularly “Have Gun, Will Kill” (p. 45-60) and “A Tale of Two Villages” (p. 61-76).

⁷⁴ See Hansen, 1999, p. 157.

⁷⁵ A.G. Noorani, 2000, *The RSS and the BJP. A Division of Labour*, New Delhi: Left Word Books.

⁷⁶ There were an estimated 13 000 Hindu-Muslim riots in India since 1950. 87% of the victims were Muslims, many of them killed in police action (John Dayal (ed.), 2002, *Gujarat 2002. Untold and Re-told Stories of the Hindutva Lab*, Delhi: Media House, p. 36).

The growing limitation in critiquing Hindu nationalism that Sarkar has pointed out with regard to the altered Subaltern approach shows most developed in Nandy's interpretation. He describes the movement and its (temporary) culmination not in terms of responsibilities but in terms of ultimate alienation and perversion, of "unhappy, torn, comic-strip crusaders for Hindutva" whose actions do not call for penalties and justice, but who "turn out to be messengers carrying messages they themselves cannot read."⁷⁷ They are not consciously and actively pursuing a majoritarian and supremacist society of a 'Hindu Rashtra', but, by contrast, represent the "end-product of a century of effort to convert the Hindus into a 'proper' modern nation and a conventional ethnic majority."⁷⁸ The destruction of the Babri masjid and the following communal violence thus gain a cathartic rather than catastrophic quality, while the primacy of cultural difference and the dismissal of the political supports a re-definition of the culprits into the actual victims, creating the space to "enter the world of the marginalized and realize that theirs is an invaded, fragmented, destabilized, recreated, modified territory."⁷⁹ Nandy's readiness to interpret the communal frenzy of Ayodhya as the final – if not necessary - outcome of electoral politics and nation-building and as a fear rather than an expression of the self is complemented by Appadurai's general assessment "of the colonial subject in relation to the enumerative and classificatory projects of the state"⁸⁰ (of which the election roll is one) as well as by his interpretation of contemporary communalism in India: "This cultural and historical tinder would not burn with the intensity we now see, but for contact with the techniques of the modern nation-state."⁸¹ But it also has parallels in the way that Appadurai reads the options of the post-national world.

In contrast to Nandy, his focus on cultural opportunities that an impending globalisation opens with regard to the end of the nation-state as one of the epitomes of Western modernity supports a disposal of the romanticism of the 'innocent', because it frees in the same breath from the restrictions of local alternatives developed out of the past. The rather thorough contact with Western modernity in some way or the other is thus – as it is still in Nandy's view – not any more a dead end-road at the end of which stands the death of the self (unless it is reclaimed). It can be acknowledged as already having transformed all previous 'authenticity', because what has supposedly become possible with globalisation is the post-national continuous *production* of the local as an index of an alternate modernity through

⁷⁷ Nandy et al., 1995, Preface, p. ix.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.vi.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. ix.

⁸⁰ Appadurai, p. 134.

⁸¹ Appadurai, p. 135.

deterritorialised transnational agency, physical and virtual mobility and media: „[...] locality is no longer what it used to be.“⁸² In his critical engagement with notions of primordialism he hence argues that “what appears to be a worldwide rebirth of ethnic nationalisms and separatisms is not really what journalists and pundits all too frequently refer to as ‘tribalism’.”⁸³ While Nandy sees in Hindu nationalism the grotesque farce after the tragedy of Western modernity, the result of a terrible force and the (foreseeably) futile efforts to correspond to it, Appadurai sees ‘ethnic’ or culturalist movements as a means to an end. Western modernity is in his conception not merely, even if as well, a producer of alienation, but also a platform for agency.

In this basically plausible, even if only descriptive, context he does see that the now “disjunctive relationship between nation and state” is indeed the “seedbed of brutal separatisms”⁸⁴ in the sense that groups – generally described as ‘ethnic’ (even though they are often religious and/or political) – that seek to break free from the nation-state are themselves for the most part “claimants to nationhood.”⁸⁵ The increased potential of violence that Appadurai ascribes to the modernity of cultural assertion and mobilisation, and particularly the repetitive claim to nationhood, however, are in his view, again, the direct outcome of the overpowering logic of the nation-state itself and its “incapacity [...] to tolerate diversity (as it seeks the homogeneity of its citizens, the simultaneity of its presence, the consensuality of its narrative, and the stability of its citizens).”⁸⁶ The nation-state, even though some more than others, has in many instances doubtlessly proven its difficulties in coming to terms with diversity, and continues to do so. Also, a certain reflexive copying of the ‘enemy’s’ violent pattern at the attempt to break free from his embrace can be observed with a number of oppositional movements (even though not, for example, with the Indian national movement, which, however tainted meanwhile, managed to mark its opposition to the British Raj also by an oppositional *concept*, namely that of non-violence). In Appadurai, however, the nation-state appears again merely as the merciless and ubiquitous controller over cultural differences, the inhibitor of creativity, agency and imagination, and as the sole generator of violence, whose overpowering existence necessarily conditions all forms of resistance against it, taking away their rationality and the responsibility of the agents. In compliance with his assessment of the nation-state’s “disease”, he somewhat classifies this culturalist agency as its necessary

⁸² Ibid, p. 9, see his concluding chapter *The Production of Locality*.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 15, see his Chapter 7 *Life after Primordialism*.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 39.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 139.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 177 (brackets in the original).

after-effects, which will have to be borne “in the short run”⁸⁷ until the new forms of coexistence and negotiation that enable “cultural freedom and sustainable justice” (and whose more concrete description he fails to deliver) are starting to gain ground “in the longer run”⁸⁸, indicating the healing process. A rather mythical time of “increased incivility and violence”⁸⁹ thus acquires a cathartic character here too. It is framed as a hopefully temporary darkness at the downfall of an overpowering, straightjacketing framework at the end of which shines new, post-national light.

Implied in these interpretations is, most of all, a rather disturbing and indeed remarkable indifference vis-à-vis the likely victims of this cathartic violence, particularly as they are not likely to be conventional power-holders but co-strugglers and co-citizens. The ‘alienated’ Hindu nationalist activists in Nandy are seen as not quite knowing what they were doing when killing their Muslim co-citizens (despite factually being well-organised since decades). Similarly, the foreseeable victims of the dark post-national phase of Appadurai’s are not problematised either but somewhat turned into minor side-effects of a greater cause, the abandoning of the nation-state, and the motion into a better, deterritorialised future - a projection that not coincidentally recalls the justification for the colonial endeavour itself.

As does the later Subaltern approach generally, Appadurai also ascribes an omnipotence and pervasiveness to the state and its instruments and institutions (at least as its basic motivation), which stands, however, in curious contradiction to his diagnosis of the nation-state’s “endemic disease” that he himself specifies as “self-perpetuation, bloat, violence, and corruption”⁹⁰ and that suggests an accusation of weakness and deterioration. It thus seems not very consistent that the development of culturalist movements that seek advantages and greater recognition for a culturally or ethnically defined group should be read only as efforts at liberation from the iron grip of a powerful state, but rather seem to signify its crisis. Particularly the unprotected-ness of the victims who fall prey to violence motivated by culturalist claims points towards a *lack* of the nation-state’s accessibility and increasing deficits in fulfilling its basic political, social and legal duties (amongst them not least the “stability of (all) its citizens”). Similarly, communalised votebank politics, which Nandy’s critique of the election role implies, underscores the *failure* of liberal democracy to prevent a redefinition of a political majority into a cultural majority rather than its *power* to rule over

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 23.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.19.

the communities. The proposed omnipresence or ‘totality’ of the nation-state (as an index of Western modernity) thus rather appears as a precondition of Appadurai’s as much as of Nandy’s ideas, which thus continuously re-invent the West rather than inventing its alternative. This inflexible fixation, in turn, might explain the slight chill of totalitarianism that surrounds both these visions, which so indiscreetly and thoughtlessly line up with the culprits rather than the victims for the sake of a ‘cultural freedom’ that cannot be worth much if coming about like this.

A related parallel between Nandy and Appadurai is to be found in Nandy’s oblivion towards even the possibility that the ‘authentic subaltern’ could be oppressive him- or herself and that he or she could be a nationalist (Hindu or otherwise) without belying his or her ‘true self’. This conception is mirrored in Appadurai’s ignorance of the possibility that the nation, precisely a pursued disjunction from the liberal state, could “in the longer run” re-invent itself on the level of modern primordialist culturalism. It is very striking, even though his scenario allows for the recognition of post-national “claimants to nationhood”, that Appadurai is consequent in avoiding the term ‘Hindu nationalism’, turning it into ‘Hindu fundamentalism.’ Neither Hinduism nor Hindu ‘fundamentalism’ is ever referred to in the context of the concrete place of India, and ‘Hindu fundamentalism’ does not figure as a long-established, itself historical nationalist movement but merely in its global networking agency, even though Meera Nanda, for instance, has pointed out most vigorously that Hindu activists “see themselves as nationalists above all.”⁹¹

Moreover, Hindu nationalism’s attempt is not at all to break free from the nation-state but, representing a majoritarian nationalism, to re-define an already existing nation and to replace the conventional state functions and obligations. What seems to be in its immediate interest is a de-politicisation in the sense of a defunct liberal state order, particularly as far as legal guarantees for minorities are concerned. Despite Appadurai’s claim that “majoritarianisms seem to have appeared from nowhere”⁹², the well-known fact that the RSS has been existing for more than 20 years longer than the Indian nation-state itself, must have made it difficult even for Appadurai to subsume Hindu nationalism under culturalist liberation movements that seek *freedom* from the constraints of the nation-state. As it is wilfully kept out of the factual realm of the Indian nation-state, ‘Hindu fundamentalism’ thus becomes neutralised and removed from the possibility of qualitative judgement. It indiscriminately turns into one of

⁹¹ Meera Nanda, 2003, *Prophets Facing Backwards. Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, p. 9.

⁹² Appadurai, p. 39.

the many manifestations of “culturalism” which is “the form that cultural differences tend to take in the era of mass mediation, migration, and globalization.”⁹³

2.4. *Whither the Nation-State?*

However, given that Appadurai’s widely received scenario of globalisation constitutes something like a ‘global mirror’ to the Subaltern Studies Group’s approach, there seems to have occurred an interesting rift between them in their further development that also reflects the inherent limitations of a focus on ‘the local’ and the flexibility that a wider – ‘global’ - perspective offers. Even though these texts of his have hardly seen the attention that his earlier ones received, Appadurai has from the beginning of the new century tentatively started to revise his ideas, leading him eventually to the rediscovery of the political rather than the cultural locality.

After recognising that his proposed ‘dark post-national phase’ was beginning to stretch out into a continuity of violence against intra-state minorities and the poor in various nations⁹⁴, he in 2002 sought to avoid “the sterile terms of the debate about whether or not the nation-state is ending (a debate to which I myself earlier contributed)”⁹⁵, thus indicating that, while increasingly insufficient in practise, the functions of the state are not really dispensable as no others are available. While this trajectory has lead Appadurai, however, not towards a re-assessment of the state itself, but towards shifting his attention to the research and documentation of urban civil and democratic initiatives in Bombay (in 2001, he founded PUKAR, a cross-disciplinary research project) – and thus also towards those who are not quite mobile in a global sense -, the approach of the Subaltern Studies Group, and notably of Ashis Nandy, has hardly undergone revision.⁹⁶ Instead, it has become increasingly subjected to criticism by some Western, but mainly by Indian scholars or scholars of Indian descent, who have repeatedly pointed to the dangers that the basically orientalist construction of a

⁹³ Ibid, p. 16.

⁹⁴ Arjun Appadurai, 2001, The New Logics of Violence, in: *Seminar*, July: *Globalization - A symposium on the challenges of closer global integration* (www.india-seminar.com/2001/503.htm).

⁹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, 2002, Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics, in: *Public Culture* 14 (1), p. 24.

⁹⁶ See, for instance, 2002, *The Romance of the State - The Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, and 2004, *A Billion Gandhis*, in: *Outlook*, June 21 (www.outlookindia.com).

harmonious pre-colonial and pre-capitalist Indian community and the equation of democratisation with culturalisation involve.⁹⁷

This criticism seems not coincidentally to have come to a climax with the latest big communal crisis in India, the pogrom against the Muslim population in the state of Gujarat 2002 - which coincidentally and immediately accompanied my fieldwork and which I return to in detail from chapter 5 onwards - and the run-up to the national elections in 2004, which unexpectedly resulted in a defeat of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-government under leadership of the BJP (see Conclusion). The organised violence, the systematic denationalisation of Muslims and the emerging reinvention of the state along culturalist and economic lines in Gujarat (see 5.3.2.) made for the first time tangible the consequences of a politics of de-politicisation that puts the culture of community before the secular liberal state and the responsibilities of science and theory in lending legitimacy to such processes. While the critique took occasionally very harsh forms, that not least expressed the disappointment with a failed attempt at developing sustainable non-Western alternatives of thought and practise⁹⁸, it brought forward on the other hand some important perspectives that are directive for the future understanding of relations between East and West in a global context. Subrahmanyam, for instance, in directly addressing Nandy's approach, pointed out that "it is [...] a profound error to assume that 'secularism' is a common word in political use in the West that has simply been transferred to India as an 'imported idea'. In reality, the term has a political weight in India that it has never had in the West, and it has acquired a deep meaning and significance in India that many Europeans simply don't understand. Thus, 'secularism' has become almost as Indian a word as 'preponed' or 'denting' (for removing a dent in a car)."⁹⁹

What the Gujarat pogrom and the ensuing debate thus underlined were basically five aspects. For one, they made unmistakable the actual theoretical paralysis as well as practical indifference of members of the Subaltern Studies Group, none of whom figured in the public

⁹⁷ Apart from Sarkar and Subrahmanyam, see Eckert, 2003 (*The Charisma of Direct Action. Power, Politics, and the Shiv Sena*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press), Corbridge and Harriss, pp. 196-199 (*Reinventing India. Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press), Mankekar, 2000, pp. 197 and 221, and Chetan Bhatt, p. 9 (2001, *Hindu Nationalism. Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, Oxford/New York: Berg).

⁹⁸ See Rajiv Malhotra, 2004, The Cartel's 'Theories. Indian postcolonialists (who started with good intentions) are like outsourced coolies who sustain and enhance the theory and the politics of the Western Knowledge Factory. In other words, they are working for the cartel, in: *Outlook*, Feb. 11: www.outlookindia.com (brackets in the original).

⁹⁹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 2004, Our Only Colonial Thinker. Ashis Nandy's foundational assumptions on secularism are flawed, uninformed, in: *Outlook*, July 05: www.outlookindia.com.

with a condemnation or critique¹⁰⁰ and who left the documentation and analysis of the events and hence the ongoing historical record – at times at the risk of their physical health (see 6.3.1.) – to ‘secular’ political agents, journalists and groups. Secondly, and closely connected to that, they drew attention not only to the fact that the problem is less an overpowering than a deficient – and in its deficiency dangerous – liberal state, but also evidenced that the relevant dialectics occur not (any more) between ideology and resistance, but between participation and exclusion. Thirdly, they showed that essentialist ascriptions of features, characteristics and concepts to different cultures systematically disable an understanding of their historical travels, transformations and appropriations that might – in a positive as much as in a negative way - go as far as not recognising the ‘original’ idea in its re-interpreted form. It is not any more merely ‘Indian culture’ that Europeans fail to understand, but the place value of secularism in its set-up (the appropriation of yoga and Asian spiritual models in the West, which might puzzle a classical Indian yogi, can serve as a complementary example, while secularism itself increasingly starts to be used in Europe in a re-appropriated – and more Hindu nationalist - sense in the context of intensified debates mainly about the cultural rights of Muslims). Colonialism changed not only the colonised, it also changed the colonisers. Fourthly, while – within a conventional East/West-perception - opposition against the Subaltern approach might have been expected especially from Western scholars, it stressed, on the contrary, that it was rather Western academia which had been at the (often affirmative) receiving end of a theoretical concept that has already started to show its outdated-ness in its ‘country of origin’, while on the other hand there has evolved a global debate in which differing positions are distributed irrespective of culture and country and in which the decreasing influence particularly of a European modernity can be tackled (see also 5.1.).

¹⁰⁰ As an exception may be seen Ashis Nandy’s article “Obituary of a culture” (in: *Seminar*, Vol. 513, May: *Society under Siege*, pp. 15-18), published while the pogrom went into its third month, which is very interesting insofar as it seemed very much in accordance with the shock and consternation that was voiced in English language publications at the time. The piece clearly refers to the RSS and the Hindu nationalist combine as being instrumental in systematically stirring up and organising anti-Muslim violence in the state of Gujarat, and it tries to trace how hatred has taken root in Gujarati society over the past 40 years, enabling the emergence of a figure like the BJP-Chief Minister Narendra Modi, whom Nandy describes as a “classic, clinical case of a fascist.”¹⁰⁰ His approach to Hindu nationalism as a variation of alienated resistance to modernity seems very mitigated in this article, and there appeared a certain shift from the mere idealisation of ‘earlier’ (never quite specified) inter-community existence towards integrating the aspect of “dislike” for the ‘Muslim other’: “They [the population of Ahmedabad, the secret Gujarati capital, B.O.] took the Gujarati Muslims, a large proportion of them business castes, as a part of Gujarat’s landscape, though there was a clear social distance. [...] That dislike was, however, ‘balanced’ by a similar dislike for the westernised outsiders congregating in the new, fashionable institutions being established in the city. Traditional Ahmedabad kept away both.”¹⁰⁰ The idea, though, that there had existed more ‘human’ forms of coexistence – with “dislike” signifying a basic human and thus understandable emotion – which have been continuously disrupted through “outsiders”, in this case Western urbanisation, and the suggestion of a ‘healthy’ state of “traditional Ahmedabad” is basically unchanged (see 5.3.2.).

Finally, however, it also showed that a certain predominance of the Subaltern approach and its extensions over the past two decades has particularly amongst Indian scholars led to a negligence of studies on the nation beyond its set-up in Nehruvian terms and of state analysis (the Gujarat violence, for instance, has predominantly been analysed in terms of communalism and state failure, but not in terms of a new form of governance in this context, see 5.3.2.). With the notable exception of the sociologist Shiv Visvanathan, who has concluded that “what we need desperately are a set of thought experiments that allow the politics of the nation to invent itself beyond the current impasse”¹⁰¹, there are so far hardly any moves into that direction, and the results of such a call remain to be seen.

2.5. *The Location of Television*

Coming back to the correspondences between the Subaltern, and particularly Nandy’s approach and Appadurai’s globalisation scenario, it is noticeable that one of their main resonances lies in the commonness of a ‘blind spot’. While the concepts of culture and ethnicity are central to Appadurai’s thinking, the tropes of media and globalisation do not figure at all in the Subaltern discourse, which also expresses that its ‘cultural turn’ was basically commensurate with an invention of classical Western anthropology in the Indian context (minus the empirical fieldwork component). This focus on ‘the local’ as a negation of the national results not only in a complete absence of imagining that the end of the secular nation-state might not spell the freedom to reclaim a lost identity and develop an own modernity but aggravate the violent struggles between communities as much between classes and castes and facilitate the evolvment of more authoritarian forms of governance (as Hindu nationalism is proposing it). It also spells oblivion towards the economical and the processes of liberalisation, privatisation and commercialisation, which Appadurai at least perceives as one important aspect of globalisation unfolding. His negligence of the ambivalences and problematic implications of this aspect has, on the other hand, provoked apprehensions that parallel the one brought forward against the Subalterns by Sarkar, namely the diminished space for a critical distance, in his case to the logic of neo-liberalist policies and the world

¹⁰¹ Shiv Visvanathan, 2003, *Interrogating the Nation*, in: *Economical and Political Weekly*, June 07, pp. 2295-2302.

market economy. Hardt/Negri see in this vein Appadurai's ideas as paradigmatic for a "postmodern thinking", which "- with its emphasis on concepts such as difference and multiplicity, its celebration of fetishism and simulacra, its continual fascination with the new and with fashion – is an excellent description of the ideal capitalist schemes of commodity consumption and thus provides an opportunity to perfect marketing strategies."¹⁰² The basic correspondence between the Subaltern and Appadurai's analytical framework thus consists in the 'blind spots' of Hindu-nationalism and neo-liberalism respectively, and it is just these two figures that have over the past years developed increasing compliances in India which materialise particularly in the field of commercialised media. In order to approach these compliances, it is, however, necessary to first try and understand the changed meaning and location of the media, and particularly of television, as this is a field where Appadurai's approach shows shortcomings not merely in its theoretical, but also in its empirical presumptions.

2.5.1. *In the Trap of Teleology*

In this regard, it is at least a little bit surprising that Appadurai's ideas have – at least for quite some time - hardly caused irritation amongst media scholars. The significance that Appadurai ascribes to media in the process of globalisation is pivotal and again connected directly to the nation-state's proposed downfall. It was Appadurai who gave, in reference to Benedict Anderson, a new salience to the use and the term of the *imagination*, and it might be down to his extensive employment of the term that the "imagined community" has during the 1990s been applied to all sorts of – preferably ethnic and cultural – communities, but rarely to the one which explicitly occupied Anderson, namely that of the nation.

Anderson's conception of the nation's forming process is tied closely to the emergence of capitalism and the print media, which enabled practices, above all the daily ritual of reading the newspaper, which represented "the key to wholly new ideas of simultaneity."¹⁰³ The very possibility of having access to the same news (in the same language) at the same time, yet at very different places within an identifiable territory, generated for Anderson an invisible bonding that revolutionised the eye-to-eye affinity of family and kinship. Appadurai projects

¹⁰² Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri, 2000. *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 152.

¹⁰³ Anderson, p. 37.

this framework into the future arguing „that there is a similar link to be found between the work of the imagination and the emergence of a postnational political world.“¹⁰⁴ Rather than the print media, it is now the next generation of the electronic media that is to generate this imagination, and that enables new forms of simultaneity which point beyond the nation-state and work towards the “deterritorialised” character of the global condition.

It is, again, in this stepwise pairing of certain generations of media with particular forms of societal and political organisation, in the simplifying logic of a basically teleological development model that Appadurai’s basic error and at the same time contradiction lies, because it precludes the heterogeneity he actually pursues. Like with the nation-state itself, which succeeded feudalism and the monarchy (as well as colonialism), but hardly thoroughly abolished them and took hardly anywhere less than a century to evoke a paradigm-shift in its favour, Marshall McLuhan emphasised as early as in the 1960s that newly emerging media hardly ever completely replace older ones, but, often dramatically, change their meaning, importance and function. Apart from language, which continues to actually being developed *through* the use of different media, we know till today the written word, the newspaper, the radio, the telefax, even the drum, all of which had to seek a new meaning for themselves, or are still in the process of doing so, with the advent of successive media, which sometimes endangered their survival, but sometimes also enhanced their importance (like the computer, in the form of e-literacy, actually re-invented the written word as much as the sign).

The difference between the nation-state and globalisation as overarching paradigms, however, seems to be that globalisation, at least as a materialised form, is still far less defined and direct. On the contrary, it appears to be one of globalisation’s basic features that it recedes from the unambiguous grasp of form and definition and leaves the construction of clarity more than ever to humans (or at least keeps up the impression that this is the case). Heterogeneity, at least in the foreseeable future, thus seems to substantially grow out of the simultaneity, interaction as well as competition of different *media* (as well as of different societal and political organisations) rather than, as Appadurai suggests, out of the overcoming of one particular form. This scenario of technological and political simultaneity will for the foreseeable future apply in a particular way to non-Western countries (see 2.5.3.).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Appadurai, 1997, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance, Enrique Bustamante, 2004, who points out that “the future of our culture cannot escape from being determined by the evolution of the ‘old’ analogue world”, of which television has been a leading representative (Cultural Industries in the Digital Age: some provisional conclusions, *in: Media, Culture & Society* 26(6), p. 803).

In this context, Appadurai's imprecise use of the term "electronic media" is characteristic. He attributes to them the capacity to "decisively change the wider field of mass media and other traditional media"¹⁰⁶ (whom he does not specify), while he at the same time refers to them as all sorts of different media (basically every device that is in need of a plug or a battery), including cinema (which as such is not electronic at all) and computers (which he actually sidelines and which operate digitally), but particularly as television. Unsurprisingly, he ultimately falls short of arguing with the electronic media themselves as revolutionary agents but is mainly referring to their *software*, predominantly to "images", but partly to music and sound, or different genres of production and reference ("news, politics, family life, or spectacular entertainment"), which undermine the confines of the nation-state by travelling around the globe and by providing to different and mobile cultural groups „resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project.“¹⁰⁷

It is here that the basic difference to Anderson becomes evident. Anderson very clearly connects the emergence of a new *technology* – print – that through its novel, capitalist forms of production, dissemination and consumption, and independent of its respective *contents*, enabled a new sense of communitarian imagination, while Appadurai seems eager to imply a technological revolution through electronic media, the first victim of which would in his logic be the nation-state. This conception remains oblivious to the circumstance that electronic media (and predominantly radio and television) are *already* traditional mass media themselves and have for decades – complementing the print media - been an intrinsic part specifically of the national imagination in nearly every country, even if under different preconditions, for instance, in the US, where broadcasting was commercial from its inception, in Europe, which has a particular tradition of public broadcasting, and in countries of the 'Second' or 'Third World', where broadcasting – often illegally (see 3.2.) - was generally state-owned. The fact that Appadurai has to seek refuge in the contents rather than being able to convincingly argue with the technology itself already indicates that his idea of a mere succession model does not quite hold, and also underlines that at least parts of the electronic media are subject to profound change themselves rather than being its motor. This accounts probably more than for many other media for television, which can be seen as the electronic medium that is traditionally most intimately connected with the nation-state (see below).

¹⁰⁶ Appadurai 1997, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 4.

On the other hand, admittedly, it becomes somewhat understandable that the impression of a cultural globalisation that is generated by the global dissemination of television images could arise. This has to do with television's very own ambiguity and with its particular national coining as well as with the fact that at the time that Appadurai conceived his perceptions and ideas, at the beginning of the 1990s or even earlier, television indeed started to grow beyond itself in an unprecedented way, bursting its national and terrestrial definition with the help of the satellite.

2.5.2. Twins of the Modern: Television and the Nation

Television has traditionally been seen as being instrumental in constituting and naturalising the imagined community of the nation because of its – in relation to the newspaper – even more concentrated ability, encapsulated in the very term of *broadcasting*, to reach people in different localities of the nation-state at exactly the same time with the same message. Moreover, in contrast to radio it has been, particularly in the developmental discourse, considered as enabling easier access for people with less training in the use of the written and spoken word and even for those who are not thoroughly familiar with the respective (national) language, because of its less direct, even though often underestimated, dependency on language (see chapter 4).¹⁰⁸

However, it seems that, despite the obvious difference of one constituting a modern ideology and the other a modern medium, there also exists a more metaphysical relationship between nationalism and television, which Anderson, in a way, already anticipates, when he writes: “Unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes or Webers. This ‘emptiness’ easily gives rise, among cosmopolitan and polylingual intellectuals, to a certain condescension. Like Gertrude Stein in the face of Oakland, one can quickly conclude that there is ‘no there there’”. It is characteristic

¹⁰⁸ See David Morley, 1980, *The ‘Nationwide’ Audience. Structure and Decoding*, London (British Film Institute). In the Indian context, Vikram Sarabhai, for instance, then head of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), friend of Indira Gandhi and responsible for the first Satellite-bound experiments with television in India in the 1970s, had put it thus: “In concrete terms, can radio be an effective alternative to television? I suggest that television has a unique contribution to make because it has a rare credibility and is most persuasive. Television is ideal in conveying information and news to the broad masses of the people, particularly to the illiterate section of the population to whom such an audio-visual medium would have a profound impact” (Sarabhai quoted in Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 1990, *Beaming Messages to the Nation*, in: *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 19, p. 35).

that even so sympathetic a student of nationalism as Tom Nairn can nonetheless write that: “Nationalism” is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as ‘neurosis’ in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (the equivalent of infantilism for societies) and largely incurable.”¹⁰⁹

Many of the rather stark characteristics attributed to nationalism here are identical with those commonly linked to television. The absence of grand thinkers, particularly in comparison with cinema that has provoked influential theorists from Kracauer and Benjamin to Deleuze, has for the first time been challenged by the more recent prominence of popular culture studies and thinkers as profound and influential as, for instance, Stuart Hall, who typically had to write against the classically dismissive attitude of the intellectual elite towards television, and, as Lila Abu-Lughod has suspected, also towards its scholars: “Does the taint of lowbrow status and the apparent banality of television rub off on those who study it?”¹¹⁰ Indefinability yet prominent and undeniable existence¹¹¹, a pathological, neurotic tendency that is ascribed to the medium as much as to its viewers, infantilism and incurability are all features that have frequently been applied to television (most unmistakably encapsulated in the term of the ‘idiot box’). As much as it is difficult, as Appadurai himself proves, to unequivocally locate nationalism in the positively connotated field of a striving for democracy and struggles for independence and self-rule¹¹², television can neither easily be pulled into the vicinity of the book, whose essential necessity regarding education has never been questioned, or even the newspaper (the yellow press at the most), nor can it simply be associated with cinema, that is, with (potential) visual art.

Nationalism, like television, has not quite been taken seriously in any philosophical way and is tainted with a suspicion of expressing the bad taste and destructive drive of ordinary people and of leaders and manipulators who exploit these sentiments for their own petty goals rather than the noble aspirations of thinkers and visionaries, and this brings both of them also in the vicinity of populism which Paul Taggart has attested an “empty heart” that “lacks a

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, 1991, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Lila Abu-Lughod, 1997, p. 111.

¹¹¹ Characteristically, John Fiske, one of the most renowned theorists of television, opens his classic *Television Culture* (1987) with the contention that “any book about television culture is immediately faced with the problem of defining its object. What is television?” Similar problems of definition can be found in nearly any book on the subject.

¹¹² It is very illuminating in this respect that the Oxford Thesaurus (1995, twentieth impression 2003) lists the following synonyms for nationalism: patriotism, allegiance/loyalty/fealty to one’s country, chauvinism, jingoism, xenophobia, which are covering the whole range of rightist to leftist associations with nationalism, but also show that there is not really a ‘neutral’ synonym for it.

commitment to key values. (...) The ‘grand’ ideologies of the modern age – liberalism, conservatism, feminism and socialism – are likely to have adjectives attached to them to make them into social liberalism or radical feminism. Populism is more likely to attach itself than be attached to.”¹¹³ Obviously, the same holds for capitalism, which is equally one of the very and ever more increasingly influential phenomena, yet draws its power from being practised rather than from being theorised upon, and it seems that globalisation itself might in the long run fall into the same category.¹¹⁴ It thus appears that it is precisely those phenomena which are the least graspable in terms of theory and explanation (and thus can least easily be called an ‘ideology’ but most easily be represented as ‘natural’ or ‘real’), which are the ones that not only hold a particular attraction, but that also end up having the least refutable impact on our lives, because, lacking a consistent argument in the first place, they leave themselves least open to attack.

Marshall McLuhan, on the other hand, in still firm belief in teleological technological progress, has described television as a “timid giant” in contrast to the self-conscious “architect of nationalism”¹¹⁵, the book. Yet television has around the world become a medium far more associated with the particularities as well as structural similitudes of nations. There has never been a ‘national printing service’ in the same way as there has been national television, which somewhat points towards a primacy of the popular over the elitist as well as towards the hegemonic over the heterogeneous in the national context. After the radio, television became a “potent means of manufacturing that ‘we-feeling’”¹¹⁶, while at the same time, as Arvind Rajagopal points out, television “holds out the promise of defending national tradition, and serving as a line of defense against foreign culture, or against any other elements defined as negative.”¹¹⁷

But the description as a “timid giant” also implied rather early that television had powers that vastly exceeded the confinements that a national framework offered. It suggested that some force and suppression was at work in order to trim the medium into a propagator of national interests, which might have propelled expectations of its hidden capacities to be unleashed in

¹¹³ Paul Taggart, 2000, *Populism*, Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press, p. 4.

¹¹⁴ It is maybe characteristic that the two epic attempts to theorise on globalisation so far – Manuell Castells’ *Network Society* and Hardt/Negri’s *Empire* – are both coming from a rather critical perspective that is trying to cope with the sheer ‘being’ of globalisation.

¹¹⁵ Marshall McLuhan, 2001, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, London/New York: Routledge (Reprint from the 1964 Edition), pp. 336-368 and 185-194.

¹¹⁶ Paddy Scannell/David Cardiff, 1991, “The national culture”, in: Oliver Boyd-Barrett/Chris Newbold (eds.), 1995, *Approaches to Media. A Reader*, London: Arnold, p. 319.

¹¹⁷ Arvind Rajagopal, 2000, “Mediating Modernity. Theorizing Reception in a non-Western society”, in: James Curran/Myung-Jin Park (eds.), *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, London/New York: Routledge, p. 294.

a less nationalised context. This metaphor of television unbridled has obviously gained great plausibility with the medium's transnationalisation, thus contributing to television being associated with postmodernity (rather than modern nationalism) and notable in perceptions of 'television coming to itself' under globalisation.¹¹⁸

The initial euphoric embrace of satellite-disseminated television images so far unimaginable particularly in countries where the state had the monopoly over television and the role of the medium had been pre-defined as a mere (book-like) national educator, like in India and other 'Third'- or 'Second'-World countries, lend empirical support to this notion. Epitomised by the global broadcasting of CNN in course of the First Gulf War, television indeed seemed to march at the forefront of globalisation, unilaterally dissolving its historical bond with the nation-state. Television and the nation were suddenly seen to move in different timeframes: television apparently had been able to read the signs of the times and was walking ahead into a new era, leaving behind a struggling nation-state. The partly heated debate in media and television studies during the first half of the 1990s, the focus on the future implications of television and the new contexts within which it had started to operate (transnational media companies, international viewership) testified to the unprecedented prominence of this actually rather traditional medium (and to the supposed redundancy of the national framework).

Towards the second half of the 1990s, however, the shift that had already taken place with regard to the nation-state began to hit television as well. On the empirical level, it took not even years for viewers around the world to understand that there was no such thing as a simultaneous 'global image' in the sense that one image could actually capture the new global condition. Images associated with globalisation were at that time largely confined to the comprised representation of perceived contrasts, such as the 'Third World'-peasant with the mobile phone, the villager in front of the TV set, or the religious leader drinking Coca Cola, which suggested the (generally positively or neutrally connotated) simultaneity of hybridity and plurality of different times, cultures and economic circumstances, even though the subtext of these images was actually often a not so harmonious clash of economic and social extremes, which already seemed to harbour the possibility of an eruption.

¹¹⁸ See a.o. Jim Collins, 1996, "Television and Postmodernism", in: Paul Marris/Sue Thornham (eds.), *Media Studies. A Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 375-384; Mark Poster, 1994, "Postmodern Virtualities", in: Robert C. Allen/Annette Hill (eds.), 2004, *The Television Studies Reader*, London/New York: Routledge, pp. 581-595.

It were maybe indeed the imploding towers of the World Trade Centre on 9/11 that represented the first ‘real’ global image, which not coincidentally comprised of the complete reduction of abundant imagery to a single very powerful symbolic act and which signified a collapse of the former constructions’ and representations’ light-hearted-ness (and, occasionally, arrogance). The symbolic and semiotic strength that lay in the picture of the plane hitting the tower, which was present for days on end on TV screens around the world and thereby, probably for the first (and short) time, generating a ‘real’ global simultaneity of broadcasting, became also apparent in the numbers of 9/11 that do not require the mention of the particular year or even the explanation that it describes a date in the calendar (and not, for instance, an alphabetical code or the name of a band or organisation). They work as a sign in themselves that is recognised – even though certainly not interpreted – in the same way around the planet, and that at the same time yet very materially signifies the first ‘global date’ in a political sense (rather than did the breakdown of the Berlin Wall).

In turn, the absence of a global image during the 1990s also pointed not only towards the absence of a global broadcaster, but also towards a lack of an equal exchange of imagery on a global scale and thus to a hegemony in the definition and representation of what *was* global. CNN was in this context rather quickly identified as basically being unable of representing anything but an American view, whose global dissemination alone did not make it global in the way the word promised, but rather seemed to conceal that ‘the global’ in actual terms was synonymous with the West and ‘the local’ with the Rest. Also in this sense the crumbling World Trade Centre flickering world wide over the TV screens marked a turning point, particularly in relation to the extremely orchestrated visualisation of the “Operation Desert Storm” that had in 1991 propelled CNN around the globe.¹¹⁹ For the first time, in 2001 the US were forced to globally disseminate an image of their own vulnerability and to virtually demonstrate – even though not acknowledge - their new role of being not only a sender but also a receiver, of being not only a presenter and representative but also a represented.

¹¹⁹ See, for instance, Hamid Mowlana/George Gerbner/Herbert I. Schiller (eds.), 1992, *Triumph of the Image. The Media’s War in the Persian Gulf – A Global Perspective*, Boulder: Westview Press.

2.5.3. *In the Throes of the Nation*

At the same time, it became increasingly evident that the future impact of new digital media and the production in digital mode would be far greater than initially grasped (Appadurai, for instance, sees the Internet still as a marginal development), and that a transformation of all previous media, including the existing electronic media, could be expected or was already on the way. Digital production of television – even though not dissemination and reception – has become the standard also in India by the middle of the 1990s, whereas digital platforms with selected national and international channels are everywhere on the advance. Yet does digital production and dissemination not turn television into a ‘new medium’. For television what became most acute in this evolving scenario was the impending dissolution of its very own logic, namely the traditional relationship between sender and receiver, presenter and (re-) presented, posing the question of representation and its future options with an unprecedented urgency.

The ‘new media’, as a generational term, starting with the computer and reaching via digital cameras, mobile phones, MP3-players etc. fundamentally disrupt the pattern of production *for* and *in the name of* others by reducing the representation to the hardware, a shift that can be realised even by looking at advertisements. Next to TV-set producers, who promote particular models, television *channels* are essentially dependent on running campaigns for their *contents* (a new show or soap opera). In advertisements for new media, by contrast, the content (a photo coming out of a printer, for instance) is a mere *example*, because its production has become privatised in the more original sense of the word, namely been transferred into the private sphere of people. New media thus basically do not represent contents but, extending or maybe indeed being in accordance with McLuhan’s dictum of ‘the medium is the message’, represent *themselves* as tools that enable the individual user’s selective self-(re)presentation and active networking through the direct and virtual dissemination of texts, images and sounds. Moreover, through their decreasing size and weight they permit a mobility that redefines the spatial determination of consumption, which formerly tended to be confined to the private living room with its furniture classically arranged in relation to the TV-set. There happens, thus, a profound rearrangement of what we have been used to calling the public and the private sphere, and if there is at all still a historical pairing between societal and political organisation and different generations of media, as Anderson has seen it with regard to the

nation-state and the newspaper, it currently lies in the matching of the global and the digital (and not the global and the electronic).

Television, one could say, in the absence of fully developed new digital media, had been able to briefly acquire the role of a pioneer by lurking beyond its former limits and by extending the familiar for a short period into the future, mirroring the ‘new era’ in its imagery but ultimately turning out to be unable to adequately represent it. The short moment of global televisual simultaneity at the implosion of the WTC may indeed serve as a metaphor for the utmost that television can achieve in this regard. The global and digital development does not spell the end of television, but the end of the primacy of conventional terrestrial broadcasting as well as of the ‘normality’ of conventional representational patterns, which plunges, as John Ellis has put it, the medium into an “age of uncertainty.”¹²⁰

The task put to television was and continues to be to re-invent itself by finding new spaces and meanings for itself, which, on the operational level, include vast and transnational dissemination and the simulation or factual enabling of interaction with viewers. The numerous motions in this direction vary from country to country and reach from excessive privatisation and commercialisation, which convey to the viewer the feeling of being an active participant with a free choice rather than a represented subject (see chapter 8) via television on demand, interactive experiments such as digital switch boxes and viewers’ options to intervene in plot lines to the dissemination of programming and news onto mobile phones or the computer. The first variant, excessive commercialisation and privatisation, however, is in operation particularly in countries where the other options are not yet as ubiquitous and applicable, like in India, where a continuously incoherent legislation (see below) and the financial means of the large majority of potential consumers keep television for the time being in its dissemination more on the collective rather than an individualised level (see chapter 7).

The slight advantage of television in this development, on the other hand, irrespective of the economic preconditions of its consumers, is that it is basically a medium of loyalty rather than of experiment, and even if the experimental might be the imperative of the day is it just a complementary longing for stability and familiarity that television could and does profit from and that Jostein Gripsrud, who felt already overchallenged with hundred analogue channels, has described for the Norwegian context thus: “I did occasionally tune in for a small dose of Turkish music or Middle Eastern folk comedy or take a quick look at some spectacularly sexist Italian talk shows; a bit more often I would watch some German or French talk shows.

¹²⁰ See John Ellis, 2000, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*, London: IB Tauris.

But most of the time I stayed with the Norwegian channels. [...] This pattern did not really change with my transition to digital television, which was forced on me by the duopoly satellite companies.”¹²¹ This account also emphasises that television’s struggle of re-invention, which with regard to the Indian context is one of the basic stories that this study is out to tell, re-aligns television to its old partner, the nation-state, albeit under changed (and continuously changing) conditions.

It could, of course, be argued now that even if Appadurai mistook the electronic media for the media of the future, his projection is still accurate with regard to the new media, which are now in the process of fundamentally altering earlier media and which are in use to the potential effect of deterritorialisation with the help of global networking and the imagination (even if a lot of this imagination is under the subtle influence of corporate power). This might be true to an extent. But this shift in time and technology does not consider, for one, that even the Internet has “proved to be an effective tool of national identity creation, especially as the medium enables the bypassing of the laws of the official nation-state” (see 5.3.2.).¹²² Neither does it account for television’s most expressive survival, and this occurs, apart from regionalisation, most prominently in the form of *transnationalisation* and *renationalisation*, which happens *simultaneously* to and *in interaction with* the unfolding scenario of new media.

Neither of the two developments of transnationalisation and renationalisation has over the past years found much of attention on the part of media scholars. This does not merely concern the more cultural analysis of media whose focus largely remained tied to the framework of the global and the local that had been developed by the middle of the 1990s or, in a more critical perspective, detected “electronic empires”, which suggested a strong one-dimensional and global increase in television’s power.¹²³ As soon as it became clear that it is actually the new media that are directive of the overall development, the orientation tended to shift away from television altogether, with Manuel Castell’s *Network Society* becoming indicative of a paradigm modification away from electronic towards digital media.

However, as little as the nation-state has vanished did people stop watching television, on the contrary: even in many Western countries has the consumption of television (satellite, cable

¹²¹ Jostein Gripsrud, 2004, “Broadcast Television: The Chances of Its Survival in a Digital Age”, in: Lynn Spigel/Jan Olsson (eds.), *Television after TV. Essays on a Medium in Transition*, Durham: Duke University Press, p. 215.

¹²² Maya Ranganathan, 2006, The Internet and History: An Exploration of the Transmission of History on Political Websites, in: *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* XXIX (2), p. 281.

¹²³ See, for instance, Daya K. Thussu (ed.), 1998, *Electronic Empires. Global Media and Local Resistance*, London: Arnold.

as well as broadcast) increased over the past years. The analytical shift towards new media is essentially marked by the understandable interest in exploring the unfolding of a new technology, but it thereby becomes removed to an extent from actual contemporary social media practise, which can be measured, for instance, by the degree of access. The large majority of people on this planet still remain excluded from the new possibilities of active digital networking, not merely because of financial resources but also because of lacking skills such as e-literacy (a long-term problem that Castells, at least, is quite aware of).¹²⁴ The presence of television as well as options of accessing it has, on the other hand, rather rapidly multiplied, particularly in non-Western countries. In 2005, *terrestrial* broadcast television, in the form of the factually still government-controlled broadcaster Doordarshan, has for the first time crossed the 50% mark (!) of all Indian homes, while homes with a cable connection – which enables the reception of satellite channels - have increased from 40 million in 2002 to 61 million in 2005, representing a growth of 53% in the three years alone since I commenced the fieldwork for this study.¹²⁵ This increase is, on the other hand, accompanied not by a decline of the newspaper market, but, on the contrary, a substantial growth of this sector as well, with meanwhile as many readers in urban as in rural areas.¹²⁶ This signifies a form of simultaneity – involving concurrent factors of literacy development, economic inequality and fast technological advance – which the Western historical process has not witnessed and which also confirms that Appadurai's idea of a stepwise teleological development is actually deeply rooted in a conventional Western perception.

Considering this complex scenario Lynn Spigel has lately criticised that the one-sided analytical shift towards 'digital worlds' and 'virtual realms' is tantamount to "a shift away from the analysis of the present – from the material and actually existing conditions of media culture – toward a kind of 'retro-avant-gardism' that resonates with modernity's great faith in technology"¹²⁷ – a realisation that not coincidentally can be made for the analysis of the nation-state as well. Appadurai's thesis of electronic media as the motor and generator of globalisation thus may have been refuted by 'reality' (or rather by virtuality), as it has become

¹²⁴ Soraj Hongladarom, for instance, points out that "simply equipping a group of people with computer hardware and software, as many state and local authorities have done in the past, is never going to be an effective solution. Much more is needed before those who have not found a place for computers and the network to be fully 'computer literate' and to function in such a way that the inequality exemplified by the divide is alleviated", *The Digital Divide, Epistemology, and Global Justice*, in: *Computer Society of India* (ed.), 2005, *CSI-Communications* 28 (12), p. 6; www.csi-india.org.

¹²⁵ National Readership Survey 2005 (www.allindiannewspapers.com/India-newspaper/NRS-key-findings.htm).

¹²⁶ See Dionne Bunsha, 2002, *The rise of print*, in: *Frontline*, July 06-19.

¹²⁷ Lynn Spigel, 2004, "Introduction", in: Spigel/Jan Olsson (eds.), p. 11.

evident that television (alongside other traditional electronic media) is itself *being* globalised, hence opening new options of examining not merely its *power* but also its *limits*. Nevertheless, the study of media seems to largely have followed his momentum of a teleological future orientation rather than developed modified approaches, particularly empirical ones, of the changing and heterogeneous “Here and Now.”¹²⁸

It is only over the past few years that there have been made advances in the ‘realistic’ spirit that Spigel has noted to miss – maybe not coincidentally coming mainly from veterans in the field of media studies. David Morley, for instance, in an attempt to reassess the traditional connection between television and the private home and in direct critique of Appadurai, claims that “if we take mobility to be a defining characteristic of the contemporary world, we must simultaneously pose the question of why (and with what degrees of freedom) particular people stay at home [...]. Despite all the talk of global flows, fluidity, hybridity, and mobility it is worth observing that, in the United Kingdom at least, there is evidence that points to continued geographical sedentarism on the part of the majority of the population. Thus Peter Dickens argues that despite widespread assumptions on the contrary, geographical mobility in the United Kingdom actually declined in the 1970s and 1980s as compared with the so-called stable times of the 1950s and 1960s.”¹²⁹ Related to this evidence is the limited capacity of television, because it still generally represents a continuous, running process - Williams’ famous “flow”¹³⁰ - rather than an attachable fragment, not only to transcend nationality, but also the private home. This aspect is recognisable in a trend that almost directly counters mobility and spatial dissolution, namely the tendency to ever bigger and immovable flat screens and monitors in private spaces that can be read as a move to *re-ground* media consumption in the face of an actually not-so-ubiquitous mobility and that enables conventional television to exist alongside the more individual use of the DVD and the computer in the living room.

In another variation of Morley’s intervention it could be argued that the concept of time-space compression, which Roland Robertson saw in the middle of the 1990s as being characteristic of the global condition¹³¹, provokes the question for the amount of people for whom time has actually expanded and spaces have become virtually impossible to transgress. The large majority of today’s world population have still never left the country they were born in

¹²⁸ Title of the first chapter in: Appadurai, 1997.

¹²⁹ David Morley, 2004, “At Home with Television”, in: Spigel/Olsson, p. 306/307 (brackets in the original).

¹³⁰ Raymond Williams, 2003, *Television*, London/New York: Routledge (reprint of the 1974 first edition).

¹³¹ Roland Robertson, 1995, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity”, in: Mike Featherstone/Scott Lash/Roland Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities*, New Delhi: Sage, pp. 25-44.

(prominently amongst them not only 'Third World'- but also US citizens), let alone have entered a plane. For refugees and asylum seekers, on the other hand, national and regional borders have become more insurmountable than ever, which ties both groups – voluntarily or involuntarily - back to the nation-state, where, on the other hand, spatial restrictions for minorities and impermeability of geographical boundaries for the poor have become as salient as has the mantra of 'flexibility' for the work force (see 3.3. and 5.3.2.)

In a slightly different vein has Colin Sparks in 2000 published an article under the telling title "The Global, the Local and the Public Sphere", which at reading quickly reveals itself as an ironic reference to the "amalgam of all that is fashionable in the study of the mass media."¹³² While Sparks actually underlines the importance of all three concepts mentioned in his title, without which the changes we are witnessing could not nearly be grasped, he points to fundamental shortcomings in the way they are applied, which, as he goes on to show, could even be avoided without much in-depth research. The strongest point that he makes concerns the non-replaced role of the state, be it in the form of factual regulatory agency, that is practised in most countries and has in some, like China, even been enforced, or in the form of the active neglect of this regulatory capacity for the sake of other priorities such as calls for democratisation, commercial profit, employment considerations and/or a particular government's gain from an unregulated situation etc. (see 3.2. and 5.3.2). The state is not inherently weak in globalisation, it also chooses to be so.

Moreover, Sparks underlines a context that is most crucial for the development in India and for understanding the role that Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation occupies in it, which plays a main part in this study, namely the co-option of the national rather than the local level through transnational corporate agency: "Murdoch, to take the paradigmatic example of a global media operator, and one who is most certainly concerned to intervene in public debate, does not appear much interested in local operations, outside of his original patrimony in Australia. [...] Murdoch has not concentrated simply on acquiring lucrative stations in particular localities. He nowhere appears to have a strategy of finding local partners and working with them. His alliances are with companies that operate on the state level. There is little evidence, in most of his main theatres of operation, that Murdoch wants to undermine the state from above and below. (Indeed, there is precious little evidence that, despite his public speeches, he wants to undermine even very despotic states from above. Provided he

¹³² Colin Sparks, 2000, "The Global, the Local and the Public Sphere", in: Robert C. Allen/Annette Hill (eds.), 2004, *The Television Studies Reader*, London/New York: Routledge, p. 139.

can do business with them, butchers are quite OK.) The famous slogan, attributed to News Corporation as well as to many other companies, of ‘Think Global. Act Local’ seems to mean, in practice, ‘Think Global. Act National.’”¹³³ While it is, however, important to note here the difference between state and nation, because, as I will elaborate in the coming chapters, Murdoch does clearly profit from an inactive or complicit state whilst cooperating with and re-inventing the national level, it is also certainly no coincidence that Murdoch’s main operations still take place in the classical national areas of television, radio, newspapers, cinema and book publishing (see 3.1.).

What is important about Morley’s and Sparks’ texts is that they re-emphasise the fundamental difference between choice and access. This points to the significance of the factors of class, caste, race, and gender as well as power, education, and morals in gaining a new relevance with regard to the use and consumption of different media and their contents, which can be extended by the factors of space and language (see chapters 3 to 5). On the other hand do they re-direct attention to the factual agency (and thus responsibility) of players and institutions, such as concrete companies and the state, which have rarely figured in cultural analysis of media and globalisation during the last decade, and the coming chapters will also show that Rupert Murdoch’s powers are by no means ontological but can, if wanted, be held in check even by small contracts (as much as they can be aggravated even by small legal steps). Sparks comes to the conclusion that “there is no such thing as a global public sphere at the moment [...], nor is there any sign of one emerging in the immediate future.”¹³⁴ This does not merely account for the absence of a global image or a global broadcaster, but also for the difference between globalisation and transnationalisation that is inherent in Sparks’ observations and that is most vital with regard to television and its endeavour to re-invent itself.

2.5.4. The Transnational and the Global

¹³³ Ibid, pp. 145/146 (brackets in the original).

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 149 a. 148.

Transnationalism, it could be said, implies the transgressing of national borders. In contrast to globalisation, however, it betrays not only some enduring or reconstructive relation with the framework of the nation-state, but also reifies the uneven trajectories between East and West. The development of transnational satellite television over the past 15 years has worked on two different levels. It essentially operates along the postcolonial gradient, inscribed in which are the tracks of a hegemonic discourse of Western modernity as well as the routes of migration from East to West over the past decades. On the one hand, there does exist a vast and growing number of TV-stations – private, public, or state-owned - that broadcast their signals via satellite into many areas of the globe, predominantly, however, into states where they know of a substantial population that has ties to the nation from whose soil the signals are coming. This form of transnational television, which is essentially cultural minority television as it hardly reaches the majority population of the respective country and that happens more from East to West than from West to East, has often been connected to tropes such as “long-distance nationalism”¹³⁵, even though it is by no means clear whether it actually aggravates minority nationalism or does not also release relief of ‘having gotten away’.

Transnational television of this kind is superimposed by a second level of transnational television, which predominantly travels from West to East and which manifests itself, for one, in Western channels airing their programming into many Eastern countries, where they can realistically hope to find viewers accustomed to the Western discourse and interested in their fare, and where they become part of the general bouquet of channels (rather than being cultural minority television). Secondly, this transnational television does not exhaust itself in owning shares in TV-stations, for instance, in Asian countries, but it also engages in producing customised *programming* for a proposed majority population in the respective countries. It is this feature, which actually marks a complete novelty in the area of television and which has developed with a neo-liberalist coining of globalisation as it involves Western corporate agents (like Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation and Columbia Entertainment) who otherwise have no connection with these nations. By contrast, in Western countries the Chinese or Indian ownership of a microchip manufacturer or computer company is increasingly the case, but the production of, for instance, television software for an American audience by a Chinese company is still unthinkable: it would signify the end of a national culture and national sovereignty that television more than any other medium has come to

¹³⁵ Benedict Anderson, 1992, *Long-Distance Nationalism. World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics*, The Wertheim Lecture, Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies (CASA)!

symbolically guarantee, but that obviously also stands in for the maintenance of a global power relationship (the US in particular do not even allow foreign ownership of broadcasters operating in the country).

An executive of the private Indian broadcaster Zee TV, which airs its programming to a large number of countries, including Europe and the US, put it thus: “At the end of the day, we cater to our citizens abroad, or Indians who have become citizens of other countries, wherever that is. But they [Western transnational channels, B.O.] are producing programmes for our audience here in India, not for their citizens who live here. We tried to create software for a European audience, establish a ‘Zee Europe’ in the cable networks there. But it didn’t work. They can cater to our tastes, but we cannot cater to their tastes.”¹³⁶ Which essentially means that Indians cannot (yet) *produce* Western tastes, at least not in the field of television.

On the other hand, as the former self-evidence and restriction of television’s national framework is diminishing, it has to negotiate with and struggle with other forces, next to the digital (global), particularly with the regional. In the Indian case, this becomes evident from the actually very limited number of transnational broadcasters in operation, which are, however, the leading players as far as the national level is concerned. There is a host of mainly American or British channels such as CNN, BBC World, HBO, Hallmark, ESPN, Cartoon Network, History Channel, Discovery Channel etc., which are prominent in every TV schedule but which represent today what one might call numerical minority television as they cannot claim substantial viewership. The national market, by contrast, is increasingly characterised by strong competition particularly from private Indian regional companies (as well as local TV channels – see 5.3.2.), which broadcast in different regional languages and have no connection to transnational corporations (most prominent are the South Indian broadcasters Asianet, ETV, Sun TV, Raj TV and Surya TV). Next to MTV and Columbia’s Sony Entertainment Television (in the following called Sony)¹³⁷, it is only Rupert Murdoch’s Star TV that now engages in transnational *programming* in the sense that it is thoroughly conceived and produced in India and thus designed to reach a national audience (see 3.4. and 3.5.). Both Sony and Star TV control today together with Zee TV (formerly itself associated with Murdoch) the main shares of the national Indian television landscape, which in its present form already seems more or less saturated, but which also cannot be imagined to *not be there* as long as the nation-state exists.

¹³⁶ Zee-executive, Interview I/3.

¹³⁷ The official abbreviation for Sony Entertainment Television is SET, which has, however, not really found its way into colloquial use (see www.setindia.com).

Both these tropes, the tracks of the Western hegemonic discourse as well as the struggle for the national arena in the form of national viewership (and the re-invention of television itself on these lines) have been crucial in the development of Murdoch's Star TV in India, which stands at the centre of the empirical analysis in the next chapters. However, while the lopsidedness in favour of the West in the transnational televisual context suggests at first glance an easy and powerful ride into the living rooms of Indian viewers, this development has been far from smooth and one-dimensional, underscoring the changing parameters within which television operates in a transnational context. It would also be misleading, though, to assume that anti-Western reactions are commensurate with 'cultural resistance'. Neither do they result in completely non-Western representation (however 'Indian' they are), as I have tried to indicate in the beginning and will try and further elaborate in Part III. In the following chapter, I will describe the beginnings of transnational television's – and particularly Rupert Murdoch's – difficult endeavour in India, which, however, also already shows that a culturalist re-definition of the nation profits rather immensely from an absentee or complicit state, particularly under conditions of neo-liberalist commercialisation.

3. The Limits of Transnationalism and the Limits of Resistance

In 1997, Purnima Mankekar returned to India for a follow-up fieldwork of her ethnographic study on the construction of nationhood and gender through India's state-run broadcaster Doordarshan (DD). During this fieldtrip, the results of which figure as an epilogue in her book, she already noted a phenomenon, which has only lately found entry into the debate on media and globalisation. Taking into account the meanwhile emerged transnational and private channels, that had hardly been around when she conducted her main research between 1990 and 1992, she noticed "the national [...] reappearing in the guise of the local", generating a "reterritorialization of culture"¹³⁸ insofar as "the Indianization of transnational television programs was occurring at the same time that "Indian culture" was itself being

¹³⁸ Mankekar, 2000, p. 349.

reconstructed.”¹³⁹ This early observation of Mankekar’s, which took place almost at the same time that Appadurai published his thesis of global deterritorialisation, has proven to be of great significance for the later development and for an understanding of the current scenario of television in India.

‘Indianisation’ obviously betrays not only a central relation with the nation-state, but also a moment of culturalising. It was still a key-term in the Indian television business when I conducted my interviews amongst producers, executives and journalists of Indian private and transnational channels between 2002 and 2004, but has despite its ubiquity in the Indian discourse very rarely been analysed, particularly with regard to television.¹⁴⁰ In a broader sense, however, as transnationalising television has a clear implication of neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism, Indianisation is embedded in the larger discourse of ‘the global’ and ‘the local’, but particularly in the trope of ‘local resistance’ against an overpowering force. While the global-local trope tends to be more affirmative of a creative syncretism between the two sides that is, however, often ignorant of questions of power and the inequality of options¹⁴¹, the focus on resistance operates within the same dichotomous pattern of omnipotent power and direct opposition that has by postcolonial theorists been applied to Western modernity, the nation-state and the cultural dissent against them. The main motivation for a particular producer to Indianise his or her output is thus considered to be the resistance of Indian audiences against Western – that is now mainly American – productions based on their cultural difference. On the other hand, the production of ‘Indian’ programmes by a transnational company is seen as a powerful and most effective strategy to secure and expand market shares. Both these readings of Indianisation entail a strong and rather one-dimensional significance of corporate power and culture as antagonistic concepts. The way they are generally brought forward, the first of the two ascribes all power to the audiences, to whose proposed rejection of ‘culturally alien’ contents even mighty players have to bend down. The second, more on the lines of Empire, the construction of a simulacrum and the manufacturing of an identity, sees an ultimate power increase on the side of the transnational company,

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 350.

¹⁴⁰ See Brosius/Butcher (eds.), Introduction; Thussu (ed.), 1998. An example with regard to the film industry, where syncretism is indeed far more salient, is Tejaswini Ganti, 2002, “And Yet my Heart Is Still Indian - The Bombay Film Industry and the (H)Indianization of Hollywood”, in: Ginsburg/Abu-Lughod/Larkin (eds.), pp. 281-299.

¹⁴¹ Rob Wilson/Wimal Dissanayake (eds), 1996, *Global/Local. Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, London: Duke University Press.

because it is fairly indifferent to what it is producing and for whom, as long as the profit is increased.

As I have argued in chapter 2, relations between colonisers and colonised, while based on an inherent inequality of power, were less dichotomous and more complex and reciprocal than put forward by postcolonial theorists. Before this background, the encounter between the transnational and the national in a postcolonial context, while re-confirming the basic power relation, seems even more intricate and multifaceted, and Mankekar's observation indicates an interconnected-ness, or even a blurring of power in the process of reconstituting 'Indian culture' (as a noun). While opposition against the British Raj, where it happened, was already cultural as much as it was political and secular, the rejection of Western programming was hardly unequivocal and only partly *based* on culture. If we do not consider 'culture' as a given thing and take into account that particularly those who turned to transnational channels had already ample experience with Western influences it rather seems that the branding of something as 'foreign' and the conditions under which this happens – including the realisation of an unbalanced power relationship and the lack of choice - are instrumental *in forming* ideas about the 'own culture' and the degree to which it is seen or declared to be in need of protection and/or reinforcement. What seems most significant in this context is that the very arguing in terms of culture already presupposes this process of identification, indicating a realisation that is least likely to have happened amongst those who most represent 'culture' in ethnic terms: hardly any villager will instinctively say that 'my culture is under threat' (even though that might be underway), unless he or she has already learned to identify certain negative influences in these terms. Arguing in terms of culture can be seen a learning process that is predicated upon the modernisation process itself and that up until now is more likely to have been undergone by the middle and upper classes of a society, which again stresses the problem of representation but also a certain unprotected-ness in the exposure of indigenous and rural viewers. In India, moreover, it showed that middle classes referred to 'culture' in moral rather than ethnic terms, thus indicating a 'middle-classification' of culture (see 3.5.).

On the other hand, as far as the corporate side is concerned, it is not so easy to go and produce customised programming in a country that is today actually more foreign and unknown to Western corporatists than is the West to their proposed customers. While Murdoch indeed resembles in many ways the naïve and self-possessed colonialist (India having been his first television endeavour outside the West – see 3.1.), he clearly underestimated the actual postcolonial context he was operating in, which is characterised not merely by a long training

in dealing with the West, but also by a strong sense of independence. These preliminaries cast a doubt on the singular power of the transnational company in producing simulacra and amounting profits. On the other hand, while the British Raj took almost a century – piggybacking on the East India Company – to establish its administration, the inroad into postcolonial, and particularly into democratic countries via technology is obviously far quicker. But there is often an instancy and ease ascribed to it that does not withstand empirical findings. As I will try and show in this chapter with regard to Rupert Murdoch, whose Star Plus-channel occupies a central place in this context, the length of the way that stretched out in front of the transnational undertaking of Star TV, before it came anywhere near an indifference to what is being produced and for whom, severely complicated the subtle and thorough success that is often associated with transnational corporate agency, even if the final ‘success’ was overwhelming. What could be observed here, I argue, was a *relative* power, in which immense financial resources were paired with a substantial ignorance of the national preconditions.

At the time of my fieldwork, Star Plus, the channel in the Star-bouquet that is today most designed to cater to a national Indian audience, was just coming to terms with its own success that had been in a difficult and cost-intensive making for more than seven years and that had essentially saved Star TV from packing up in the Indian market altogether. This success consisted basically of three prime-time programmes that were tied together in the classical commercial combination of quiz show and soap opera, signifying a balance of excitement and reassurance: the Hindi avatar of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, *Kaun Banega Crorepati?* – only spoken of as *KBC* – that was followed, five days a week, by two Indian soap operas, *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Because Every Mother-in-Law once was a Daughter-in-Law) and *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii* (The Story of Every House). Together, because they all feature the letter ‘K’ in the beginning, but also because they saw countless copies on the same and on other channels, they were referred to by my interview-partners as either “the K-formula” or “the K-phenomenon.” This formula had catapulted Star Plus in 2000 into the market leading position with such vigour that till to the moment that I am writing this it is keeping the competing channels gasping for air and better ideas (see 7.3. and 8).

However, even this rather phenomenal success showed itself as not being all that complete, but again situated within the negotiation of what is and what is not ‘Indian’. Despite Star Plus’ final leadership in the Indian market, executives working for the channel still emphasised that “even though we’re all Indians here, working for Star always means you’re

not really Indian¹⁴² and that “we have to walk that extra mile, we have to take that extra care, we have to make it IndianIndian [*sic*] – because we’re Murdoch.”¹⁴³ This assessment was complemented by an executive from Zee TV, Star Plus’ direct rival, in whose description Star figures despite its success as a mere distortion of genuine Indianness: “[Star] is almost like a foreigner trying to speak in Hindi. Even though we appreciate that he is taking the effort to learn the language, but at the end of the day he’s still not you.”¹⁴⁴

These statements already indicate the increasingly relentless battle between the two channels – that Zee TV ultimately lost -, in which language came to be seen as one of the prime signifiers of a reshuffled national cultural identity and representative authority (see chapter 4). On the part of the Star-executives, the utterances point towards a distinct, and not very comfortable form of hybridity, namely of operating in a realm that is post-national and neo-national as well as post-colonial and neo-colonial at the same time: “The transnational is less understandable to many than the West, and because it’s less understandable it’s more dangerous. You just can’t pinpoint it, but still you know it’s different. It’s this confusion we have to deal with.”¹⁴⁵ Yet they underscore an inverted relationship between ‘Indian’ and ‘Western’ under conditions of corporate transnationalism. It is rather the *absence* of a complete simulacrum (at least of a credible one) and the very fact that the Western producer has *not* managed to convincingly vanish behind his or her product that generates the (enhanced) level of ‘Indianness’ – the “IndianIndian”-ness - of a programming. To put it differently: the less accepted the producer is as ‘Indian’ (or the more identifiable as ‘Western’, respectively), the more ‘Indian’ the programming has to be, which is a particularly vital factor in Murdoch’s case (see chapter 4 and 8). This contingency leaves it at about the same distance from ‘authenticity’ that an openly Western or Westernised programming might have been. At the same time it diminishes the distance from culturalist framings of ‘authenticity’ and ‘reality’ like the ones proposed by Hindutva.

Nevertheless, the argument of the manufacturability of programming, which points to substantial financial power, and therewith of ‘identity’, is very important, because while the first suggests the changed options of capitalism in a transnational context, the latter points towards an increasing absence of ideological power in the conventional sense. Both these aspects of power, money and ideology, seem to have been understood by Rupert Murdoch for

¹⁴² Star Plus-executive, Interview II/43.

¹⁴³ Star Plus Head of Content, Interview I/15.

¹⁴⁴ Zee-executive, Interview I/03.

¹⁴⁵ Star Plus-executive, Interview II/43.

long in too conservative a manner, which underline that he basically lacked a grasp of the postcolonial and globalising ground that he was walking in India. Most clearly, it apparently escaped him that ‘the West’ itself does not merely represent a focus of aspiration, but also an ideology. The result was that, instead of *making* money on his programming, which initially consisted mainly of American shows and soaps and later of upmarket programming in a mixture of Hindi and English (Hinglish – see chapter 4), his money factually had to *cover* for the lack of his acceptance (which included his person as much as his output) through the audiences. Murdoch’s investments in Star TV exceeded for years substantially his profits (towards the end of the 1990s his losses were reported to be around 80 million US\$ per year), and it was his vast transnational financial resources that enabled him to stay at least in the Indian market (whereas the so-called ‘free play of market forces’ would have forced anyone with less money and such a success ratio to withdraw). It was the absolute resilience of Murdoch, which prompted an executive of Star Plus to the insight that it is not the ideology of the West but the ideology of winning that fuels his actions: “Murdoch is not in television for money, he could make money much faster in other businesses, if he was really after that. Of course, he wants profit, but if you ask me, he is here to rule our minds, to rule nations, and that’s what we will be ruled by in the future: media moghuls.”¹⁴⁶

Star Plus’ final triumph in India from 2000 onward, on the other hand, was at least greatly facilitated by the continuous reduction of Murdoch’s ideological supervision that is generally characteristic of his operations and that had for long also guided his dealing with Star TV. As one leading executive put it: “Today we are totally independent. Rupert doesn’t say any more: ‘Show *Baywatch* and give me the money.’ He says: ‘Show what you want and give me the money.’”¹⁴⁷ While the implications and the framework of this form of ‘independence’ are obviously highly ambivalent (see 7.3.), the old pairing of money and ideology has been transformed into an interdependency of *profit* and *de-ideologising*. The latter is not only imbued with the logic of commercial television and the re-framing of the viewer from an absorbing recipient into a mature and active consumer (see 8.1.). In the particular case of transnational television it is also largely congruent with a politics of *de-westernisation* that prominently entails a ‘cultural turn’ increasingly characteristic of the corporate sector (see below). In the Indian context, this ‘cultural turn’ resonated with “the slippage between Hindu and Indian nationalisms” that has “acquired tremendous potency in the late 1980s and early

¹⁴⁶ Interview I/8.

¹⁴⁷ Interview I/15.

1990s.”¹⁴⁸ The re-invention of the nation, which is pursued and symbolised by the re-invention of television, was thus predicated upon the *withdrawal* from ideology and a new form of naturalisation.

3.1. *De-Ideologising the Medium: Transnational Companies and the ‘Cultural Turn’*

I have earlier argued that as of now television can only be framed within the transnational as it has only recently started to transcend national borders, while it in one way or the other remains tied to the national, and there does neither exist an infrastructure, nor hardware and software that would deserve the term ‘global’. Murdoch’s News Corporation, however, occupies an exceptional place as far as the transnational is concerned.

Taking into account the larger corporate sector, of which television has *not* traditionally been a part, there have obviously since decades existed corporations which were spreading large parts of the globe, formerly called multinational or international companies (one can think of Singer, Ford, Leyland, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Nestlé, BP, Shell, Palmolive, Colgate, Hoechst, Siemens and many others). What makes the difference between a multinational and a transnational company in this context, or where the composite structure that a ‘multi’ implies turns into the border-crossing that a ‘trans’ suggests, Masao Myoshi, amongst others, has tried to define: “A multinational company is one that has its headquarters in a particular country and operates in various other countries. Its upper management largely comprises of people from the country where the company originates, and the enterprise’s loyalty, despite being increasingly autonomous, is in the last instance bound to the motherland. A truly transnational corporation, on the other hand, does not need to be obliged to any country of origin, but is independent and mobile – ready to settle anywhere and to exploit any state, including the own, as long as this cooperation serves its own interests.”¹⁴⁹

By this definition, basically all existing television broadcasters, be they public, private or state-owned and be they internationally receivable or not, continue to fall into the category of the multinational rather than the transnational company, because they operate from a

¹⁴⁸ Mankekar, 2000, p. 165.

¹⁴⁹ Translated from the German by me; Masao Miyoshi, 1997, “Eine Welt ohne Grenzen? Vom Kolonialismus zum Transnationalismus und zum Niedergang des Nationalstaats”, in: *politics-poetics. Das Buch zur documenta X*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz Verlag, p. 188.

particular country and sustain correspondence offices in other countries (unless they are so small that they merely re-broadcast feeds made available by news agencies such as Reuters and Associated Press (AP). This pattern also includes news channels like CNN, BBC World or Al-Jazeera, none of which is independent of their originating country, even if they attempt to cover vast regions of the globe (a new model does indeed represent Al Jazeera English, whose headquarters in Qatar seem to be more arbitrary – and tied to the financial input of the generous ruling Emir rather than the nation-state of Qatar – but which appears to be operating more in a re-invented East/West-logic than on a truly transnational level).

As far as ownership structure is concerned, things already become more nebulous, as, for instance, the Bertelsmann Group owns TV-channels in France and Britain as well. Yet it remains known that Bertelsmann is basically a German corporation with its headquarters in Germany. In this regard, Murdoch's News Corporation represents until today an exception as it can in the field of traditional media (newspapers, book publishing, cinema, radio and television) still be seen as the only corporation worldwide that wholly complies with the definition that Miyoshi has given for a truly transnational company already almost a decade ago - a fact which News Corporation itself is obviously very conscious of, presenting itself on its website as “the only vertically integrated media company on a global scale.”¹⁵⁰

Coming originally from Australia, Murdoch entered the British newspaper market already in the late 1960, setting up the tabloid Sun and taking over the News of the World (in 1969) as well as the traditional Times and the Sunday Times (in 1976). He then proceeded to mingle with the US print and film sector, acquiring various papers (e.g. the New York Post and the Herald American), book publishers (i.e. Harper Collins and Ecco) and the 20th Century Fox (in 1985), as well as founding Fox TV (in 1986). From the US (after becoming a US citizen in 1985 under the provision of not allowing foreign ownership of US television stations), Murdoch made further inroads into Britain, Australia itself and other parts of Europe (Germany, Norway, Italy, Denmark) mainly with the 1989 established Sky TV, before stretching into Latin America and Asia (including India, Indonesia and Japan). News Corporation, formed in 1980, meanwhile has its formal headquarters in Los Angeles, yet it is anything but an American company. It is indeed something like a migrating or roaming and at the same time encompassing corporation, and, significantly, this circumstance seems to have been enabled less by a confusing set-up of de-personified and invisible mighty shareholders

¹⁵⁰ www.newscorp.com (July 2005).

but rather by the very transparent, often even physical movements of one single man, Rupert Murdoch.

However, transnationalism in this reading may be less down to concrete company *structures* in the more narrow sense than to the *ways* in which companies proceed in their way of making business. If an existing business is taken over by a multinational, or if a multinational is setting up a branch in a particular country, this is often linked to a recognisable change in the business policy in favour of the new owner, or with a disruption of the existing economic and social landscape, respectively. Multinationals, because they are identifiable as ‘foreign’ in the countries outside their motherland – which in many cases is still located in the West – carry next to their practical disruptive force (particularly with regard to the environment and labour rights) an ideological weight, as for instance the protests against Shell in Nigeria, the boycotts of Coca-Cola in Egypt, the demonstrations against Pepsi and Kentucky Fried Chicken in India or, in the broadcasting sector, the rather quick dismissal of CNN as ‘American’ in many countries, including Europe, over the past decades have shown. (It is important to note in this regard that Japan, which can be considered to belong to a metaphorical rather than geographical West, has, despite flooding markets with industrial and electronic brands such as Honda, Sony and Yamaha, never encountered the same opposition). The ongoing difficulties of companies like Coca-Cola or McDonalds in the Indian market – as opposed to the older colonial brands like Colgate, Surf, Cadbury’s and Britannia, which are largely considered ‘Indian’ now (and with licenses are produced in India as well) – testify to this pattern.

While time, usage, advantages and appropriation obviously play an important role here, transnational understanding of business can be seen as having found a ‘shortcut’ to the consumer, the most important aspect of which is to shed the ideological weight of being Western and thus the *identifiability* of the producer. In practical terms this means that, for instance, Coca-Cola has taken over the well-established Indian cola brand of Thumps Up without changing the bottle design and started to fertilise the sector of bottled water for itself, which takes into account the climate and the demand for safe drinking water. Similarly has Pepsi tied up with the Indian brand of Lehar, which in time was secretly swallowed. It is this manner of taking over, tying up with and/or branding what already exists and enjoys acceptance rather than trying to convert consumers to something unknown, and the readiness to adapt to a demand rather than creating one (in the more brute sense) that includes the recruitment not only of local employees but also of a local, independently deciding

management, which can be called transnational as compared to multinational, and it increasingly turns many actually multinational companies, in the sense that they continue to have loyalties to the motherland, at least partly into transnational agents as well.

This change in business approach has particularly over the last few years turned out to promise far quicker and more reliable returns, because it saves lengthy campaigns in order to convince consumers of the merits of something non-familiar. On the other hand, it entails a de-ideologising that basically renounces of an acceptance of the company's own background *through* the consumer. It represents almost the opposite of the unquestioned self-confidence of traditional approaches in marketing and advertising that were epitomised by imperative slogans such as "Drink Coca-Cola". The product was at that time boldly promoted as a status symbol, a strategy that was building upon the clear and untainted conviction that belonging to the Western world was the dream of everybody so far living outside it. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union and during the first years of the 1990s, this pattern and the accompanying Western self-confidence seemed for a short while even enhanced – given the immense scale of new products for countries which had, like India, operated under quasi-socialist structures – and complemented by the factor of speed: consuming the new products meant to become part of the dynamics of change and 'opening-up'.

Since the end of the 1990s at the latest, however, what has become more and more foreseeable for Western companies is a discourse of 'othering' in non-Western countries as well as an increasing resistance to the speed of change – at least if this speed is dictated by others. The transnational, subtle approach is thus invested with a conscious attempt at *de-westernisation* and what can be called a 'cultural turn' in economics that at the same time tries, in sharp contrast to only a few years ago, rather eagerly to convey the impression that everything stays the same, including cultural patterns and traditional practises. Given the times, this appeal does obviously represent a more appropriate and sophisticated business strategy in order to secure power and influence, while it at the same time keeps a surface of stability and even tradition, under which change is continuous. On the other hand, it speaks of a crumbling self-assurance and a growing inability to openly sell the West as the obvious goal in life and to assume that the rest cannot wait to follow.

Interestingly, Murdoch, despite representing the only truly transnational company in the field of traditional media, falls even out of this general pattern to quite a degree. In a sense, one might even say that News Corporation is in tendency developing contrary to it. Murdoch was probably the first to start out in the way that is now increasingly discovered to be a fertile

avenue by conventional multinationals, namely by taking over already established and accepted media (such as The Times – the epitome of classic Britishness - or the 20th Century Fox, originally established 1935) and successively moulding their functioning. Today, however, he rather seems to be operating in a ‘mixed approach’ in the sense that while he continues to take over or buy controlling shares in already established media he is also increasingly engaged in establishing branches of enterprises which inevitably carry the stamp of Murdoch, particularly Sky TV, in much the same manner that Coca-Cola, Pepsi and McDonald’s continue to try and penetrate markets with their original brands (with adaptations such as, in India, the mutton burger, superstar Aishwarya Rai advertising the Coca-Cola bottle, and Pepsi running campaigns such as *Azaadi Dil Ki* (Freedom of the Heart) that tries to evoke parallels with the national Freedom (Azadi) Movement).¹⁵¹

Yet a significant difference between Murdoch and these companies is that Murdoch does not stand for a ‘cultural classic’. Brands like Coca-Cola, the BBC in broadcasting, even McDonald’s may have been protested against as representing Western imperialism or neo-colonialism, but they also form cultural legends of modernity that are meanwhile recognised anywhere *as* cultural legends and whose complete demise is most likely to evoke a feeling of loss at least amongst some sections of different societies. The protest against these brands can at least partly be seen to be as symbolic as are the brands themselves. The awareness of their status is obviously the reason for these companies not to give up marketing these brands besides adapting to local needs and demands as well. Murdoch, on the other hand, does not only *not* have such a symbolic brand to offer, he has an exceptionally bad reputation even amongst media people (not least in the US).¹⁵² Murdoch represents economic megalomania, moral ruthlessness and bad taste more than any other media company to the extent that one of my interview partners in India – and it was not a Star TV executive – felt the need to protect him by saying that “Murdoch is not as bad as always projected. I think he is changing also and trying to understand more.”¹⁵³

This well-meaning, almost pitiful gesture, however, does hardly seem to be justified in face of the fact that News Corporation is much like very traditional multinationals (such as Ford, Singer or Daimler) inseparably tied to Murdoch’s name and persona, a circumstance which is

¹⁵¹ For a closer evaluation of the latter see Melissa Butcher, 2003, *Transnational Television, Cultural Analysis and Change. When Star Came to India*, New Delhi/London/Thousand Oaks: Sage.

¹⁵² See John J. Pauly, 1988, “Rupert Murdoch and the Demology of Professional Journalism”, in: James W. Carey (ed.), *Media, Myths and Narratives. Television and the Press*, London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage, pp. 247-261.

¹⁵³ Independent news producer, Interview II/18.

enhanced by the dynastic rather than decentralised route that News Corporation seems to be taking (Rupert Murdoch now increasingly being succeeded by his son James Murdoch – see chapter 4). Moreover, in the case of Murdoch there shows a considerably stronger featuring of a pattern that can generally be observed in the media. He is less concerned with the messages and implications of his entertainment productions, which may be more experimental and even visualise open criticism (for instance in the eco-drama *The Day After Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich, 2004, 20th Century Fox), where in the end an unmistakable vice president Dick Cheney apologises for the decade-long arrogance of the US to a Mexico that now offers asylum to US-citizens under acute threat of freezing to death in their own country). With regard to news reporting, however, as became obvious more so than ever during the Iraq war 2003, Murdoch is known to directly ideologically instruct, wherever possible in his rather vast network, his news editors in a right-conservative fashion, which seems to completely undo all the subtlety that can generally be ascribed to contemporary transnational agency.¹⁵⁴ While one could thus say that conventional multinationals in the commodity sector are, besides marketing their traditional products, increasingly trying to go transnational in the sense that they are trying to vanish behind elsewhere established brands and thus become de-westernised and unidentifiable, the only truly transnational corporation in the sector of traditional media seems to have rather decreasing problems with becoming increasingly visible.

Murdoch's Indian endeavour, finally, was even more complicated than the already contradictory position that News Corporation occupies in the transnationalising landscape. Murdoch did go the more transnational way in India in the sense that he renounced setting up a branch of Sky TV – an option that he probably considered unreasonable because of the very nascent state of the Indian private television market, the lack of a satellite transponder in the region and a completely unclear legal situation at the beginning of the 1990s (see below). Instead, he took over an already existing enterprise that was of potential national relevance with regard to content production and distribution. In 1993, he bought the controlling share of the then extremely successful Star TV off the Hong Kong-based millionaire Li Ka-Shing and made it into the first Asian branch of News Corporation. He thus made the attempt, like in the early days with *The Times* or the 20th Century Fox, to vanish behind an enterprise that was

¹⁵⁴ See Robert Greenwald's documentary *Outfoxed* (USA 2004) that describes the undisguised practises of political colouring in favour of the Bush government in Murdoch's US Fox News, and *Guardian Weekly*, February 27-March 5, 2003: Speaking with their master's voice.

already established in the perception of consumers who in doubt would not even notice the change of ownership.

However, the degree of this established-ness was more than shallow in the Indian context. Till 1991, a mere two years before Murdoch entered the scene, the state-broadcaster Doordarshan had held the monopoly on broadcasting in the country, and there were no ‘established’ private broadcasters to take over that would have lived up to that description. Completely unfamiliar with the Indian context as he was, it was most probably Star TV’s booming success at the time (with 6000 new subscriptions to the network every day)¹⁵⁵, which Murdoch mistook for an already established acceptance by the viewers. Moreover, Li Ka-Shing had set up Star TV as a pan-Asian network that would cater to a Westernised elite with a so far invisible lifestyle and underestimated purchasing power, and Star Plus was at the time exclusively airing English-language programming, mainly American soaps (most prominently *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*), talk shows (*Ophra Winfrey*) and sitcoms to a highly receptive urban audience. Significantly, one of the first things Murdoch is reported to have said after his takeover was that “there is no such thing as a pan-Asian channel. You have to localise”¹⁵⁶ (which essentially meant to nationalise). He conceptualised Star Plus as the main revenue earner amongst the well off strata of Indian society, but well noticing the then already increasing success of the Hindi-language Zee TV he acquired a 49,9% share of that broadcaster in 1994, which was all that its owner Subhash Chandra – in wise anticipation - was willing to let go of in exchange for the right to use Star TV’s satellite platform (see chapter 4).

While Murdoch thus lived up to his reputation as basically wanting to control media rather than sharing them, the fact that his takeover of Star TV did at that time not bring about any profound change in the already existing concept of the broadcaster could still have ensured that the transaction would go about smoothly and discrete. However, even though Murdoch remained completely out of the Indian public – which was largely congruent with completely staying out of the country in the first place -, the change in ownership went anything but unnoticed. On the one hand, the sheer novelty of a non-Indian broadcaster screening into India caused at the time immense attention to every small move that occurred, actively supported by an eager press, and the takeover was widely reported. But the particular attention that this transaction received was also down to another factor. The core problem lay

¹⁵⁵ M. Rahman, 1992, The New TV Superbazaar. Now at your Fingertips, in: *India Today*, November 15, pp. 22-36.

¹⁵⁶ Star Plus Head of Content, Interview I/15.

with the aspect that Li Ka-Shing had somewhat been far ahead of his time with turning the usual pattern of Western cultural dominance upside down by setting up a transnational broadcaster with American programming that was not recognisable as being headed by a Chinese (indeed, most viewers in India were initially convinced that Star TV was American). Had Murdoch taken over a broadcaster that already aired Indian programming, the move would possibly not have drawn the same attention (Zee TV, in contrast to Star, was indeed hardly identified with Murdoch in the Indian public, but rather seen as anti-Murdoch, despite the fact that he owned half of it). Similarly, Sony, which entered the Indian market in 1995 with predominantly Hindi language programming, was far less seen as an ‘outsider’, an assessment which was additionally supported by the familiarity of Indian consumers with the Sony electronics brand (in radios, tape recorders, TV-sets etc.) that was not identified as Western but as Japanese. It thus provides another example where a Western corporation, in this case US-based Columbia Entertainment, successfully vanishes behind an accepted name. In the case of Murdoch’s takeover of Star TV, however, things went exactly the other way round, as here the epitome of a Western power-holder actually ended up getting identified with the most American programming imaginable. Instead of vanishing behind an accepted brand with the take-over of Star TV, Murdoch, on the contrary, became overexposed. This should in the longer run substantially complicate Star TV’s ‘cultural turn’, of whose looming necessity Murdoch might at the time only have been foggily aware.

3.2. The Defensive, the Absentee and the Complicit State

While Murdoch thus started basically on a detrimental note in India, his operations were from the beginning aided by the initial complete absence and later by pointed fragments of media legislation.

It is one of the most important aspects in the development of globalisation in India, which generates similar effects of a ‘missing public’ and thus of a vulnerable democracy in various fields (see 3.3. and chapter 6 and 7), that the domain of a democratically deficient state was in an immediate way confronted with the forces of economic liberalisation and privatisation. This confrontation was probably the most dramatic in the area of broadcasting as the latter represented within the media the only one in which the state actually held a – democratically

indefensible – monopolist position that directly met with one of the fastest agents of the just unfolding globalisation, transnational and private television, which was on the scene even before the Indian state, in 1991, had to formally proclaim bankruptcy and enter into a stabilisation programme sponsored by IMF and World Bank that fuelled the policies of economic liberalism already begun under Indira and Rajiv Gandhi.¹⁵⁷

Being encountered by a rather powerful and, moreover, apparently alternativeless force, however, did not quite mean that the Indian state became powerless or that it had been all powerful before. The Indian state, I propose, that was until the 1990s largely congruent with the Congress system, rather liked to imagine itself as naturally powerful, which involved a disregard for its own legal base and an indifference to democratic rights.¹⁵⁸ Extracting its self-perception essentially from the anti-colonial struggle, it took itself for granted as much as it took its subjects' loyalty for granted, irrespective of increasing signs to the contrary. This attitude conditioned an *inactivity* rather than powerful governance as well as a certain self-referentiality rather than interaction with the citizenry, which also led to a naturalisation of middle class (and upper caste) interests (see 3.3. and 4.2.). At the same time, and because of this basic attitude, the state was also in a defensive position against a citizenry and electorate that was increasingly aware of its democratic rights and was articulating demands that the state could not thoroughly ignore but responses to which it attempted to systematically postpone (often with the argument, like in broadcasting, that the time was not yet ripe for such steps, thus also suggesting a lack of people's maturity).¹⁵⁹ The endemic violence that characterised the Congress-led state can be explained out of a self-propelled and self-perpetuating defensive-ness against moves to re-define the state according to its own democratic foundations and thus also against what has been called 'the democratic revolution' – namely the growing structure of regional and local parties, grassroots-organisations and, in the realm of media, of the video industry and cable operators since the 1980s. A basic presumption of people's support for the state was thus ironically always coupled with a basic assumption of their immaturity.

¹⁵⁷ See Corbridge/Harriss, pp. 143-172.

¹⁵⁸ See in this context Rajni Kothari, 1988, *State against Democracy. In Search of Humane Governance*, Delhi: Ajanta Press; Francine Frankel/M.S.A. Rao (eds.), 1990, *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press; and Atul Kohli, 1990, *Democracy and Discontent. India's Growing Crisis of Governability*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵⁹ As late as 1985, for instance, Rajiv Gandhi, in order to retain the state's authority over broadcasting, said at a press conference: "All India Radio and Doordarshan are not yet ripe for autonomy" (in: Chatterji, 1987, p. 182).

In the area of broadcasting the absence of a legal framework for the state's monopoly and the decade-long, finally essentially fruitless debate about the transfer of Doordarshan and All India Radio (AIR) into public broadcasters represented direct examples of these conflicting strands in the Indian state's politics. In fact, the state's monopoly over broadcasting, presupposed, within a developmental logic, most clearly the population's loyalty to a pre-defined cause. The democracy practised in the independent press and, to a degree, in the commercial film industry, delivered the legitimacy of the state's monopoly in broadcasting, which was seen as a thoroughly natural thing that was not in need of any legal base. The only law that is in force until today, and that directly refers to the wireless transmission of information – thus including terrestrial television - is the Indian Telegraph Act, dating from 1885. It served the British administration to ensure its monopoly over the electromagnetic airwaves and thus over all outgoing and incoming messages by telegraph. It was kept unaltered after Independence, automatically securing the Indian government the authority over, first, radio and later television and was not subjected to a revision under the impression of a democratic constitution until the advent of the transnational channels.

The awareness that this monopoly was inconsistent with a democracy, on the other hand, had started to articulate itself rather early and ironically precisely in committees that the state itself set up in order to improve broadcasting. Already the very first committee that was assembled in 1966 to enquire about future broadcasting possibilities, the Chandra Enquiry Committee, recommended that AIR – which was at the time also conducting the first steps of television in India – be converted into a public corporation, which was conveniently ignored by the state.¹⁶⁰ By the time of the Emergency (1975-1977), which represents the only non-democratic phase in India's postcolonial history and which left the country traumatised, the demand for broadcasting's autonomy had already entered electoral competition. The Janata Party, at the time supported by the Sangh Parivar (in the form of the Jana Sangh) against the Congress, won the elections in 1977 also with the promise to transfer AIR and Doordarshan into public broadcasters. Having experienced dictatorship and a politically manipulated media (Indira Gandhi had used the nascent Doordarshan ruthlessly for her purposes and had detained a large number of journalists or disabled their work), autonomy of the media had been a strong demand amongst voters. But instead of legally establishing autonomy first and giving media experts and practitioners the opportunity of discussing new structures, a new committee, the Verghese Committee, was set up – still under government control – in order to

¹⁶⁰ P.C. Chatterji, 1987, *Broadcasting in India*, New Delhi/London/Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 165/166.

elaborate further steps, which basically meant nothing else but keeping the process on hold. The Verghese Committee, under the veteran journalist George Verghese, produced the first draft of the Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Bill, which soon came to stand for a unkept promise, because before anything could be implemented, the Janata-government fell and mid-term elections returned Indira Gandhi to power.

A decade later, the reckless exploitation of Doordarshan for Congress propaganda during the 1989 elections by Rajiv Gandhi provoked a revival of Prasar Bharati.¹⁶¹ It was the Janata Dal under its leader V.P. Singh that won the elections, thus also proving that the electorate was democratically mature enough not to be impressed with open propaganda. The V.P. Singh-government was the first to introduce the Bill straight in parliament, and the President signed it in 1990¹⁶², but the government fell soon after (because the BJP withdrew its support). The following Congress government under Narasimha Rao was confronted with the continued demand from parliamentarians to implement Prasar Bharati, but tabled continuous excuses to stall it.

While thus the Indian state liked to present Doordarshan as a broadcaster that operated in the tradition of the BBC, it did itself everything to prevent its actual transition into this mode, which was quite clearly demanded by the electorate. With the exception of the V.P. Singh-government, the continuity of non-action and defensive reflexes against a re-definition of the state and the protection of a democratic public sphere make quite clear that autonomous electronic media had never really been on any government's agenda, and that the state had failed to ensure democratic rights as well as to actually legitimise itself. Instead, within the compulsions of formal democracy, autonomy had become a demand of the opposition in order to get elected or a revolving promise of the government in order to retain power.

In this situation, the factual and illegal appearance of transnational and private television almost inevitably became a carrier of democratisation, which was evoked less through the democratic constitution and motivation of the channels than through the deficient democratic situation they met with, while they at the same time immediately profited from India's basic democratic guarantees. They swept away the state's monopoly, even though it remained intact with regard to terrestrial broadcasting, while offering in abundance the choices that Doordarshan had withheld or carefully channelled. At the same time, they seemed to force the

¹⁶¹ See T.K. Thomas, 1990, *Autonomy for the Electronic Media. A National Debate on the Prasar Bharati Bill 1989*, New Delhi: Konark Publishers.

¹⁶² The President of India's signature turns parliament-approved bills into lawful acts.

state into action by necessitating a regulation of their own existence in the country.¹⁶³ Being confronted with its own deficiency, it was not surprising that it was the state itself (rather than the citizenry, amongst whom this debate unfolded much later – see 3.5.) that came up with the meanwhile famous term of the ‘invasion from the skies’ - which suggests a complete and understandable helplessness in the face of an overpowering force (this time from space) – and that instinctively thought in terms of suppression and treason. The Minister of Information & Broadcasting in the Rao-government, Singh Deo, is reported to have exclaimed in a parliamentary debate in 1992: “This is a cultural invasion by foreign TV-networks! What do you expect me to do? Put a policeman next to every house?”¹⁶⁴ Supreme Court judge V.K. Krishna Iyer, on the other hand, already included the responsible state organs in his sweeping accusation of treason: “The dish antennae, for instance, can be disallowed even by a municipal corporation. However, the elitocracy are mindless and myopic. History will not forgive them.”¹⁶⁵

As Rishab Aiyer Ghosh has argued, the appearance of transnational television did provoke steps towards legal democratisation that, however, generated justifications of the state rather than a democratic regulation – not least including a legal security for Indians taking up work in transnational channels – and altogether worked towards an uninhibited and non-legalised liberalisation of the market that transnational and commercial television ultimately profited from. Two incisive judgements by the Supreme Court in 1995 – the ruling that airwaves are not legally owned by the state but belong to the public and that broadcasting “is expression and, even if done for a profit, protected under the constitutional clause governing the right to express”¹⁶⁶ – finally laid down that the state’s monopoly, while factually already broken, was, even as far as terrestrial broadcasting was concerned, unconstitutional. “This put the Government in the unique position, not of easing legal controls as in telecom, but of setting up an entire infrastructure to justify an unconstitutional broadcasting setup. If the present situation was illegal, a new law had to be created. The new law, then, could be seen as imposing *new* legal controls, for the current controls are not legal. This perspective opened a feast of issues that had to be resolved. Specifically, the constitutional, ‘reasonable’ restrictions

¹⁶³ See Krishna Kishore, 1994, The Advent of STAR TV in India: Emerging Policy Issues, in: *Media Asia* 21(2), pp. 96-103.

¹⁶⁴ Cited from S.C. Bhatt, 1994, *Satellite Invasion of India*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, p. 147.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 187.

¹⁶⁶ Rishab Aiyer Ghosh, 1998, “Trends in Indian Media and Prospects for Broadcasting Reform”, in: Monroe E. Price/Stefaan G. Verhulst (eds.), *Broadcasting Reform in India. Media Law from a Global Perspective*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 50.

on free expression had to be implemented in broadcasting law, replacing the unconstitutional, ‘unreasonable’ restrictions now in place.”¹⁶⁷

While the development thus shows that the state was indeed undermined in its earlier self-evidence, it also underscores that it continued to revolve around itself rather than taking on the demands of the hour. The main focus remained on its own position rather than on establishing legislation in the interest of the larger affected citizenry. When the government presented in early 1997 the first draft of a Broadcasting Bill, it proposed, amongst other things, a reduction of foreign ownership of channels operation in India to 49%, which was consequently not seen – and particularly not by the independent, privately operating press - as an attempt to regulate an invasion and to secure the legal interests of Indian viewers and journalists, but as a step towards retaining government control and to legalise the state’s own unconstitutional situation.¹⁶⁸ It is in this context that the instinctive aversion against any government interference has to be seen that continues to be salient amongst journalists and media people. State action in broadcasting is invariably associated with state control and censorship (see also 7.2.). Whenever I brought up in my interviews the factor of a lacking legislation that might also protect their rights and interests as media-employees and journalists, which were at the time of my fieldwork in a situation of acute affliction, the answer would be: “Governments are following their own agenda, and our situation is difficult, but I don’t think the government should have much to do with helping it.”¹⁶⁹ Ironically, what seemed to repeat itself here was the motif on continuing postponement: had the Congress-state postponed its reform and re-definition by arguing in terms of its subjects’ immaturity, the privatised television industry seems to postpone its own organising by arguing in terms of its own ‘nascent state’. The focus, moreover, seems less on legal security than on a better work atmosphere: “This is still a nascent industry, everybody is still trying to understand how it works, to win audiences, to create hits, everybody is following trends, I’m sure this is not going to go on and the time will come when we will sit together in the industry and work out something, some regulation, some rules to go by which make the work atmosphere more pleasant.”¹⁷⁰ After democratic rights have been routinely withheld, they are thus – particularly by those with viable alternatives – also not claimed any longer, which systematises oblivion

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ See *Sunday*, July 06-12, 1997: Doordarshan rules, OK? The Broadcasting Bill will throw out many of the new channels and return TV to government control; and *India Today*, March 15, 1997: Legislative Myopia.

¹⁶⁹ Star News/NDTV-journalist, Interview I/31.

¹⁷⁰ Sony-executive, Interview I/18.

to the extent to which the television sector remains dependent even on an absentee state as much as it is vulnerable to state interference (see below).

The government, at the time (1997) under the United Front, eventually failed to implement the Broadcasting Bill, and the only actualised legislation concerned the weakest (and the ‘real local’) in the field – the then largely self-employed cable operators, whose activities were covered under The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 (see 5.3.2.). Thereafter all proposals at a larger legislation of the media lapsed, at last the much-hyped Convergence Communications Bill (CCB) that was introduced in 2001 in order to provide an over-arching law for multimedia (telecom, broadcasting and infotech), but that was again shelved in 2003 on the grounds that “broadcasting issues cannot be covered entirely under it.”¹⁷¹

While, on the other hand, ‘state’ and ‘government’ seemed in the recounting of the events blur into the entity that has been referred to as the Congress-system, this perspective also blurs differences between the agendas of governments (and parties) and the competition amongst them. It is still difficult to say why exactly the Broadcasting Bill lapsed, even though this was largely ascribed to the government’s inability to actually stem the tide of change (and thus somewhat to a ‘democratic victory’). The same United Front-government, however, then under Prime Minister Inder Gujral, implemented the pending Prasar Bharati Act, i.e. Doordarshan’s official autonomy from the state and the broadcaster’s transfer into a public corporation, through ordinance after new elections were already in the offing (which in 1998 brought the BJP-led NDA-government to power). Implementing Prasar Bharati happened in order to minimise the foreseeable influence of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar on Doordarshan: “The final decision was taken two days within the government knowing that it was falling and that the BJP would be coming in.”¹⁷² The BJP, in its claim to ‘speak for the people’ – against a Congress-led state - has legitimised its democratic commitment not least through emphasising its opposition to Indira Gandhi’s Emergency and its curbs of the press and has in this context always opposed a coherent broadcasting legislation, at least in the formulation of opposing parties. Instead, it had advocated with the issuing of its manifesto for the 1998 elections “voluntary normative standards for media”. As this proposal is most revealing in the open replacement – under the very emphasis of democratic sustainability - of legal and political security through social and moral responsibility that is characteristic of the Sangh Parivar’s agency (here coupled and enhanced through the reference to the West’s

¹⁷¹ “GoM shelves Convergence Bill plan”, September 25, 2003 (www.indiantelevision.com/headlines/y2k3/sep/sep237.htm).

¹⁷² Romila Thapar, former Prasar Bharati Board member, Interview I/36.

decomposing morality), it is worth quoting at length: “The BJP believes that a healthy polity and democracy cannot survive without the support of an extra-political moral order which the democratic political order cannot itself impose on its citizens. This belief is also the belief of more advanced democracies that are experiencing a steep slide in morality which is endangering the very idea of orderly society. These decaying societies are beginning to understand that no society, especially a democracy, can long endure without the consensus of the majority of its citizens to some normative moral code. Within the boundaries of this code, cultural diversity can flourish, outside of which it quickly degenerates into a jungle of conflicting special interests enveloped in moral chaos. While the world shrinks, India will have to provide against such danger in our society too. Fortunately, at the family and social levels, the age-old ‘dharma’, which is distinct from religious practice, acts as an extra-political normative moral order. But the normative moral order or dharma needs to be protected and preserved as it is already under pressure. With this end in view, the BJP will strive for a national consensus with the involvement of all sections of the Indian society for a voluntary moral standard for the media, for the media plays a very important role both in fostering and prejudicing such a moral order.”¹⁷³ While the last sentence contains a hidden warning against media ‘prejudicing’ this proposed order, the BJP has also never seriously advocated an implementation of Prasar Bharati, thus evidencing that it basically supported the direct confrontation between state and neo-liberalism to its own advantage rather than backing a democratic (and constitutional) public sphere (see also 8.1.)

The Congress, while waving the flag of democracy, had exploited and used broadcasting in pursuit of its ideological agenda of state, and the Emergency can be seen as a brutal enforcement of developmentalist socialism against growing democratic discontent. Even though Doordarshan’s screening of the Hindu epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* between 1987 and 1990 can be seen as a large-scale (and utterly successful) attempt of the Congress to woo the population (see chapter 4 and 8) in accordance with an increasing ‘soft Hindutva’-approach, the entry of transnational television also somewhat sealed the break-up between Congress-state and citizenry. Not a state that would oppose its existence, but a party that would support its flourishing could count on support, and this party was – at least outwardly - the BJP, which had already been most successful in occupying themes like privatisation and decentralisation, that the Congress encountered with mixed feelings, and in inserting itself in the structures of the ‘democratic revolution’. On the other hand, while opposing a regulation

¹⁷³ www.indiantelevision.com/indianbroadcast/legalreso/BJPmediapolicy.htm (2000).

of the emerging private television landscape, the BJP was no less interested in subjecting broadcasting, and particularly Doordarshan, which was of prime importance because of its vast terrestrial reach, to its own agenda.

Both parties basically followed a double strategy, with the BJP, however, making the more flexible moves and thus being in the advantage. The Congress remained on the one hand entangled in a defensive-ness against the citizens, which generated the proposal of legal measures against the private and transnational channels that were simply unrealistic and had the effect of an increasing absence of the state from the sector. On the other hand, as part of the liberalisation politics of the Rao-government, it entered into a direct competition with the new channels, resulting amongst other things in the launch of no less than fourteen satellite channels between 1992 and 1994 (for which there existed neither personnel nor programming structures nor a reception infrastructure)¹⁷⁴, aiming at different regional states as well as the national market, in a short-lived tie-up with CNN and in the rapid further commercialisation of Doordarshan. The BJP, by contrast, was doubtlessly interested in executing full power over the media (in its election manifesto 1998 it still pointed in passing to the basic desirability that “ownership of the media is in the hands of natural-born Indians only”). The intially enthusiastic response of audiences to Star TV and later to Sony and their successive – even if difficult (see below) - settling in the market, however, as well as the BJP’s pursuing a visually spectacular, and image-based public politics (see chapter 6 to 8) that found in the private ‘image-hungry’ channels an almost natural platform and vehicle for its purposes, may have led the party, at least as far as the entertainment channels were concerned, to not enforce this desire much further. After its coming to power in 1998, though, it pursued a strong subjection of Doordarshan under its agenda.

That the BJP went to this task rather thoroughly – under the objective of ‘fostering a normative moral order’ - showed the vigour with which it immediately set to impede and basically dismantle the functioning of the just implemented Prasar Bharati Board, under whose authority Doordarshan now officially operated. One of the ministries in the new government that had been most important to the BJP was the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, and it was given to the known hardliner Sushma Swaraj, whose first argument was that “the Prasar Bharati members are not committed to our culture.”¹⁷⁵ Right after the elections, she succeeded in implementing the Prasar Bharati Amendment Act, which made the

¹⁷⁴ See Gopal Saksena, 1996, “Doordarshan’s Satellite Channels: A Case of Pre-mature Birth”, in: *ibid*, *Television in India. Changes and Challenges*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, pp. 91-94.

¹⁷⁵ *The Asian Age*, March 25, 1998.

Prasar Bharati Board answerable to parliament, and in dismissing the appointed CEO of Prasar Bharati, the long-standing 'Doordarshan-man' S.S. Gill, upon his protest. The amendment installed an outwardly democratic 'rotating mode' of Prasar Bharati Board members, which virtually rotated known liberal members very fast out of their positions. The first were in 1999 the historian Romila Thapar and the writer Rajendra Yadav: "We were dismissed with the argument that we were Marxists. It was hilarious."¹⁷⁶

As far as the programming was concerned, changes were noticeable equally quickly. "Planned educational programmes were called off virtually the moment the BJP came to power. They understood that through these educational programmes, one was to introduce a secular education."¹⁷⁷ Particularly as far as the coverage of politics was concerned, however, the direct manipulation became palpable: "Trouble started when Pramod Mahajan's¹⁷⁸ secretary was regularly coming to DD requesting tapes of all interviews that were done with politicians, and they would be handed to him as everyone knew he came from the Minister. He took them to the editing room in a private production to doctor them in order to make them conducive to the BJP-position. And only then allowed the director to show them. When we discovered what was happening, we passed a resolution as a Board, saying that this man was not to be allowed to come near DD and that it should not be allowed to take tapes to any private enterprise. Mahajan was enraged."¹⁷⁹

While the BJP thus kept a firm grip on Doordarshan, their absconding from a coherent regulation of the private TV-market allowed for situative intervention in the spirit of its election manifesto. This became tangible in the rather sudden decision of the NDA to introduce revised norms of ownership for private news channels producing in and uplinking from India. Had the market up to then largely been dominated by entertainment television, these norms were issued at the time when, after the Gujarat pogrom in 2002, a virtual boom seized the news channel sector, while the new regulations were also aggravating this boom. According to the new legislation, issued in early 2003, foreign equity in a news channel was now not to exceed 26%, and heads of companies and news editors have to be resident Indians. However, this meant the definite end only for Rupert Murdoch's Star News, which he had operated since 1997 in contract with New Delhi Television (NDTV) and which was the only news channel then wholly owned by a foreigner (Murdoch managed to re-launch a different

¹⁷⁶ Interview I/36.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Successor of Sushma Swaraj, who was replaced by Mahajan probably out of inner-party conflict (Swaraj came from the Advani-camp, Mahajan from the Vajpayee-camp).

¹⁷⁹ Interview I/36.

Star News in Hindi with an official Indian head of company within the three months limit given by the government, though).

The regulation was justified by the responsible Secretary of Information & Broadcasting with the sudden realisation of international standards: “We finally looked around and found us immensely liberal. Nearly everywhere in the world foreign equity is limited to something like 20%. Why should we be different from others?”¹⁸⁰ The Joint Secretary, however, went more into detail, particularly upon my question if the regulation was directly aimed at Murdoch: “This has nothing to do with Murdoch, we regret that Mr. Murdoch is hit by this.”¹⁸¹ The main consideration that was brought forward here was not the illegal status of the transnational channels but ‘Indian sentiment’, which ‘outsiders’ could not handle appropriately, and this had shown particularly with the reporting on the Gujarat pogrom the year before. While the first attempt was to argue in terms of the journalists’ security – “they went in at their own risk, and what happens if the owner of the station is not even in India?” – which somewhat supposed that an Indian owner would be more answerable merely through his or her presence in the country rather than through legal obligations. Pursuing the point of the reporting on Gujarat, though, the Joint Secretary explained: “Law is one thing and sentiment is another. We cannot afford reporters to raise sentiments, especially on the communal lines. TV is a medium based on emotion, and people here react very emotionally. There are things which are just not done in India, and outsiders might not respect that. We cannot have reports like ‘Fifteen Muslims killed a Hindu’ and then have to deal with the retaliation.”¹⁸²

This statement shows not only that television has undergone a straight definitional transition from being a medium of development towards one of emotion (leaving out the information part). It also makes unmistakable that the BJP-government’s legal initiative was at least partly directly aimed at NDTV and thus at the then only English language news production in the TV business, whose reporting of the Gujarat violence and the Sangh Parivar’s decisive role in it had been most vigorously attacked by the BJP (see 6.3.1.). While I will come back to the ‘Muslim attack Hindu retaliation-theme’ invoked here in chapter 5 and 6, equating the reports on Gujarat with the work of ‘outsiders’ suggests that it were Western journalists covering the violence in an insensitive manner, completely obfuscating the fact that Star News/NDTV-reporters were all Indian, working, in contrast to other Star TV-channels and rather to

¹⁸⁰ Interview II/05.

¹⁸¹ Interview II/04.

¹⁸² Ibid.

Murdoch's dismay, independently under Murdoch's umbrella, who had during the whole time not once set foot in the country. The 'outsider' thus signified the English language – and thus in the terminology of the Sangh Parivar 'pseudo-secularist' - Indian journalist and producer, who had become in course of the unfolding private television market increasingly the cultural Other and who had been the classical subject of 'othering' in the Hindu nationalist discourse since the 1980s (see 6.2.).

The new regulation thus actively promoted a re-nationalisation of the TV market's upshooting news sector in terms of ownership. And while it did not prevent English from remaining in the market, it reshuffled prior parameters by supporting Hindi (as the guarantor of adequately expressing 'Indian sentiment') as the norm and English (as being inherently unable to do so) as an addition (see chapter 4). That the initiative was, on the other hand, not directed at foreign ownership as such, and particularly not at Murdoch, showed the clear reaction of the Joint Secretary to my question in this regard. The new regulation might even have helped Murdoch to end his (financially demanding) relationship with NDTV, which was renitent against editorial interference and which had become 'too hot' after the Gujarat reporting (see 6.3.2.). He might also have been warned in time to take preparations for an officially mainly Indian-owned Hindi channel if he wanted to stay in the market (which would subscribe to Spark's thesis of Murdoch's generally good relations with national state authorities, and particular with right-conservative ones). In any case showed the new regulation that the BJP had been quick to learn from Murdoch by leaving the entertainment sector (which was moving 'voluntarily' towards Hindi and "an extra-political normative moral order" anyway) unregulated and focussing its interferences on the news and thus on the sector that has traditionally been of the greater interest to politics and states: "Let people have channels for fun an leisure and whatever they enjoy. Why not? But when it comes to news and current affairs, the Indians should handle it, because they know India and what its sentiments are."¹⁸³

Moreover, this relatively small, and apparently almost socialist, but very effective regulation was not prone to raise much attention or even protest – the Congress itself, for instance, did not bring forward objections - as it seemed limited to the ownership structure and thus effectively obfuscated the actual degree of ideological interference it carried. The 'advantage' of this in points, situative interference at the cost of a coherent democratic legislation showed when, in 2006, the newly elected United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-government under the Congress introduced the Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill,

¹⁸³ Ibid.

which makes the old mistake of allowing for state intervention regarding the whole TV-landscape in situations defined by the state itself: "The Central Government may at any time, if it appears necessary or expedient to do so in public interest, in respect of any broadcasting service, which is considered prejudicial to friendly relations with a foreign country, public order, communal harmony or security of the State, direct the Licensing Authority to suspend or revoke its license or direct the service provider to stop broadcasting its service or transmit in its broadcasting service such announcements in such manner as may be considered necessary, and the service provider shall immediately comply with all or any such directions."¹⁸⁴ Foreseeably, this attempt at re-introducing ideological supervision was met with protests in the media industry and revived BJP leader L.K. Advani (under the NDA-government Union Home Minister) in employing the BJP's routine argument: "It reminds me of the Emergency days, when the worst-hit was freedom of the press, which is considered to be the fourth pillar of democracy."¹⁸⁵

The new bill has so far not been passed and chances are that under the circumstances its fate will be the same as that of the old Broadcasting Bill. Against the common perception that differences between Congress and BJP have become marginal, this underlines that while the Congress has still difficulties to let go of the idea of a simply strong state but, precisely because of that, tends to reproduce the absentee state, the BJP is basically interested in a dysfunctional liberal constitutional state. The long-term sufferer is democracy itself.

3.3. The Wave of Indian Television and the Difficulties in Getting to the Shore

While this last section has partly jumped ahead in time – for reasons that will become understandable in course of the next chapters – the historical forms of distance and presence of the state that it has tried to evaluate with regard to broadcasting legislation has an equivalent in the the development of television itself in India. In variation of the common knowledge that television has continuously become more and more widespread, one can in India's television history make out a motion over the past 40 years that takes the shape of a

¹⁸⁴ Draft of the Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill, 2006, Chapter 2 (Regulation of Broadcasting Services), Paragraph 5, at: www.mib.nic.in/informationb/POLICY/BroadcastingBill.htm.

¹⁸⁵ *Newswatch India*, July 04, 2006: Broadcasting Bill: A novel way to gag the Indian media, at: www.newswatch.in/?p=5235.

big wave, but not in the sense that it merely breaks over the audiences, as the metaphor of the ‘invasion from the skies’ suggested, but in the sense that it first recedes further and further away from the majority of the population to then re-approach it after a saturation point is reached. This motion stands in direct relation to three factors: to the basic difficulty – in the face of her cultural diversity and hierarchical social and economic structure - of creating a ‘national audience’ in India (and the relentless impetus to pursue it nevertheless), to the transformation of an assumed ‘natural’ national audience into the continuous creation of a commercialised ‘nation of numbers’, and to television’s strong affinity with middle class lifestyles, morals and aspirations.

Under India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his official maxim of equality as an aim and guarantee for the country’s development, television, after its first emergence in 1959, was more or less consciously kept in limbo (as a subdivision of AIR), because it was considered too costly and unable to reach substantial parts of the population in the foreseeable future. Branding television as an “expensive toy”, Nehru made it unmistakable that he saw it inappropriate a medium for “a country where half the population was living below the poverty line.”¹⁸⁶ His daughter Indira Gandhi, by contrast, was acutely aware that a development against television, particularly in a country as populated as India, would be impossible. From the 1970s onwards, she strived to make up for lost time and to create a classical ‘national audience’. In 1976, during the Emergency, Doordarshan (literally ‘far-vision’) was established as a self-sufficient broadcaster, whose development, however, was characterised not merely by the strong grip of the state but also by a primacy of technology, i.e. the pursuit of the country’s near-complete coverage with terrestrial transmitters. The programming of Doordarshan’s single ‘national channel’, on the other hand, was soon increasingly focussing on the rapidly evolving consumption interests of the growing middle classes, which was further enhanced with the introduction of commissioned, privately produced programming and advertising in the 1980s (see also 7.2.). Less affluent strata of Indian society were thus, at least theoretically, included in the *reach* of television, which was by the beginning of the 1990s proudly declared to be 87% but was actually referring to the territory covered and not the the viewers reached. Moreover, what was there to see on the screen – if they had at all access to a TV set - was not really designed to relate to the average citizen.¹⁸⁷ Usha Zacharias

¹⁸⁶ Chatterji, 1987, p. 52.

¹⁸⁷ This went not unnoticed by the viewers. In the Report of the Joshi Working Group on [Television] Software that was commissioned by the Congress Government under Indira Gandhi and conducted in 1983, „people from different walks of life“ are cited expressing various objections to the running programmes on Doordarshan,

has seen the striking mis-relation at the time between technology, contents, and viewers in a context of growing national ambitions aptly captured in an advertisement for a Hitachi TV-set in 1987 that appeared in the daily newspaper Indian Express: “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.”¹⁸⁸

This already existing motion towards the middle classes and away from the majority population was taken somewhat to extremes by the transnational and private competition, because it started out catering to the few who then could afford a cable connection and whom Star TV identified with the upper echelon of society. In 1992, still before Murdoch’s takeover, the broadcaster made it very plain that “our primary target is the urban, educated, well off viewer. This also provides a highly focused audience for advertisers.”¹⁸⁹ Five years later, and four years after Murdoch’s takeover, a then leading Star-executive still maintained that “we are not aiming at catering to the whole of India. We produce for a niche audience.”¹⁹⁰ However, the rather pretentious focus on the “well off” had over the years been cornered into a more modest “niche”, indicating an unwanted limitation rather than a chosen agency.

At the time of transnational television’s entry 1991, the number of TV-sets in the country was estimated to stand at below 32 million.¹⁹¹ With the average five members who are generally counted per household (despite the trend towards nuclear families – or rather smaller independent units within an extended family - in urban areas)¹⁹² plus neighbours and friends

which also spoke of a rather clear understanding of the way the medium was used by the producers: „Why these advertisements on expensive goods and gadgets, exploiting the female form for attracting attention? Why should Doordarshan promote consumerism? Is it not aggravating the dowry problem? There are atrocities on young girls who are not able to satisfy the growing appetite for those well-advertised goods.“ Another one complained, referring to taxation: „See what they are offering us? This is done with our money but it is not for our welfare. We do not have the leisure to keep watching songs and dances. These are rich men’s luxuries.“ Most interesting is a viewer’s critique that somewhat seems to anticipate the future development of television in India. Demolishing the rather persistent idea of a ‚secular Doordarshan‘, the interviewed also quite clearly recognised the impending pairing of wealth with religion, and of the middle classes with cultural conservatism: „Doordarshan’s programmes reproducing Bombay feature films violate every day in some way or the other the spirit of our Constitution. We want a secular, scientific, socialistic and democratic India. They have programmes which preach religiosity and superstition rather than scientific outlook, inequality between sexes and castes rather than equality, fatalism rather than activism, aversion to rather than dignity of manual labour, glorification of elite classes rather than of the working people. Is not Doordarshan becoming the support of the backward-looking rather than of the forward-looking?“ (Cited from Chatterji, pp. 176-178).

¹⁸⁸ Usha Zacharias, 2003, *The Smile of Mona Lisa: Postcolonial Desires, Nationalist Families and the Birth of Consumer Television in India*, in: *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (4), p. 397.

¹⁸⁹ Then Star TV India General Manager Siddhartha Ray, in: M. Rahman.

¹⁹⁰ Interview by the author, 1997.

¹⁹¹ S.C. Bhatt, 1994, *Satellite Invasion of India*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, p. 281.

¹⁹² The Census of 1991 already notes the figure of 38% for families with 2-4 members, largely living in urban areas (indiantelevison.com).

who come to watch and community sets in rural areas that enable access for larger amounts of viewers, the actual reach of the state-broadcaster Doordarshan was already phenomenal by international standards. Yet this translated into less than a quarter of the nation at the time, around 200 million people at the most, which left more than 700 million without any access at all, including pockets where even the screening of a film could still be a complete novelty. Intensifying this scenario, commercial cable television – which was what satellite-transmitted transnational and private television became on the ground through its dissemination by a cable operator - with its explicit focus on the “well off and educated” was not only passing over this ‘majority nation’ of the ‘usual underprivileged’ or what Kirk Johnson has termed as the “information underclass”¹⁹³, i.e. the rural population, the poor, the lower castes and the lower income-groups, who had largely been left unattended by Doordarshan as well. Cable television, the access to which itself was already defined by money, was in its very claim equally excluding substantial parts of the middle classes. This was an entirely new phenomenon as it was them who since Indira Gandhi were seen and had felt as ‘the backbone of the nation’, deserving privileged attention. Contrary to that, television as an event, as a happening, was *there*, and more so than ever before, but it was, with a mere two million households receiving the new channels by the end of 1992 (most of them in Delhi and Bombay), reachable not even for the core of the national population.



This successive seclusion of television from its viewers seemed to confirm what some may have thought since long (and what Nehru had enacted as a policy), namely that it is simply ‘true’ or at least ‘the case’ that television in India does not work as a mass-representative medium (as Doordarshan had tried to make believe), and that it had now in its transnational, privatised and thoroughly commercial form reached its actual or ‘realistic’ destination, namely to be a pastime for the upper classes and castes. The sort of programming itself seemed to emphasise this: it was not only ‘private’ in an absolutely unprecedented manner with chat shows on pre-marital sex and inter-community marriages; it also represented in the soap

Above: *India Today*, November 15, 1992. The caption reads: “Ridge and Caroline of *The Bold and the Beautiful* (left); and Mason and Gina of *Santa Barbara: Stars n’ Soaps forever.*”

¹⁹³ Kirk Johnson, 2001, *Media and social change: the modernizing influences of television in rural India*, in: *Media, Culture & Society* 23 (2), p. 160.

operas, particularly in Star Plus' pime-timers *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*, the fantasy-lifestyle of the extremely rich. The programmes were obviously aiming at generating a closeness and familiarity amongst their desired small and exclusive target audience that contrasted sharply with Doordarshan's national and 'public' messages and its attempts to woo the middle classes, which in relation looked rather tame now. *This*, the unmitigated representation of the unfettered high life, was the real thing, and in the Indian context, this new reality of privatised television thus gained an additional symbolic dimension in the sense that it acquired the aura of being a private (and, as some of the partaking felt, long deserved) matter of the privileged that literally excluded the public.



Indeed, Star TV's initial concept was based not only on a clear perception of class, but also of space. It contained a definite dichotomy between urban and rural areas, which was nearly identical with the dichotomy between rich and poor and which involved an imagination of India as a place in which the rich live in secluded spots that can be sharply demarcated from the rest. Strictly speaking, this was true then and is even more true today in the sense that the permeability of space for different sections of society – for instance with regard to certain areas of cities – has noticeably decreased, supported by meanwhile well-established and systematic violent operations of state or municipal authorities to evict slum

dwellers from their settlements by razing them to the ground. This practise, that has a tradition with all governments¹⁹⁴, has in some areas resulted in what Janet Abu-Lughod has termed as “urban apartheid.”¹⁹⁵ Simultaneously, the sometimes frenetic attempts of what

Above: advertisement for a planned housing and shopping township outside Delhi (front page of the Hindustan Times, November 26, 2006).

¹⁹⁴ The practise was first systematised under Indira Gandhi during the Emergency (see John Dayal/Ajoy Bose, 1997, *For Reasons of State. Delhi under Emergency*, New Delhi) and has become a routine since, with more 'peaceful' and more violent phases. In 2005/2006, under the new UPA-government, a particularly ruthless phase has evicted nearly 15 000 slum dwellers from their settlements in various parts of Delhi, most of whom have not been provided with resettlement in other areas (see *Tehelka. The People's Paper*, May 27, 2006).

¹⁹⁵ Janet Abu-Lughod, 1980, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

David Sibley has called “rituals of purification”¹⁹⁶ – in the form of rigorously fencing off private space and property against the surrounding poverty and dirt to the extent one feels to be in another country - have amongst the wealthy increased in proportion to their urge to display their sometimes rapidly multiplying wealth (and to the corresponding fear of losing it to an increasingly numerous but also increasingly articulate ‘mass of the poor’).

Over the past years, this striving towards purification has become more systematised in the increasing planning and partly erection of monumental and tightly secured townships outside the metropolises. They symbolise in their sanitised and futuristic appearance not only the ultimate dream of cleanliness and ‘the good life’ that is directly conditioned upon the relative increase in poverty and the absolute increase in environmental decay. It also describes a reversal in the sense that townships at the city margins usually housed the poor in the form of slum settlements. Meanwhile, city centres are increasingly ‘invaded’ by the poor, and the violent but ultimately futile attempts at continuously evicting them has spurred the motion amongst the rich to leave the city and settle ‘in security’ where once the underprivileged existed ‘in marginalisation’. Moreover, in a development that can be observed in North Indian cities, and particularly in Delhi (but also, for instance, in Ahmedabad/Gujarat – see 5.3.2.), there seems to evolve an uneasy and historically defined trinity between the old city centre, which is generally from the Mughal period and houses a larger percentage of Muslim residents, the administrative centre, which was built under the British and extended by the Indian state and accommodates in its housing complexes the mostly government-employed middle to lower middle classes (in its majority Hindu), and the new monumental and aseptic,



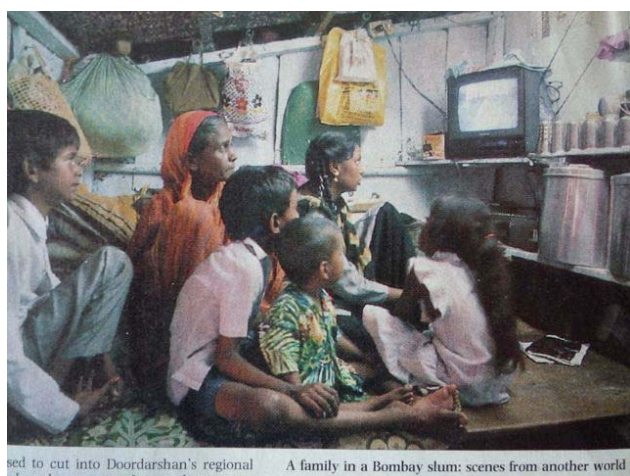
mostly privately financed and consumption-oriented architecture outside the city that is almost exclusively Hindu and that not coincidentally resonates with the

sanitised architectural design of the proposed Ram mandir (see 8.3.2.).¹⁹⁷ These architectural, class- and community-based struggles in the Indian urban space certainly already pose some of the most interesting and daunting questions – particularly regarding the, rather endangered, trope of cosmopolitanism.

Above: structure of the Ram mandir as proposed by the VHP (from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram_Temple).

¹⁹⁶ David Sibley, 1995, *Geographies of Exclusion. Society and Difference in the West*, London/New York: Routledge, p. 29.

At the beginning of the 1990s, patterns of discernment within the upper and middle classes that managed to shut out the existence of poverty around them were still visibly ‘good’ (but rather discrete) neighbourhoods in close proximity to the city centre in which houses were guarded by generally very hapless and underpaid *chowkidars* (watchmen), the monotonous tick-tick of whose wooden sticks that accompanied their patrols could be heard all night long. The ‘air-conditioned life’ of the ‘gated communities’ that started to unfold in a more perceptible manner during the later 1990s was still largely confined to hotel bars and dimmed restaurants that looked as if they did not want to raise much attention. However, while the general image of India was then still far more coined by poverty (it is remarkable how



thoroughly Western media have over the past years taken to see India as being represented by its middle classes), even these early attempts of the more wealthy to demarcate – which at the time still spelled ‘to hide’ - their lives and options from the poor also already emphasised their flip-side, namely the actual extreme condensation of wealth and poverty that

the Indian urban space represents, in which poverty is effectively very difficult to ward off the personal life, let alone off the perception. In many ways, this is increasingly a truly global development.¹⁹⁸

While the rural population, including the wealthy amongst them, were thus indeed for long excluded from the spread of commercial cable television, targeting the urban areas with broadcasting signals – which is another thing than luxury cars or designer clothes - did not mean to automatically catch the affluent only. It meant ending up in an urbanity which is growing rapidly and which also defines its urban status by increasingly comprising of people who might be by any standard ‘poor’ but whose priority-setting includes not only a TV-set but also a cable-connection, even if shared amongst three or four families and even if the electric supply is erratic. The spread of cable television in the urban bastis (slums), like in

¹⁹⁸ Above: photograph from *India Today*, November 15, 1992. The caption reads: “A family in a Bombay slum: scenes from another world.”

Bombay's Dharavi, was relatively high from the beginning and might have exceeded that in the households of civil servants.¹⁹⁹

Ironically, with regard to these unaccounted areas of reach there seems to have repeated itself what the Subaltern Studies Group has noted for the proposed participants in peasant revolts under the British: there hardly exists any record of how a programming that was so decisively *not meant* to reach them was first received by inhabitants of bastis in the metropolises. Occasional photographs of slum-dwellers glued to a screen in their hut that appeared in newspapers or magazines suggested some diffuse alarm about an uncontrollable development, but hardly were any comments and views of these audiences documented. This extreme rarity of viewers' recorded opinions, especially outside the middle classes, has, as P.C. Chatterji objected in 1987, a tradition in India ever since television appeared and became an instrument of the state, which over the years set up countless committees and working groups in order to optimise the medium, to whom it, however, never occurred to ask the viewers to get rid of its problems, the most salient of which was doubtlessly its lack of popularity. The state deciding in the proposed but never researched interest of its subjects, implied in which was always an actual fear of the maturity and rationality of the Indian citizens, was probably most pronounced, next to the army and the bureaucracy, in the field of broadcasting.

Evidently, this tradition of ignoring the 'views of the viewers' was rather deeply entrenched also beyond the actual state institutions in all areas that were claiming some natural sovereignty of interpretation and representation, such as journalism and science. It was obviously strong enough not to be broken with the advent of private and transnational broadcasting, i.e. with cable and satellite television, and it actually lingers on till today, or has re-invented itself respectively. One of my interview-partners in Star Plus, whilst we were wondering about the audiences of the 'K-formula', broke out: "That's what I think about all the time! What do the people in the slums think when they see *these* soaps – and they *do* see them, that's for sure. Nobody knows, that's not researched at all. If you ever do a project on this, call me, we can do it together, I'd be most curious."²⁰⁰ It has not come this far yet, and I hope that meanwhile others have stepped in. In any case does the offer underline that

¹⁹⁹ The availability of cable television was reported to be nearly 85% in urban areas in 2001 (referring to cities with more than one million inhabitants), in contrast to 32% in rural areas (indiantelelevision.com). There also materialised very quickly a system amongst cable operators, which, dependent on the area within which they disseminated the channels via cables, allowed for much cheaper rates in slum- and lower-income neighbourhoods in order to satisfy the demand and create business there. It is worth mentioning that viewers in these areas were reported to generally pay their fees in a far more reliable manner than many upper middle class households (Interviews of mine with cable operators in Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta in 1992/93 and 1996/97).

²⁰⁰ Star Plus-executive, Interview I/08.

commercial television companies, whilst making themselves completely dependent on the TRPs (Television Rating Points), do not conduct any more in-depth research on the audiences' views than a monopolist state organisation, which underlines the compliance between the two as far as democratic deficiencies are concerned and which, moreover, evidences that a claim of 'national', 'authentic' or 'people's' representation is often predicated upon the ignorance towards empirical investigation (see 4.3. and 6.3.2.).

At the same time, it was not only the fact that at least the poor who *were* reached by the satellite images in the metropolises took to the new imagery quite eagerly, from whatever feeble indication that exists regarding their opinion it can also be tentatively concluded that it was not framed in terms of culture (even though of language).²⁰¹ Rather did it express quite a clear perception of the changed quality of the imagery and a strong interest in the improved information value.²⁰² A small hint on the practical dimensions of the 'pictorial turn' is given by a survey done in 1994 on the reception of news, despite even that being only an interpretation by an observer: "It (Doordarshan) has more of talking rather than showing. They should show news on TV news, and for that they should collect news. Wherever it is, they should reach there. That does not happen, that's why on Star and the BBC news what they show is watched even by people in Dharavi who cannot even understand English."²⁰³ The main motives for a positive reception of the new channels surfacing here underscore the

²⁰¹ Kirk Johnson, with his rare fieldwork conducted between 1995 and 2000 in rural Maharashtra, has shown that even an increasingly commercialised Doordarshan during the 1990s was predominantly met with curiosity and an appreciation of being exposed to new impressions and the option of learning about so far unknown aspects of life: "We learn about politics in other countries and about life. We still don't understand many of the things we see on the TV, but we know much more than we used to" (2000, p. 213). Another villager pointed out: "My father bought a TV when I was 22 years old. I have watched TV for many years and know everything about the world that those people know [the local elite, B.O.]. They cannot bully us anymore" (Ibid, p. 215). The negative influence of TV was generally associated with its stimulation of wishes and longings that are deemed negative: "People were more satisfied before television. Now these young people, all they do is watch TV. No one is satisfied any more. Everyone is greedy" (2001, p. 153). An 'us and them'-constellation was seen mainly with regard to economics and geography: "Because of TV I know many things about how people live in Mumbai and other places. I know a lot about rich people now and about people from many places" (2000, p. 213). A threat of the own culture, however, was perceived in terms of a reshuffling of traditional practices rather than ethnic particularities, amongst them gender relationships and local hierarchies: "Since TV has come to our village women are doing less work than before. They only want to watch TV. So we men have to do more work. Many times I help my wife clean the house. [...] They [the children, B.O.] never listen to me anymore, times are really changing. I like TV very much, but it is changing many things in the village" (Ibid, p. 212).

²⁰² The Media Advocacy Group, New Delhi, conducted a study in 1994 on newsmagazines in the electronic media that focussed on the locally produced *Newstrack* and *Eyewitness* and regrettably did not include the transnational channels. Viewers' responses, however, suggest a similar appreciation of the variety and framing of news in contrast to those of the government broadcaster (Media Advocacy Group/MBL-Research and Consultancy Group, 1994, *Project Spotlight. Report on a study on Newsmagazines of the Electronic Media*).

²⁰³ Survey amongst viewers in 1994, in: Anjali Monteiro/K.P. Jayasankar, 1996, "The News of the State and the State of the News. The Reception of News in the Indian Context", cited from the manuscript, meanwhile published in: Klaus Bruhn Jensen (ed.), 1998, *News of the World. World Cultures Look at Television News*, London/New York: Routledge.

depth of the communication gap between Doordarshan and its viewers, particularly with regard to the underprivileged. There is a clear consciousness of Doordarshan intercepting information about incidents and developments that should be news and an assessment of the state broadcaster's notorious characteristic to air ready interpretations, which entailed a domestication of the image as much as of the viewers' sense-making – and thus their construction as immature. Despite not being addressed, lower class-viewers and basti-inhabitants thus seem to have identified the programming, here particularly the information value and the visual rather than textual framing of events, as relevant in contrast to what they were used to and indeed as a moment of a 'democratisation of democracy.'

The very fact that the incoming satellite images could not be kept exclusively to the imagined and desired audience of the upper strata but quickly spread beyond that effectively re-emphasised television's character as a mass medium rather than a class medium. As if to subscribe to that, Murdoch's plan to keep Star TV, and particularly the entertainment channel Star Plus, as a caterer to the "well off and educated" of Indian society, who could be sold straight to upmarket advertisers (and to groom Zee TV into television for the less affluent masses), turned out to be a miscalculation. It soon became obvious that the well off and educated were not in the least interested in the American soaps *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* that then represented the prime-time programming on Star Plus and that were directly aimed at them. In fact, it were these strata, especially as far as the very well off were concerned, who most unmistakably demonstrated their resistance not to Western cultural patterns, but to Western arrogance and ignorance.

What seems to have been of immediate relevance in this context is the concept of representational realism that Fiske and Ang/Stratton have pointed out with regard to television in general and to the format of the soap opera in particular (which I will come back to in more detail in chapter 8). Fiske, in concordance with writers such as Stuart Hall has remarked that television basically "reproduces the dominant sense of reality. We can thus call television an essentially realistic medium because of its ability to carry a socially convincing sense of the real. Realism is not a matter of any fidelity to an empirical reality, but of the discursive conventions by which and for which a sense of reality is constructed."²⁰⁴ This constructed sense of reality is, as Ang and Stratton argue, in the case of the soap opera most clearly predicated upon "the general dominance of realism as a cultural form in modern

²⁰⁴ Fiske, 1987, p. 21.

western capitalism”²⁰⁵ that took root with an emerging bourgeoisie in 19th century Europe and found its most popular expression in domestic fiction. “It is familiarity with and acceptance of this particular construction of the world which the reality effect of realism both depends upon and reinforces”, and “it is precisely this unstated naturalization of the moral order which forms the basis for soap opera realism.”²⁰⁶

However, the naturalised modern worldview of a realistic and rationalised order, or what Barthes has called the “general semiology of our bourgeois world”²⁰⁷, has in the 20th century, as Fiske adds, been translated into different representational forms of realism. Insofar as the soap opera in particular can generally be seen as a format that is implicated in the dominance - and naturalisation - of social hierarchies and strong class differences (officially socialist countries, for instance, amongst to a degree also India can be counted, did not know the soap opera format), they can be referred to different national and historical settings and also point towards divergent dealings with and realities of capitalism, materialised not least in different modes of television production. The European soap opera of public television, meaning particularly the British soap opera of the BBC, developed a “social realism”²⁰⁸ that naturalised the “ordinariness” of working class life as “an unmediated, unprejudiced and complete view of reality”²⁰⁹, and thus implied a critique of the (unrepresented but implied) norm of a bourgeois middle class lifestyle. The American soap, by contrast, and particularly the evening prime-time soap of the 1980s, is connecting – somewhat jumping the decisively political decades of the 1960s and 1970s in the US – to Hollywood’s “high production values of 50s family melodrama which focused on upper-middle-class homes crammed with lavish furnishings and consumer goods, celebrating the life-style of a class basking complacently under Eisenhower, while already disintegrating from within.”²¹⁰ It enhanced the realism of middle class norms through what Peter Brooks has called “melodramatic excess”²¹¹ as well as

²⁰⁵ Ien Ang/Jon Stratton, 1995, “The end of civilisation as we knew it. *Chances* and the postrealist soap opera”, in: Robert C. Allen (ed.), *To Be Continued... Soap operas around the world*, London/New York: Routledge, p. 125.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 126.

²⁰⁷ Roland Barthes, 1972, *Mythologies*, New York: Hill and Wang, p. 11.

²⁰⁸ Fiske, p. 23.

²⁰⁹ Fiske citing Marion Jordan, *ibid*.

²¹⁰ Christine Gledhill, 1987, “The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation”, in: Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart Is. Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*, London: British Film Institute, p. 11.

²¹¹ Brooks opens his famous work on Balzac and Henry James with describing excess as “a mode of heightened dramatization inextricably bound up with the modern novel’s effort to signify.” He makes out to be at the bottom of his endeavour a movement that curiously runs directly counter to Appadurai’s proposed shift from ‘culture as a noun’ towards ‘cultural as an adjective’, namely from using the adjective ‘melodramatic’ in his studies towards finding out what may lie at the core of the melodrama as an aesthetic genre and an expressive form, which has travelled, as Brooks himself points out, from the novel to cinema and then to television (Peter Brooks, 1976, *The*

the baroque abundance of an upper class lifestyle, which makes the imagination not an external but internal aspect of realism itself. Excess of property and luxury – as well as of immorality – and the constant fight between good and evil is essential part of the melodramatic condition that has become expressive first in the post-revolution French and English (and also Russian) novel and theatre and can be re-discovered in the glamorous, emotionally dramatic, economically aspirational dominant realism of the American soap opera of late capitalism - and distinctively of highly developed commercial television production.²¹²

The socially realistic understatement of the British soap opera – for instance in *East Enders* - is designed more to remind even upper middle class viewers of ‘the basic (‘real’) values in life’ as well as to confirm to lower class viewers that an ascension to the upper class is not even part of a realistic imagination, which ironically makes it subscribe to the status quo. It thus differs significantly from a depiction such as *The Bold and the Beautiful*, which is decisively produced for a middle to lower middle class audience in the US and which is predicated upon the idea and promise of upward mobility in American capitalism. While the working class and the lower classes remain largely unrepresented, it is they who are most likely to detect the “socially convincing sense of the real” in these soaps, because the extent of the represented wealth and excess is utopian and fictitious in itself, serving as a metaphor for the sheer possibility of ascension. Most certainly, however, these soaps do not appeal to the upper classes, whose own lifestyle is not represented in a socially realistic manner, but in a form that appeals to an imagination of the real that tends to be harboured by those quite removed from it (see 4.3.).

It was this latter – rather American – variation of a highly commercialised imaginative realism rather than a social realism that now started to unfold in the transnationalised Indian context, expressing, as it were, the decease of official socialism and also instantaneously making transparent the virtual abyss between the living standard of the Indian upper classes and the rest of Indian society – as well as the already existing similitudes between the Indian and American upper classes. Knowing that it is precisely *not* the American upper classes that are the audiences of soaps like *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*, and to assume at the same time that they would attract the Indian upper classes, unwittingly implied on the part of Star TV an expectation of their awe and aspiration for the projected glamorous

Melodramatic Imagination. Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess, New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

²¹² See Thomas Elsaesser, 1972, “Tales of Sound and Fury. Observations on the Family Melodrama”, in: Gledhill (ed.), 1985, pp. 43-69.

American lifestyle - and thus a status of inferiority. It equalled them with the American middle to lower middle classes and completely underestimated the self-assurance, 'real' lifestyle and options regarding physical mobility, access to luxury goods and the choice of media that were already characteristic of these strata and that were just brought out in the open, made visible and further legitimised with the liberalisation policies of the Congress government under Narasimha Rao.

Apart from some having been familiar with the offered soaps on Star Plus from numerous visits to the US and Europe anyway, members of this class had already many other possibilities to choose from in order to spend their time, which were quickly to grow with globalisation unfolding. And even if at the time some sense of envy and a feeling of inferiority still existed, the option of watching rather cheaply produced 1980s-American soap operas would even more so have been interpreted as an insult. American channels that in the longer run developed the "convincing sense of the real" for the Indian upper classes, if they watched conventional TV at all, were exactly those that did not try and consciously address them but left open the choice to freely associate with them (like Hallmark and HBO). This shows not only how underestimated the functioning of the commercial image in the Indian context still was at the time (see chapter 8), it also emphasises that globalisation happens on different levels and very differently to different, yet globally increasingly similar class formations, and is predicated upon comparable access, choices and scopes of decision-making.

3.4. De-Ideologising the Message: The Nation of Numbers

Evidently, resistance hits hardest when it comes from the object of desire. It is important to note that the decisive resistance, that forced Rupert Murdoch to fundamentally alter his agency in India, came from the upper and upper middle classes, and it was not cultural but rather ideological in nature. Moreover, the further development shows that the obsession with numerics, which Appadurai and the Subaltern Studies Group have routinely ascribed to the logic of colonial administration and the postcolonial nation-state, received an unprecedented boost just at the moment of the *sidelining* of the state, in this case of the state-broadcaster

Doordarshan, that had been able to take for granted an audience in a way that private television could not.

The upper echelon's dismissal of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* did obviously not mean that Star Plus' programming remained without viewers. On the contrary, there was a hype around the two soaps that could only be compared to the empty streets that the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* had brought about on Sunday mornings between 1987 and 1990, when Doordarshan had televised the two epics, thus celebrating its biggest (and in many respects first) success ever (see chapter 4 and 8). However, it was precisely the global – or rather universal – target group of soap operas, the urban middle to lower middle classes, that were the ardent subscribers to cable connections and watchers of the American soaps, which appeared like a sequel of the Hindu epics on the new transnational commercial channels (see chapter 8). But these viewer groups neither responded to the soaps merely positively, nor could they - with a commodity market just in the making and income levels still generally modest – easily be sold to advertisers.

The insight of basically having (already) a middle class audience did thus not exactly provoke enthusiasm in Star Plus, as it was not prepared for this scenario. The middle classes had not been part of Murdoch's initial concept, partly because he was probably barely aware of their existence outside the West and partly because he certainly knew that they were not (yet) a profitable audience group. This was confirmed by the more middle class-oriented Zee TV and later also Sony, none of which operated until the beginning of the new century in the profit-making realm, irrespective of how popular their programming was. This was directly linked to corporate commercialisation's untimely enforcement in the Indian context. The underlying mode of calculation in commercial television is based on the relation between the quantities of number and purchasing power. An upmarket audience is sellable to upmarket advertisers through appropriate programming in a circular manner. Even if the audience is small, will the amount paid for advertising time be sufficient to profitably create a programming for viewers who are in turn likely to spend their money on the promoted goods. The equivalent works with a large and less affluent audience and more downmarket advertisers, as the number is proportionally making up for the lesser price of advertising time - even though the increase in the viewers' spending and thus in the producer's profit is permanently pursued. The ideal is always to have as large audiences with as high purchasing power as possible, which is also one reason for national television's relatively comfortable survival.

In contrast to Western European countries, however, where commercial television had been introduced in the 1980s to an area where the reach of television in general was already substantial if not total and where a consumer society already existed, commercial channels were in India in the beginning of the 1990s faced with a dilemma: commercial television was the wrong medium for the upper class, but still too expensive for a middle class that did not represent 'the masses' either and moreover relied at that time still on modest family incomes (often from government jobs, ranging between 2000 and 7000 Rps. – then around 50 and 175 US\$). They left hardly any space for consuming the products that were featured by the global upmarket advertisers on Star Plus, but did also not accumulate to any profit for Zee or Sony when invested in the more modest goods promoted in their ad breaks.

What is more, despite the dotcom-boom that unfolded in the late 1990s and that catapulted India onto the surface of digital globalisation, the national economic development proved to be highly uneven and increasingly moving into a recession towards the end of the 1990. This showed not least in the expansion of cable connections themselves, which increasingly turned out to be the very basic precondition for any future profit. Their spread was somewhat steady, but altogether slow, particularly taking into account the general growth of the population. The two million cable connections in the whole of India, which were towards the end of 1992 hyped as a phenomenal increase had five years later, 1997, metamorphosed into a mere 18 million and around 25 million in 1999, which, as no exhausting surveys were conducted, were not very reliable numbers the industry worked with at the time.²¹³ Calculating the usual five members per household and adding maybe another two or three other persons who had access (like household servants), it was around 150 million people who watched transnational and private television at the turn of the century, which was yet just about one sixth of India's whole population and still not even comprising of the whole middle class. At the same time, it was also likely that those who had been amongst the first euphoric viewers would also be the ones who in time would probably vanish as a reliable audience with increasing access to other media as well as a growing interest in regional channels.

It became clear that, in contrast to a state broadcaster like Doordarshan, not even the middle classes could any more be assumed as a 'natural' (national) audience of television, because it had started to exist in a flux between economic constraints, new technological options and alternative offers in content. The choice before the nationally oriented private and

²¹³ See www.indiantelevision.com, and Arvind Singhal/Everett M. Rogers, 2001, *India's Communication Revolution. From Bullock Carts to Cyber Marts*, New Delhi/London/Thousand Oaks: Sage, p. 112.

transnational channels was, if quick profit was indeed their main motivation, to back out of the television business, or otherwise to fundamentally alter their approach, which would involve a considerable degree of patience (and thus of financial resources). This essentially meant taking into account the process of access fluctuation and the overall slow pace of reach. What determined the channels' decision to develop the patience that turned out to be needed were two factors: for one, the altogether nearly infinite numbers of a theoretically possible future audience in India, once the vision became extended beyond the confines of desired selected audiences. Even if parts of the audience would in time go astray with the emergence of other options was the reservoir that could, as long as the Indian nation existed, make up for that more than once almost inexhaustible.

Secondly, commercial television could insert itself nearly perfectly and build upon the already existing and continuously swelling motion of upward mobility in Indian society that is itself predicated upon its strong hierarchical social organisation and economically extremely uneven distribution. In contrast to the official state maxim of the 'upliftment of the poor', which entails a benevolent and educational approach, upward mobility as its direct counterpart suggests a privatisation of aspiration and agency. Subliminally, the mantra of upward mobility, as, for instance, Mankekar shows in her study on lower middle class viewers in Delhi in 1990-92, had already since the early 1980s replaced the 'upliftment of the poor', of which television had officially been made a main protagonist. Doordarshan's movement under Indira Gandhi away from the poor towards a representation of middle class life, that was in itself metaphoric of upward mobility, thus had to be, on the one hand, reinforced by the commercial channels in order to at least approach the profit-making zone. At the same time, however, it had to be reversed in order to secure an expansion of their viewership.

This squaring of the circle can best be described in terms of a mutual direction of thrust that secured a long-term perspective of setting wealth – available in limited and highly concentrated amounts - and number – available in abundance - into a proportionate and flexible relation. On the one hand, viewers had to *qualify* as an audience on the ground of their purchasing power that could be sold to the advertisers and that, in turn, would define future programming. In a very clear form, this spelled one of the basic brutalities of sheer, unmitigated capitalism, namely that (s)he who has no money cannot take part, which again excluded the majority of India's population and reserved television (for the time being) for the middle class. On the other hand, in contrast to Doordarshan's ideological commitment but

factual withdrawal from the poorer sections, there developed an immediate interest of the commercial channels to push the limit of those who *could* qualify as a sellable audience in a long-term perspective as far as possible, which in a first step was focused on the rather large group of those whom Mankekar has described as being “precariously poised at the threshold of middle-classness”²¹⁴, but basically implied a perspective far beyond that, including rural India.

What can be taken from this development are two basic features of the earlier discussed motion of de-ideologising that has in the case of Western transnational channels a particular component of de-westernisation, but that can be made out as an intrinsic aspect of commercialisation itself. For one, instead of becoming an *ideological* propagator of middle class interests, television moved to being an expander of middle-classness, which came to be defined not as a signifier of certain values, but as the characteristic place of mass consumption and which replaced or succeeded the earlier and taken-for-granted ‘national audience’. Entailed in this shift is the second basic characteristic of capitalism (which makes it so easy to get it confused with democracy), namely that numbers represent potential markets and thus cannot be ignored. Instead of consciously pursuing a middle class-oriented ‘nation of values’, as Doordarshan had done, the quantitative rather than qualitative framing of the middle class translated into a ‘nation of numbers’, that was not per se associated with particular forms of representation. As one Zee-executive put it, disenchanted: “Mainstream television is all about reaching numbers, it’s not about reaching you and me.”²¹⁵ The point made by another Zee-executive, exemplifying what I would hear identically or in variations in every other interview, with an affirmative as well as with an alarmed undertone: “India is not Bombay and Delhi”²¹⁶, described in this context a particular connection between class and country that is potentially open to any content this constellation may ask for - a circumstance that is also mirrored in the just cited statements of executives, who are rather pointing out what commercial television is *not* about than what it *is*.

Yet, and secondly, even if the conventional ideological framing of middle-classness vanished and tended to be replaced by the capability to consume, the middle-classness of television itself was not yet really put at disposal, in contrast to the West, where there can be observed the successive re-definition particularly of conventional commercial television from a middle-class medium into the actual medium of the underprivileged (and the elderly). They exist in

²¹⁴ Mankekar, 2000, p. 86.

²¹⁵ Zee-executive, Interview I/9.

²¹⁶ Zee-executive, Interview I/3.

the form of some virtual entourage of the middle class but their capability and interest to consume despite their often relatively precarious situation actually allows for shedding the fig leaf of television's traditional middle-classness and to accept that conventional television is the cheapest of the available media (considerably cheaper even than any newspaper subscription) and the one that requires the least skills. In the Indian context, however, the impulse – in the face of the extent of absolute poverty - to suck people into a commercially defined middle-classness as well as the necessity of 'protecting' the already existing consumers *as* the middle class is still much stronger. Whilst thus the ideological framing and representation of the middle class in terms of pre-defined values was dropped, what can be said to have been translated into an ideology was the movement of upward mobility itself that turned from being an inofficial but secretly promoted by-product of the ideology of development and modernisation into an inherent precondition for commercial television's survival and for commercialisation at large in India.

Metaphorically speaking, the challenge before the transnational and private channels was thus to slide down and to further set in motion the pyramid of income and economics, whose sides are in the Indian case too flat in order to naturally support the slide. The extremely disproportional relation between wealth and number necessitated a very careful manoeuvring between as well as stimulating of upward mobility and forces of exclusion, of aspiration and realism, but it can be said to have been altogether bound to a realism of aspiration. Practically speaking, it constituted a risk to conceptualise too early a programming that was too recognisably tailored to woo the absolutely larger amount of lower income-groups in order to provoke their identification (and thus their consumption), because it might have alienated the 'middle middle class', which was still more calculable in their access as well as in their purchasing power. Producing for the 'middle middle class' alone, however, might have resulted in losing out on expanding into that big society segment that was bound to acquire or discover – not least through the consumption of television itself – some purchasing power and that represented the more reliable audience of the future.

3.5. *Moral Panic in the Making: The Nation of Values*

It was again Star TV, which faced the greatest hurdles in even approaching this challenge of revising its initial concept, because while transnational and commercial television itself successively abandoned television's earlier avatar of actively mediating and promoting middle class-values, the viewers became active in re-formulating and demanding them. These viewers were till after the middle of the 1990s, when the above described dynamics started to become imperative as the way into the future, largely represented by the urban middle classes, who had also been quick to identify themselves as the appropriate consumers of the new television landscape (rather than of cinema, which now came to be classed as the entertainment of "the locals, the vernacs"²¹⁷). But it was also amongst these middle classes that the most controversial negotiation of Star Plus' initial American programming had occurred. This resulted in most articulate forms of resistance, which was, in contrast to the reactions of the lower as well as the upper classes, predominantly framed in terms of culture. The often-penned aphorism of "middle class families scheduling their dinner time according to *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*"²¹⁸ notwithstanding, their actual reaction to the programmes was deeply ambivalent and made transparent the difficulties, but also the avenues in transferring a "convincing sense of the real" from American to Indian middle-classness.

Unfortunately, the immediate response of middle class viewers to the American fare is another field that has hardly been subject to closer empirical work, presumably because the frameworks for such studies only developed with the recognition of the further development's significance, and now it is obviously too late to ever find out again on a larger scale.²¹⁹ The visits that two colleagues and I paid in the winter of 1992/93 to a small number of families, mainly in urban North India, as well as reminiscences of people I spoke to over the past years, suggest two basic reactions (with a number of shades in between), which can be attributed to

²¹⁷ Interview with college students, cited from Anjali Monteiro/K.P. Jayasankar, 1996, "Between the Normal and the Imaginary", unedited manuscript, article published in: Ingunn Hagen/Janet Wasko (eds.), 2000, *Consuming Audiences? Production and Reception in Media Research*, Cresskill: Hampton Press.

²¹⁸ Shernaaz Engineer/Trivikrama Kumari Jamwal, 1992, Fatal Attractions: A Tale of Two Families, Coverstory, in: *TV&Videoworld*, Bombay, Dec.

²¹⁹ Mankekar's meticulous analysis of lower middle class families in Delhi does anticipate to a degree the features that would become dominant with the entry of transnational television, but the actual research unfortunately stops just on the threshold of the new development.

what Rachel Dwyer has termed “the new middle classes” and the “old middle classes.”²²⁰ These formations, inherent in which is the aspect of time, entail a profound political transition and a re-constitution of ‘Indian culture’ in terms of ‘Indian values’. However, insofar as values are intrinsically connected to ethics as well as to morals, this re-constitution does not speak of an ethnic, but of a particular middle class, moral framing of culture. Moreover, especially in its application of the logic of ‘othering’ as well as in its using of religion as an argument rather than as a practise (see chapter 8), it can be seen as a variation of the secular rather than an expression of desecularisation.²²¹

On the one hand, among the “old middle classes”, there existed strong and fundamental reservations against the whole and rather sudden development of the privatising and transnationalising television landscape. These were for the most part informed not by some instant opposition against ‘Western culture’, but by prejudices against the medium of television as being manipulative in its contents and as in its nature representing the evils of capitalism, predominantly commercialisation and superficiality. Insofar as culture in an ethnic or even civilisational definition came hardly into play, but was referred to mainly in terms of knowledge, education and the striving for justice (and thus in Bourdieu’s sense of ‘being cultured’), these reservations were basically ethical rather than moral in nature as they were targeted at the economic system of the West and its refined forms of production and influence, against which a traditional political nationalism was articulated that had taken part of its pride from trying to develop an alternative. These demurs did not only speak of experiences already made with Doordarshan, they also testified to some endurance of the Nehruvian ethos despite all previous changes. Mirrored in them was the perception of the basic contradiction of Western modernity as Nehru had seen it as part of the colonial experience, namely its provision of unique possibilities of development in terms of freedom, democracy and equality that is always in danger of being simultaneously compromised by an economic system that supports destruction through greed, subjugation and exclusion.

Reservations of this sort were, on the other hand, supplanted by an impulse, which marked the simultaneous breach with the remains of the Nehruvian ethos and the breakthrough of “the new middle classes”. This impulse was new in its openness and visibility and entailed the sometimes-pointed confession of class (and caste) membership. One could observe here the

²²⁰ See Rachel Dwyer, 2000, *All You Want Is Money, All You Need Is Love: Sex and Romance in Modern India*, London: Cassell, Chapter 3: “The Rise of the Middle Classes of Bombay”.

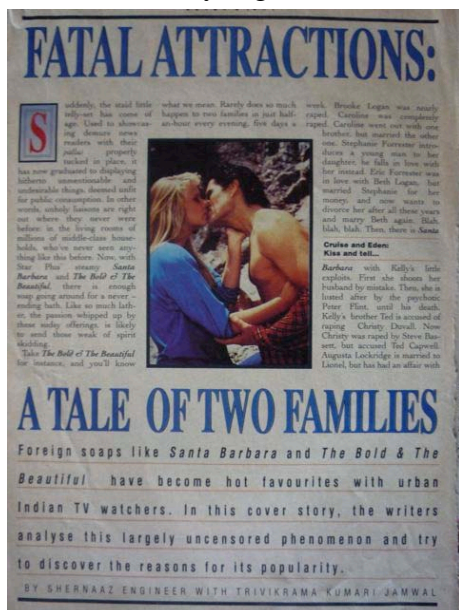
²²¹ See Peter L. Berger (ed.), 1999, *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Washington DC: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

seldom case of an almost-congruence between practise and what Madhava Prasad, referring to Stephen Heath, has described in theory as “an emerging conflict between two orders of representation, the political and the economic, with television increasingly offering to the consumer a site of economic representation, one in which the subject finds him/herself invoked as the member of a class. In so doing, television subverts the political order, with its necessary deployment of citizenship as equalizing currency, to create a supplementary representational order where the subject’s class position is acknowledged.”²²² The very acknowledgement of class position, however, is on its part supplanted by the rather instant motion of upward mobility, i.e. with the *imagination* of (higher) class membership. Independent of the contents, to receive satellite television in the form of transnational and private channels itself was by a number of those who got a cable connection very quickly decoded as a symbol of motioning out of the class one had been assigned to. It represented status and prestige to those who were longing for it rather than to those who already obtained it. The very acquisition of a cable connection could in those days be used to signify the instant ascendancy into a higher class vis-à-vis the otherwise perfectly comparable next door-neighbour and the definite demarcation from the lower classes and castes (in total oblivion to the fact that at least parts of them were already having the same access as they had). This transcendence of the Nehruvian ethos - from a society supposed to be striving towards economic equality towards the open confession and construction of class membership and upward mobility - showed even more on the level of interaction with the programming. While the (post)-‘Nehruvians’ often demonstrated their scepticism by not acquiring a cable connection in the first place (and thus by staying – for the time being - out of the newly evolving system, the older version of which they had represented), the openly upwardly mobile developed their critique mainly only after they had been in contact with the actual imagery (and thus become part of it).

Essential to this critique was the detection of a contradiction as well, albeit in a very different evaluation. Inscribed in it was yet another ‘cultural turn’ that I would essentially describe as a moralistic turn. Liebes and Katz, in their study on the reception of *Dallas* in different countries, have noted that “*Dallas* refers both in theme and form to the elementary myths in our civilization – the tales in Genesis, for example. The primordial content – such as sibling rivalry and a family that fills the world – and the serial structure of repeated variations on the

²²² M. Madhava Prasad, 1999, Television and the National Culture, in: *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 32-33, p. 119.

same narrative make *Dallas* intuitively recognizable.”²²³ The basic and instant acceptance of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*, which basically worked – as all soap operas do - along the same scheme, can thus be explained by this recognisability (see 8.2.). However, this basic topic of (joint)family life and the larger than life-scenarios that the American soaps were projecting onto the small screens in terms of wealth and economic success were seen as standing in a contradictory relation with the attached ingredients of deceit, lust, envy, revenge, retribution and above all sex with a never ending trail of pre-marital and extra-marital affairs. It was the family life in spacious mansions, the luxury of cars, swimming-pools and expensive wardrobe, that is: the dimensions of space and money which were supported by the advertising during the screening, that carried the “convincing sense of the real” in the sense of a realistic imagination. This accounted even for middle class viewers who would not have been able to afford then even one of the items promoted in the interspersed ads, which might serve as an indication of the strength of the push upward the social and economic hierarchy. By contrast, as Kirk Johnson has researched, some villagers in Maharashtra could not even relate to Doordarshan’s further commercialised programming of the 1990s. They argued that “that is for rich people and we are not rich”²²⁴, thus expressing



the failure of a “convincing sense of the real” and the promotion of alienation in their case (which would, in turn, postpone their being the target audience of commercial channels for quite a while).

Where it became difficult for middle class viewers was in the field of morality. Along with the splendid lifestyle, which opened a perspective on life how it materially could or even should be, came the excess of everything that was so far socially sanctioned and morally tabooed. While the soaps were re-assembling the larger family on the screen as much as the scattered

watching family at the dinner-table, thus re-establishing the classic viewing situation of the nation, watching them entailed the highly ambivalent psychological position of belonging to an exclusive club that turned out to be at the same time an exclusive club of voyeurs, a status

Above: Cover Story in the *TV & Videoworld*, December 1992.

²²³ Tamar Liebes/Elihu Katz, 1990, *The Export of Meaning. Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 7.

²²⁴ Johnson, 2001, p.152.

matter that gave the opportunity to indulge in a possible life and that simultaneously made it necessary to morally condemn it for being cheap, shameless and tasteless – ‘not like us’. It was a situation that was more or less identical with the vacillating feelings while watching pornography, an analogy that also found direct expression in the returning complaint that viewers were ashamed to watch these soaps together with their children. The difference to pornography was that these soaps were not ‘othered’ in terms of milieu and class (as happened, for instance, with cinema goers) but in terms of culture, which, however, often seemed to stand in for the own class or even just the own family.

This inherent ambivalence of the soap opera format is mirrored in Robert C. Allen’s argument that “the ‘opera’ in soap opera signals a travesty: the highest of dramatic art forms is made to describe to lowest”²²⁵, which is among other aspects expressed in the inner necessity of the soap opera to stage amoral excess in order to continuously, within its open-ended narrative, restore and legitimise a moral order. In this context Allen also brings forward another analogy, which developed a particular momentum in the Indian context, namely the soap opera’s association with dirt. The soap opera is still closely related to the interspersed advertising particularly of detergents and household cleaning products that originally coined the very term of the genre on 1930s US radio stations. (Significantly, detergents have in the Indian case only entered the ad breaks in a big way with an increasingly professional advertising industry (see 4.5.), a growing choice between all sorts of household cleaners and the decisive turn towards the lower middle class viewers at the turn of the century. In 2002, at the peak of the hype around the ‘K-soaps’ on Star Plus (see 7.3.) detergents and washing powders were, after toilet soaps – symbolising the individual cleaning of the body - the second-most advertised goods).²²⁶

Allen distinguishes between two forms of dirt that the soap opera generates and that the advertised detergents are to symbolically wash away or at least control for the time being. One concerns the “dirty little secrets of characters’ lives. One of the most common ways for a serial character to demonstrate his or her villainy is to obtain and threaten to disseminate some ‘dirt’ about another character: his mistaken parentage, her previous lover, his extramarital liaison, her child given up for adoption.”²²⁷ The second kind of dirt concerns the

²²⁵ Robert C. Allen, 2004, “Making Sense of Soaps”, in: Allen/Hill (eds.), *The Television Studies Reader*, London/New York: Routledge, p. 244.

²²⁶ Vanita Kohli-Khandekar, 2006, *The Indian Media Business*, New Delhi: Response Books, p. 79.

²²⁷ Allen, 2004, p. 244.

“dirty discourse of gossip”²²⁸ on the part of the viewers, who are by the soap opera more than by any other TV format seduced to indulge in imagined scenarios of what possibly happens next and to sideline with or to criticise particular characters. Whilst this positioning in itself often implies a moral decision, the very genre of the American soap opera, which is the ‘mother’ of other variations of the format (like the earlier mentioned British *East Enders*), has in all societies where it has become part of the regular TV fare been sometimes viciously attacked for its being nothing more than “glitzy, tasteless trash”²²⁹ to the extent of watching soaps becoming a dirty secret itself. In this case of American soaps meeting with the Indian middle class, a third, or even rather a fourth dimension was added. The reception of American soaps such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* has even in different European countries during the 1980s often provoked a cultural (‘American’) othering as well. In the Indian context, however, these distinctions tended to be eradicated in favour of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* being othered in terms of a generalised ‘Western culture’, which was as a whole identified with dirt and which was seen as being out to pollute and contaminate a self that simultaneously emerged not as innocent but as clean, untainted and morally superior.

This trajectory became very explicit in the description of a former leading executive of Sony, who being exhausted quit her job during the increasingly fierce competition between the nationally broadcasting channels towards the turn of the century. She recalled for the middle of the 1990s that “the new big term that was on everybody’s lips at the time was ‘Indianness’, a thing that hadn’t existed before like this.” The reaction of her own husband after a few months into *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* she remembered as particularly severe: “It affected him immensely. He had been a really liberal man, wearing suits and ties, supporting me in my job, all that. Now I saw him panic for the first time. He would abandon his suit and only wear kurta pyjama and create real drama in the house. The worst for him was, I think, that he felt he could not protect our kids, not in the long run. He disallowed our daughters to wear jeans and would completely flip if they did it anyway. The whole atmosphere in the house became unbearable.”²³⁰

The description of this particular reaction is so interesting, because it epitomises a number of aspects that have gained increasing significance during the further development. For one, it illustrates the rather instant identification of a negative ‘other’ in terms of culture rather than in terms of economics or social hierarchy (as it could be observed with regard to rural viewers

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Interview I/06.

or the poor in the metropolis). Entailed in this identification is the conscious decision, via the symbolic act of clothing, for a culture, namely the 'own', that was beforehand probably not perceived as being different or incompatible to this degree. While the act of turning the kurta pyjama into a signifier not only of Indianness but also of cleanliness (rather than of casual home-wear) can maybe not be classed as an invention of tradition in the sense that Hobsbawm and Ranger have defined it, where such an invention is closely related to ritualisation²³¹, it describes the creation of something that is seen as being in acute need of defense and protection from attack and pollution.

Secondly, the anecdote makes very graphic how it is not (any more) 'the West' that is confronting 'another culture', but that it is a 'new West' or 'second West' which is confronting an 'old West' that had been appropriated into an Indian liberal attitude and lifestyle, signified through the normality of "suits and ties", but also into the acceptance of a naturalised – rather prudish - moral order. One West is so appropriated that it is actually Indian and one West is not yet, one suddenly represents a past and the other one the future, and one resembles not coincidentally "the England that I had earlier imbibed in my Victorian schoolbooks [...] and that part of me that had been, until then, forever England" and the other "the harsher, sexier, more addictive New World of Humphrey Bogart reruns, Harold Robbins, *Time*, and social science, American-style"²³² that Appadurai describes in order to illustrate his personal – and successful – transformation from one West to the other. With regard to television this can be extended by the 'social realism' of a relatively modest, monogamous and chaste middle class life that Doordarshan – in its official pursuit of the BBC-model – had projected and the new dominant 'imaginative realism' that unfolded in the Indian living rooms now. It is out of the clash of the two Wests in non-Western, historically Westernised contexts, and out of the difficulty to master the transformation as quickly and successfully as the globally privileged, that emerges a re-defined Indian as an ethnic-cultural entity, even though his or her concern is basically moral in nature, or finds expression in terms of the moralistic.

Thirdly, the story tells of a new helplessness of the male. Here was a direct confrontation with a formerly unknown that lacked a concrete aggressor but that came in the seductive and ontological avatar of 'the new times'. It was withdrawn from direct negotiation or battle and relegated the digestion to the personal level, where the only possibility in case of dissent was

²³¹ See Eric Hobsbawm/Terence Ranger (eds.), 1983, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²³² Appadurai, 1997, pp. 1-2.

to protect those from contamination, who were actually quite likely to deal with ‘the new times’ in a more easy way, namely the children and the wife, to the latter of which the soap operas were most directly addressed (see chapter 8). It is the actually foreseeable futility of protection rather than the need to undertake it that seems to contribute to this helplessness.

Finally, this episode underlines that these soaps indeed managed to get remarkably close to the sensitivities of Indian middle class viewers. They did hit a nerve and were taken very seriously in their relevance as a concrete signification of the realism of material ascension as much as a deep threat to an imagined (and simultaneously constructed) moral order, limiting – even though certainly not eliminating – the mental distance that could have expressed itself in irony, humour, analysis or jeers.²³³

Entailed in this reaction were all the symptoms of a moral panic as Cohen has defined it with regard to the emergence of the ritualised violent clashes between mods and rockers in late 1960s Britain: “Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media [...]”²³⁴ While this was true for parts of the Indian press, whose alarm became bigger the longer the soaps were running, the novelty of the situation was that it was the contents of a new form of mass media themselves and the life they represented that was the cause of the moral panic.

Yet it should also be pointed out that even this moral rejection was not total, but entailed its own ambivalence, not to say hypocrisy, which is never very far when questions of morality are negotiated. It displayed the inherent logic of othering, which on the one hand condemns, rejects, and demonises and on the other hand exoticises and idealises. The basic motivation, at the beginning of the 1990s, was, after all, a strong longing for the different and unknown, which as such enjoyed a certain idealising. As a market researcher formulated it, who had interrogated middle-class women for surveys on consumption, putting herself in their shoes: “I didn’t want to see what I already knew, I wanted this foreign thing, that’s why a got a

²³³ Liebes/Katz, 1990, have shown that, for instance, Russian viewers of *Dallas* kept an inner distance to the soap by analysing the framework and contents under political and psychological aspects. They highlighted with regard to viewers that “it is comfortable for them to know that the millionaires are more miserable than themselves” and that the soap is “actually advertising – or, more accurately, propaganda – for the American way of life” (p. 76). Members of an Arab group of viewers, on the other hand, pointed out that “one can deduce from the serial that there is a disintegration of family ties in American society, in capitalist society, and in all Western society” (p. 88).

²³⁴ Stanley Cohen, 1972, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics. The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, quoted from: Judith Rowbotham/Kim Stevenson (eds.), 2003, *Behaving Badly. Social Panic and Moral Outrage – Victorian and Modern Parallels*, Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 7.

cable.”²³⁵ This curiosity seems to have facilitated a particular fascination with the represented ‘evils’, also because their bearings for Indian society could easier be kept at bay than, for instance, for European societies, and labelled as fundamentally different (‘Western’), which seems to have resulted in a certain fascination with the process of othering itself. Despite the features of a moral panic, the complex of curiosity, voyeurism, idealisation and moral condemnation (implied in which is the logic of populism) might explain why there were generally very few who took the option of abandoning the cable connection again on moral grounds or took to the streets in protest, as had happened against other Western goods.

Taking into account, on the other hand, Kottak’s observation that “TV impact should be interpreted as a phenomenon that occurs in stages”, this initial stage also seemed to have worked in the way that “the medium rather than the message is the mesmerizer”, which in this case was less television itself – which was already known - than its new, wholly commercialised form and imagery (see chapter 7). The assumption of a second stage, in which “rejection, interpretation and reworking of TV messages”²³⁶ occur, explains why a highly emotional and controversial public debate on the ‘invasion from the skies’ and its supposedly dangerous influences on Indian society only arose around 1996, more than four years after the channels had already been in operation. It was then that headlines of different English-language dailies and weeklies, and interestingly mostly of leftist-liberal ones, ranged from “Cultural Invasion: A bomb is ticking away”²³⁷, via “Cultural Onslaught. Mass media, globalisation and the state”²³⁸, to “‘Our value system is in a crisis.’ We have lost our sense of balance and tolerance, say members of a generation for whom liberalism is a way of life.”²³⁹

By that time, Murdoch had already ordered a policy of Indianisation for Star Plus and *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* had been moved onto the new English language channel Star World (where they continue to run till today, meanwhile having developed their own nostalgia value). Many middle class viewers, on the other hand, had shifted their attention to the meanwhile launched Hindi language Sony and the increasingly productive and professional ‘home-grown’ Zee TV, which in itself seemed to represent the upward mobility of an Indian television that could be considered to be an arbitrator of a newly framed Indianness. The de-ideologised ‘nation of numbers’ thus had to reckon with a reconfiguring ‘nation of values’ which was not its natural ally but its unknown object of desire without

²³⁵ Interview I/25.

²³⁶ Conrad Kottak, 1990, cited from Johnson, 2001, pp.161/162.

²³⁷ *The Asian Age*, October 26, 1996.

²³⁸ *Frontline*, February 21, 1997.

²³⁹ *The Sunday Times of India*, November 24, 1996.

which it could not grow. This accounted for all commercial channels, but most of all for Star Plus.

4. *The ‘Split Public’ Revisited: The Trajectory from ‘English’ to ‘Hindi’*

The first area in which this unfolding relationship worked itself out was language, which has often been underestimated as the basic constituent of the apparently mainly visual medium of television and the foremost definer of its national affiliation, while it has at the same time often – not quite adequately – been equated with (an ethnic understanding of) culture.

Language quickly turned out to be the field in which the otherwise volatile liaison between ‘the nation of numbers’ and the ‘nation of values’ promised to be least problem-ridden for a start, because the numbers that are (still) to be reached by satellite television in the longer run indeed speak and understand, if not regional languages, Hindi rather than English, as they basically consist of the smaller town- and eventually of the rural areas. The language disposition of these viewer groups linked up most directly with the growing cultural conservatism amongst the middle classes, for whom Hindi has become a signifier of (their own) Indianness. What thus became characteristic of the transnational and private TV market from the late 1990s onward was a compulsory trajectory from English to Hindi. It was eventually most of all pursued by Star Plus, which had proven not only to be the most salient ‘outsider’ in the business, but had also shown to increasingly be trapped in a self-prescribed mixture of Hindi and English, which Murdoch had initially thought to fit the Indian market (see 4.1.). However, the push towards Hindi – and the eventual marginalisation of English - was foremostly carried by the upcoming information-based and thus particularly language-dependent Indian news channels - notably by the ‘totally Hindi’-channel Aaj Tak (literally “Up Until Now”). It set the tone for an unprecedented expansion of the Hindi news market (see 4.5. and 7.2.), which in 2003 would be additionally supported by the BJP-led government’s legal initiative. Aaj Tak’s development from late 2000 onward marked a decisive change insofar as it transferred Hindi from being the mere *normality* it had been

during the 1990s, with broadcasters, apart from Doordarshan, like Zee TV (including Zee News) and the transnational Sony, into being a *topic* for the further unfolding and establishment of the private TV-landscape.

Overall, I argue, the unfolding development can essentially be described in terms of a nationalisation of Hindi and a de-hybridisation between Hindi and English, which, curiously, reinvokes Arvind Rajagopal's salient term of a "split public" in India. In his largely language-based study on the Indian media landscape of the late 1980s and the early 1990s and the simultaneous rise of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement, he had seen a 'split public' as a colonial legacy – manifest in a largely marginalised Hindi language and a dominant elite English language press – that was in his view, however, not likely to survive the proliferation of the electronic media and the process of economic liberalisation. Rajagopal's analysis revolves around the Hindu epic *Ramayan*, which Doordarshan (under Rajiv Gandhi's Congress-government) screened in a first-time television version – closely followed by the other grand epic *Mahabharat* – between 1987 and 1990 on the national channel (see chapter 8). The state broadcaster thus in a spectacular move established not only the earlier film genre of the mythological²⁴⁰ on the small screen, it also "violated a decades-old taboo on religious partisanship"²⁴¹ by the state and state-run organisations in its first coherent attempt to connect to what it saw as the cultural perceptions of 'the Hindi-speaking masses' (and to increase its ailing advertising revenues). While the *Ramayan* has been in course of the 1980s employed – or, as Richard Fox has termed it, "hijacked"²⁴² – by the Sangh Parivar as the basic textual legitimisation of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement and declared to be the central and guiding text of Hindus, the English language press has been the declared 'other' in the Sangh Parivar's discourse, which defines Hindi as the expression of an authentic Hindu culture. Rajagopal was in this context of the televised *Ramayan* the first to propose that "Hindu nationalism's recent salience depended on and worked itself out through the media"²⁴³ and through the process of economic liberalisation.

This development was in his view not tied to the effects of televisual *imagery* (or contents), but to the inherent characteristics and effects of the *medium* (or technology) of television: "The distinction between an officially maintained secular public sphere and a more

²⁴⁰ The Indian film industry at the beginning of the past century started off the mythological genre, with all the initial films, notably those of Dhundiraj Govind ('Dadasaheb') Phalke, depicting popular religious narratives – mainly from the *Mahabharata* – such as *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) and *Shree Krishna Janma* (1918).

²⁴¹ Rajagopal, 2001, Synopsis (without page number).

²⁴² Richard G. Fox, 1990, "Hindu Nationalism in the Making, or the Rise of the Hindian", in: *ibid* (ed.), p. 64.

²⁴³ Rajagopal, 2001, p. 1.

heterogeneous popular culture was not likely to survive the proliferation of new electronic media [...], as the boundary-piercing character of television ensured the blurring of programming genres.”²⁴⁴ Insofar as the agency of the Sangh Parivar, despite their political objectives, propelled into greater public prominence the concerns of hitherto subjected “vernacular counter-publics”²⁴⁵ (manifest, for instance, in an unprecedented increase of Hindu religious symbolism in the public sphere that went along with a near-endless stream of follow-up mythologicals on television, mainly on Doordarshan, but later also on Zee and Sony, ranging from *Jai Hanuman* via *Shri Krishna* and *Shiv Mahapuram* to *Shri Ganesh* and many others), Rajagopal comes to the somewhat half-hearted conclusion: “If Hindu nationalists subsequently excoriated Nehruvianism for its elitism, the irony is that they helped usher in an era of more arbitrary and authoritarian state policy, although in fact politics drew closer to popular aspiration in language if not in substance: by all accounts, a process of democratisation and political decentralisation was set in motion.”²⁴⁶

It is obvious that the whole trajectory from English towards Hindi from the late 1990s onwards was very much to the liking of the Sangh Parivar – as it was also legally supported by the NDA-government (see 3.2.) - and thus brought the television landscape on various levels into closer vicinity to Hindu nationalism’s objectives. “Hindi nationalism”, though, as Alok Rai has emphasised, “is related to, but not identical with *Hindu* nationalism.”²⁴⁷ As a too close association of language politics and the politics of the Sangh Parivar thus runs the risk of vindicating the latter’s claim of a unity between language and culture (which is, I feel, a mistake that Rajagopal tends to make)²⁴⁸, I leave the more concrete analysis of the growing interplay between a culturalising media and the Sangh Parivar to the coming chapters. In what can be seen as a preparing move into that direction, however, the question I want to pose here takes up Rajagopal on his suggestion of a lingual and cultural democratisation – in the sense of a dissolution and blurring of the ‘split public’ - in course of the *Ramyan*’s screening. If this was the case, how can the actual re-constitution of a ‘split public’ – in terms of a dehybridisation between Hindi and English – twelve years later be understood? I suggest that Rajagopal’s otherwise highly differentiated analysis – that I will repeatedly come back to - underestimated a number of points in this respect.

²⁴⁴ Rajagopal, p. 152.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 25.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 277.

²⁴⁷ Alok Rai, 2001, *Hindi Nationalism*, New Delhi: Orient Longman (Tracts for the Times 13), pp. 1-2.

²⁴⁸ See in this context Victoria Farmer, 1996, “Mass Media: Images, Mobilization, and Communalism”, in: Ludden (ed.), pp. 98-115.

Elitism, and the establishment and defense of elite structures, was (and is) obviously no prerogative of the predominantly English language groups, on the contrary. Whilst securing its own privileges under colonialism, English was at the same time also seen (and pursued) as an opportunity of transgressing regional language boundaries as well as symbolising the opportunity of breaking through the caste-defined barriers of the ‘Hindi language society’. Moreover, and reminiscent of Appadurai’s error I have described in chapter 2, Rajagopal thinks in the context of the televised *Ramayan* in terms of “the introduction of a new medium like television”²⁴⁹ in India, as if there had before only existed the ‘split public’ between the Hindi and the English language press. ‘Television’ (Doordarshan), however, was by no means ‘introduced’ at this point, but had existed long before that in a way that rather supported the split public. Despite of an already perceivable blurring between representations of high culture and popular culture during the 1980s, television had been (and could be) treated by the Indian government (read: the Congress-system) ideologically as if it were a book that could directly be learned from, and it was kept within the parameter of a knowledgeable and benevolent elite, which consisted to no little degree of upper-caste, sanskritised “‘Hindi’ ideologues”²⁵⁰, and an ignorant mass in need of education and improvement. The actual breakdown of this parameter and (some of) its inherent boundaries happened with television’s *re-definition*, initiated by the Indian government itself, from state into commercial television, along with which, however, went not the democratisation of Doordarshan but the transition of the Indian citizen into the Indian consumer and the greater proliferation of Hindi *as well as* English during the 1990s. Television doubtlessly features non- (rather than merely anti-) elite attributes and thus its own logic, but it does not, like any other technology, function independently from the respective economic settings, political agendas and social and historical preconditions, and thus of human agency and influence. Therefore, even the re-definition of television and its transfer from one economic framework into another does not spell an automatic one-dimensional and somewhat teleological process towards the breaking up of hierarchical and language-bound margins between high culture and low culture, between the official and the popular (implied in which are also the colonial and the indigenous, the secular and the religious and the urban and the rural) to the effect of a greater representational power of the latter.

²⁴⁹ Rajagopal, p. 25.

²⁵⁰ Rai, p. 120.

Most importantly, though, this *re*-definition of television in India under economic liberalisation – the first coherent step towards which the screening of the *Ramayana* describes – does not entail the dissolution or blurring of former ownership-structures, on the contrary. The vernacular press, as Rajagopal himself points out, that has in course of the 1980s increasingly taken towards an affirmative and partly openly supportive stand of Hindutva, can largely – but by no means exclusively – be seen as an arbiter of Hindu upper-caste, and predominantly Brahmin, interests.²⁵¹ This dominance has, even though in different forms, translated into Doordarshan as much as into the private television landscape itself (see 4.1.). A recent study, the first of its kind and based upon an evaluation of 315 key decision makers in 37 nationally operating news media organisations (Hindi and English, press and television)²⁵², has shown that 97% of these decision makers are Hindu (as compared to 81% Hindus represent of the general population). Of these, 86% are “twice born” (‘dwija’) or upper castes, and 49% are Brahmins (while constituting only 16% of the population). Muslims, with 13% of the population, hold only 3% of the decision-making positions, while Hindu OBCs (Other Backward Classes – see 4.2.) are represented with 4% (as compared to 34% of the population). Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), including Dalits, which together make for 24% of the population, are altogether absent. There are slight and telling variations between the different media and their language orientation (Muslims, for instance, are absent from the English television channels as key decision makers, whilst they represent 6% in the Hindi channels, and Brahmins make for 52% in the English, but ‘only’ for 49% in the Hindi channels – as opposed to 59% in the Hindi press), but they do not translate into a serious variation of the overall picture.

Insofar as commercialisation enforces the reach of growing numbers, private television was immanently interested in representing Hindi language, non-elite programming in order to *retain* and *stabilise* its structure during the process of re-inventing itself. Television does not, as Rajagopal suggests, merely by itself gravitate towards the masses, it is also, as I have shown in chapter 3, very consciously pushed into that direction by its owners, and the

²⁵¹ See in this context the very interesting study of Vidya Bushan Rawat (2003, *Press & Prejudice. An Insightful Analysis of Hindi Media*, New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies), who also points out, in accordance with Rajagopal, that the last 25 years have not only seen an increasingly supportive stand towards Hindutva, but also a substantial decline in the journalistic standard and the attendance to secular and political topics as well as substantial pressure and threats from Hindutva forces, thus emphasising a process of culturalisation and violent de-politicisation rather than a cultural predisposition of the Hindi press.

²⁵² Survey by Anil Chamaria, Jitendra Kumar, Yogendra Yadav, 2006, Delhi: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies; see *Newswatch India*, July 06, 2006: Indian media does not reflect country’s social profile, at: www.newswatch.in/?p=5255.

decision by Doordarshan officials to screen the Hindu epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* itself made this already very clear. The moment that commercialisation became the dominant force – which was also delayed because of Star Plus’ particular hampered position in the market (see 4.1.) – thus also marked the moment of a mental de-unification between producer and his or her programming and the beginning of the cynicism and alienation so (now globally) common in commercial production (see 4.3. as well as 7.3.). And when the masses are the object of desire rather than the conductors of their representation, this obviously has an impact on the ‘culture’ that eventually gets represented. Particularly in the case of Star Plus, that soon developed a tractive force in the entertainment market, the union between the Hindi language and ‘Indian culture’ became the index for the survival and ascension of the channel itself and was pursued at the cost of addressing factors of hybridity as much as of class and caste (and in this most clearly resonated with Hindu nationalism – see 8.2.).

Finally, even though Rajagopal includes, in the form of the Hindi and English press and the screening of the epics, journalism *and* entertainment, the further development of journalism does not figure in his study, as if the televised *Ramayan* had ushered in a new era in which it was becoming irrelevant. Rajagopal, however, does not intend to argue in the sense of an increasing entertainment factor in journalism – which is a very salient actual development (see 7.2.) –, and he thus underestimates the moment of upward mobility in Hindi television production and particularly in Hindi journalism that developed precisely out of its former stigmatised and marginalised position. There thus evolved a picture, in which the entertainment sector was, propelled by Star Plus, pursuing a Hindi-based ‘Indian culture’, whilst Hindi journalism was aiming just beyond that and in which elite-educated English language producers and journalists wanted (and had) to ‘go authentic’, whilst the ‘authentic’ wanted to go professional (and thus in form, rather than in content, resonated with Hindu nationalism, insofar as it has rather rigorously supported neo-liberal politics).

Whereas these motions appeared to be – and basically were – contrary to each other, they also worked, connected through the common pursuit of the (in the process itself transforming) Hindi language, towards shaping the emerging image of the consumption-oriented, culturally conscious and professional Indian. This left little space for considering that, as Alok Rai has argued, “there is no getting away from the fact that [English] is *also* the language of privilege”²⁵³, but that at the same time “the social presence of English in India is so varied

²⁵³ Rai, 2001, p. 7 (*italics in the original*).

that the notion of an English elite is self-evidently problematical”²⁵⁴, and it did, moreover, also not quite push English off its throne (see 4.4.).

4.1. *The Freedom of Imprisonment on an Hinglish Island*

Being clearly a representative of a re-inventing television in India, Star TV had had, in fact, initially absolutely no interest in breaking down margins in language and privilege. On the contrary, language had – next to class and space – represented the third component in Star TV’s initial concept of catering to the well off and educated. It had taken the split public not only for granted, but actually aimed at enhancing and re-constituting it in the parameters of an English-speaking – now globally connected – elite, that was of primary interest, and a vernacular - now local - majority, that was of secondary interest.

When Murdoch acquired half of Zee TV’s shares in 1994, this preference mirrored in the contract between the two broadcasters. Murdoch had already noticed then that English alone would not get him all that far instantly, but he seems to have expected a one-dimensional and basically teleological development *towards* English, during which some Hindi would help to



enlarge audiences. The contract with Zee thus allocated a maximum 50%-use of Hindi on the otherwise English-based Star Plus, which allowed for the use of Hindi and Hinglish within programmes and alternating news bulletins in English and Hindi (Star News/NDTV as a separate news channel was contracted only in 1997). It thus

left Hindi as the basic language to Zee TV (which, however, used Hinglish extensively itself and with Zee English promptly created its own English-language channel). Within a few years it became clear who had made the better deal. Even though none of the channels worked really in the zone of profit at the time, Zee TV was leading the market with a focus on locally produced family drama but also serials, which, like *Tara*, thematised so far unattended topics like urban women sharing a Bombay flat and negotiating spaces of emancipation. Since 1997

Above: English-based Hinglish Pepsi billboard in Delhi (1996): “Yehi hai right choice baby” (This is the right choice baby).

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

Zee also operated its own Hindi/Hinglish language news channel Zee News. Zee TV was closely followed by the meanwhile launched mainly Hindi language Sony, which specialised more in Hindi films, shows and stage/studio entertainment. Star Plus occupied a third rank that lay quite a bit behind, whilst the new Star News/NDTV, which continued to air alternating bulletins in English and Hindi, had the reputation of ‘quality news’ but a rather small viewership. What apparently became clear was that “it is Hindi that brings in the numbers and not English or some mixes”²⁵⁵, but while there is already inscribed here a mere separation between English and Hindi, the actual difference appears to have been more between an English-based Hinglish (which resonated with the English language elite but largely failed to connect to broader viewer segments) and an Hindi-based Hinglish. As a former Aaj-Tak journalist put it: “The thing is if you do something like this you have to get the right mix. If you don’t get the right mix you become a laughing stock. Because you are doing something hybrid. So there is always this fear that you might overdo it. [...] It’s dangerous if you don’t keep some kind of check on it.”²⁵⁶

Murdoch had not sufficiently considered the possibility of such a development and the fine distinctions it involved, and what had looked like a sustainable and profitable deal

increasingly turned out to be a mantrap, particularly regarding Star Plus that was now meant to cater to larger audiences. Within the English-based 50/50-regulation, the channel had started along with *Santa Barbara* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* the – generally miserably failing – dubbing of American serials into Hindi, amongst them *Small*

Wonder, *Baywatch*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Chicago Hope* and *The Simpsons* (which had been a big success on Murdoch’s Fox TV in the US and in many countries it was exported to).²⁵⁷

Above: programme listings of Tuesday, November 19, 1996 (prime time), in: *TV today*. EL TV was at the time part of Zee TV, ATN, Home TV and NEPC soon turned out to be rather short-lived experiments in the Indian market. Star Plus (bottom) aired at the time *The Bold and the Beautiful* in Hindi and two hours later, together with *Santa Barbara* in the original.

²⁵⁵ Star Plus Head of Content, Interview I/15.

²⁵⁶ Interview II/22.

²⁵⁷ The English press reporting of that time documents the fast failure that these attempts suffered - *The Asian Age*, November 12, 1996: Satellite TV Indianised as *Baywatch* goes Hindi; *The Asian Age*, January 18, 1997:

Interestingly, it was indeed with regard to these dubbings that the humour and irony surfaced amongst viewers that the moral shock of the English language *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* had largely eliminated. As one female viewer, an office clerk, recalled: “I really couldn’t believe what I saw, this was so so funny [*sic*]. There was this blonde woman in a bikini at some beach in America and she was talking in Hindi! I thought that was really good, because if I ever get to America I can just speak in Hindi and everybody understands me.”²⁵⁸ This account illustrates the significance of the language part in the composition of a television image. The dubbing of serials seemed to have on an audience where this technique had no tradition (Doordarshan, for instance, had aired earlier English and American programming like *Hello Lucy* and *Yes Minister* in the original language), an asynchronous effect with regard to culture and power. Through the separation of the image from its original sound, the ‘foreign culture’ became virtually decomposed and deprived it of its monolithic appearance. Precisely the translation into the own language, that was to evoke familiarity, transformed bikini-clad Pamela Anderson from being a big threat into a big joke that could now easily be dealt with (but that really nobody wanted to look at).

From the middle of the 1990s onward, when his American programming increasingly ran into controversy, Murdoch resumed to actively Indianise Star Plus, without realising at first the degree to which this was complicated by the language question. He appointed the filmmaker Rakesh Sharma as a consultant, who had since 1993 worked for Channel V, the music channel in Star TV’s bouquet, which had been launched after MTV left Star’s satellite platform and which did not fall under the contract with Zee TV. What Murdoch had first seen as a disadvantage, namely to having compete now with the then English-language and very popular MTV, turned here out to be his luck; because MTV initially refused to Indianise, Murdoch took the chance. Sharma was hired to make Channel V into a Hindi-language channel. “But the whole situation in the music business is different. MTV was the first channel ever in India that was aimed at the youth, who had been no separate audience group so far. You were either a child or grown-up, but there existed nothing like a youth culture.

Bart Simpson speaks in *shudh* Hindi now; *Delhi Times* (Entertainment Supplement of the *Times of India*), November 12, 1996, Interview with Ratikant Basu, then CEO of Star TV: “Q: ‘Concerning the negative response to dubbed American serials, will you terminate this exercise soon? A: The negative response needs to be quantified and only ratings will show whether the response from the public has been negative.’”; *The Telegraph*, January 23, 1997: Star drops Hindi *Baywatch*, slots 20 new serials.

²⁵⁸ Irregular interview, April 2003.

Well, it did, but it was not catered to by any industry. MTV changed that, and all the music that had been for years in people's cassette players was suddenly out in the open. That was great for a while, but I came in when there was already the feeling that Indian music was becoming sort of embarrassing. Murdoch wanted to capitalise on that, and I was brought in [to Channel V, B.O.] to give that new feeling of 'Hey, it's cool to listen to Hindi music.' That worked pretty well, and in '95, when Sony came, they asked me to do the same with Star Plus. They wanted to compete like with MTV, but Star Plus is no music channel and they couldn't go all Hindi there, so there was no point trying. [...] I created a completely new schedule for them, with telefilms, docu-dramas, very good and acknowledged actors who had worked with important directors. Really good programming that took the channel's limitations into account and tried to make the most of it, by which I mean that it was addressing an audience that was not really rich but that would value good quality. [...] Murdoch wanted it more Indian. In '96, he appointed Basu²⁵⁹ as CEO, and he brought his whole team and old Doordarshan programming. I tried to argue that people would not zap into Star Plus only to see programming they have known for years. There was not yet any feeling of nostalgia, things were moving, and Star Plus just stood for something else than DD."²⁶⁰

Sharma quit his job, but soon turned out to have been in the right, as viewership remained low and Basu also did not last long. Unable to terminate the contract with Zee, which with growing success enacted an increasingly aggressive policy against its foreign partner²⁶¹, Star Plus seemed increasingly virtually imprisoned on an artificial Hinglish island from which it could not move and whose exploitable potential shrank continuously in Murdoch's eyes. Towards the end of the 1990s, he seems to have decreasingly interfered with the channel, because there was nothing really that could be done for the time being, or rather: there was nothing that Murdoch could think of (see 4.2.). It was this involuntary withdrawal from direct ideological influence that marked a first significant turning point for Star Plus.

Namely, what is a prison for one is freedom for another. After Basu's dismissal and in the absence of obvious alternative possibilities, Star Plus as a whole can be said to have turned into a floating island that is not quite independent from the motherland, but not directly administered by it either. In practical terms this translated into a space that was virtually

²⁵⁹ Ratikant Basu, former CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of Doordarshan, 1996-97 CEO of Star TV.

²⁶⁰ Rakesh Sharma, Interview I/23.

²⁶¹ See *Outlook*, September 22, 1997: How Zee is Shooting Star; and *India Today*, November 30, 1996: Star Wars.

unique in commercial television the world over – and particularly within the network of News Corporation: a space with a financial budget hitherto unheard of in India that was limited in its striving for extension and profit and unhampered by legal and bureaucratic and now even, and most importantly, of ideological restrictions. Unsurprisingly, this highly exceptional, to a degree even utopian space became very attractive basically for two groups, who increasingly peopled the board of executives or worked as writers, directors and camerapeople. On the one hand, these were highly educated and well-trained English language academics and intellectuals, most of them graduates from prestigious colleges and universities or the NFTII (National Film and Television Institute of India, Pune), and on the other hand professionals, who represented the first generation of self-made people in the private media business (mostly having started with working in advertising in the early 1990s) and who found in the technological equipment and administrative vacuum of the channel a perfect field for experimentation. „Most of them were strongly leaning towards the left. I had the impression that at that time television was suddenly full of Marxists“, said one director of various films and serials, with unmistakable nostalgia.²⁶² Many of the writers and directors were working simultaneously with Zee and Sony and regional channels as well, but it was in Star Plus particularly that they found an unparalleled playground that in short span generated a very motivated and high-profile programming of telefilms, serials and docu-dramas in English, Hindi and English-based Hinglish, realising the ideas that Sharma had not found approval for earlier.

Ironically, with this development the split public between an English-language elite and a ‘vernacular public’ that had been inscribed in Star TV’s actual concept reconstituted itself even through the very *failure* of this concept. The well off and English educated that Star Plus had been meant to cater to in the beginning were now sitting in the decision-making seats of the channel, administrating its opening commercial gap. Like the journalists who were representing the English-language part of Star News/NDTV, they were often coming from the same background as those who would work for the English-language press, which had, in contrast to Doordarshan and like the film industry always worked commercially and largely independent from the state (except, in case of the film industry, far-reaching post-production censorship).²⁶³ This circumstance also underpinned the existence not of one, but of different elites that are historically intertwined but that speak different languages (not only in terms of

²⁶² Interview I/21.

²⁶³ On the question of censorship in India and its relation to democracy see Shohini Ghosh, who has engaged with this question most substantially (Ghosh 1999, 2003).

English and Hindi). As one Prasar Bharati-executive put it bluntly: “DD is an accumulation of brahminical whites. You’ll never find a dark Indian in any position worth mentioning here.”²⁶⁴ Doordarshan’s state elite was – and largely continues to be – a caste-defined and bureaucratic elite, anticipating the dominance of a value-oriented, Hindi-speaking middle class but administered by the petty bourgeois, basically conservative and often well-meaning civil servant who is maybe not even active in barring access for ‘dark’, lower caste or Muslim Indians, convinced that Doordarshan as a democratic institution would ensure the same chances for everybody, but who would also not notice their absence (even though the very observation of the above-cited executive refutes this and maybe indicates a change if not with regard to actual employment, at least with regard to consciousness).

Star Plus’ emerging producing elite, by contrast, was part of an elite which officially did not even exist in Doordarshan’s world (in a similar way that, for instance, the existence of a booming video industry since the early 1980s – or the increasing salience of the cable operators in the early 1990s – “could not be officially acknowledged by the government to exist”²⁶⁵), but that had nevertheless directly grown out of it. It comprised of people who “went to college with people who now live in America, Europe, wherever, I write to them on e-mail now, and they can’t understand caste, because we don’t know what our caste is. So that was our badge of honour.”²⁶⁶ Not to consider caste or religious community was part of the self-understanding of a politicised elite for whom ‘English’ symbolised a secularism in the self-evidential sense of the option and the right to social equality and the overcoming of caste barriers. It stood against what Alok Rai has called “the perverted nationalism of the ‘Hindi’ ideologues”²⁶⁷, who wielded not little influence in Doordarshan and for whom a sanskritised Hindi²⁶⁸ had historically signified the maintenance and promotion of an elitist and purist perception and construction of a Hindu society that is highly defensive of upper caste privileges as well as seeks to alienate regional languages and “to ghettoize Urdu as a Muslim tongue.”²⁶⁹ To dismiss caste and community, however, spelled the luxury of oblivion that is rather indicative of the self-evidence of upper-caste Hindu existence and the reproduction of

²⁶⁴ Interview II/2.

²⁶⁵ Rajadhyaksha, 1990, p. 39.

²⁶⁶ Journalist, Star News/NDTV, Interview II/9.

²⁶⁷ Rai, 2001, p. 120.

²⁶⁸ For a more detailed elaboration on Sanskritisation see M.N. Srinivas, 1989, *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

²⁶⁹ Rajagopal, 2001, Notes to pages 159-160, p. 343.

privileges that ‘English’ – manifest not least in the separation between English-based public (private) schools and vernacular-based government schools - continues to ensure.²⁷⁰

To Star-executives coming from this background, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* had not merely been boring (even though there were, of course, those who were secret fans of them), neither had they seen them as a danger to Indian culture (even though, as the earlier cited headlines in the English-language press evidence, quite a few might have had the fear that ‘others’, namely the less educated and poorer, would fall into that trap – to the disadvantage of the whole society – or, if they came from the Marxist tradition, were rather enraged by the neo-imperialist dimension of the development). Most of all, though, they had perceived the soaps, as European intellectuals did, to be an assault on people’s intelligence, and particularly on their own. The involuntary island of Star Plus, of all places, provided them now with an option to make a television that would have been impossible on Doordarshan, but that was equally completely undesired by Murdoch, decreasingly, maybe, because it was leftist, but definitely because it did not raise revenues. A programming of this sort was indeed only possible as long as the channel was paralysed. The same accounted in many ways for Star News/NDTV, even if with reversed premises: because NDTV operated as a self-sufficient production house on a contract for Star TV that inhibited editorial interference, the substantial financial input from News Corporation enabled it – until 2003 (see 6.3.2) - to largely *avoid* commercialisation and to function as a quasi-public channel that presupposed an English-based, demanding, if not intellectually trained audience. (Ironically, thus, Murdoch had here, for the sake of having a foot in the door of news production in India, ended up with the same ‘leftist bunch’ that now profited from a commercially paralysed Star Plus).

It could be said that while Doordarshan had been an officially egalitarian television – and a factually egalitarian television in the sense that here the middle class, upper caste Hindu made television for the middle class, upper caste Hindu, projecting a secularised, partly English-speaking but Hindu-centric moral order²⁷¹ – Star Plus was now in a situation in which an intellectual and partly activist English language elite, much like the press, referred to an audience of a similarly related kind, i.e. in which there existed a certain congruence between producers and recipients. Yet, there was a sharp difference from the situation in the press, and

²⁷⁰ A good description of this class can, with regard to the generation of the 1970s, offers the film *Hazaaron khwaishein aisi* (A thousand dreams such as these) by Sudhir Mishra (2004). See also Sagarika Ghose’s novel *The Gin Drinkers* (New Delhi: Harper Collins/India Today 2000).

²⁷¹ See Ananda Mitra, 1993, Television and the Nation: Doordarshan’s India, in: *Media Asia* 20 (1), pp. 39-44.

to quite a degree also from the English language news channels, notably from Star News/NDTV. Star Plus was not only embedded in the described kinetics and pressures of commercial television, which were more immediate than in the press. It was also supposed to be engaged in the business of mass entertainment, and its executives were direct employees of News Corporation. This made it foreseeable that this same post-Doordarshan English language elite would not be able to remain in the established serenity of its own universe and that its island was bound to be flooded in the sense that at some point it would have to produce programmes for more Hindi-based middle to lower middle class audiences, which it was hardly familiar with. If one could thus speak of a breaking down or dissolution of language-defined boundaries and privileges, it was with regard to Star Plus immanently tied to the question of how and under what conditions this elite would manage to fulfil this task.

4.2. *Prepositions of 'Culture': Education Denied and Training Disabled*

The challenge became acute when the freedom of imprisonment ended abruptly. In September 1999, Subhash Chandra, in a rather spectacular move, was able to buy back Murdoch's shares in Zee TV out of profits he had not yet made with broadcasting itself but in other branches of his meanwhile worldwide operating Essel Group.²⁷² Significantly, it was also in the English language press that this move was celebrated as an act of liberation and empowerment, almost as if marking the recapturing of national independence that was yet combined not merely with autonomy but with triumph and victory.²⁷³

What this interpretation did not consider was that with the end of the contract the language restrictions on Star Plus were lifted as well, releasing it from its island and turning it for the first time into a direct competitor. Most probably neither Chandra nor the press took this threat seriously as they could not imagine that Star Plus, peopled with an English educated elite, would ever be able to produce convincing 'Indian' programming, and they were at the time not quite wrong in that. In Star Plus, the reclamation of Zee TV's shares worked like a wake-up call to the fact that there existed no concept of a Hindi-based programming that

²⁷² Active in satellite projects, film production and distribution as well as packaging, container manufacturing and entertainment parks (e.g. Essel Park and Water Kingdom).

²⁷³ See, for instance, *The Week*, Dec. 12, 1999, Zee-Czar. Subhash Chandra's Zee TV virtually rules the entertainment business in India (cover story).

could compete with Zee or Sony. The actual purpose of the channel – and its ownership by Murdoch – seem to have been almost forgotten by its producers, as much as Murdoch seems to have remained oblivious to the requirements of making the channel profitable in case the contract with Zee ended.

At the time of my fieldwork, which commenced three years later, references to this (second) turning point amongst Star Plus-executives were varied and in their articulation indeed remarkably dependent on the level of public school- or convent-attendance and college education. What commenced at that time was a process in which the privileged position of TV-executives in terms of language and class became exposed to a form of emotional blackmailing in order to increase the commercial perspectives of private channels. This was supported not least by the executives themselves, who affirmed a situation in which “Hindi becomes, by default, the language of the disinherited masses”²⁷⁴, acquiring an “unearned and undeserved moral advantage”²⁷⁵, while “the English elite, hobbled by its entirely well-deserved bad conscience, is not really in a position to challenge or even scrutinise this moral advantage.”²⁷⁶ It was most remarkable how in this context the pressure towards commercialisation was particularly amongst those with a university degree, instead of being scrutinised for what it was, readily translated into an acceptance of the own failure of having neglected ‘the people’ that did not merely seem to refer to the few years of Star Plus’ intellectual existence but to encompass the whole historical dimension of the unbalanced relation between English and Hindi. Star Plus’ abrupt de-intellectualisation served in this sense as an eye-opener to the own privileged life, which, however, even intensified the bad conscience and the urge for the viewers’ ‘sociologicalisation’, if not ‘anthropologicalisation’ in the sense that they were re-interpreted from being demanding and otherwise underchallenged subjects into being hitherto misunderstood and ignored (Hindi speaking) ‘people’. During the process, this form of a bad conscience, particularly as it was acutely provoked, turned out to be most effective in making this elite vulnerable towards misunderstanding a commercial push as a democratising and anti-patronising movement (which was nevertheless framed in a rather benevolent manner): “1999 was actually the first time we really got in touch with the viewer. Before, we were producing programmes, which were socially relevant, responsible, interesting, whatever you want. But it was programmes that *we* would like to see, so we were basically representing ourselves. [1999] was the first

²⁷⁴ Rai, 2001, p. 7.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

time we saw our viewers as *people*, within their social and economic constraints and could anticipate what that meant for their lives and in what way any change would happen.”²⁷⁷

This compulsion to ‘get realistic’ has itself a tradition that re-emanated here in a new, commercial, context. With regard to the post-Independence filmmakers who strived for a socially realistic – and in that sense normative - image of Indian society, Sumita Chakravarty has remarked: “The intelligentsia’s gloss on realism as coincident with morality and sincerity of purpose rather than a strict adherence to the principle of impartial observation of social phenomena subverts realism itself as a social doctrine.”²⁷⁸ Resonating with the basically a-political notion of “selfless ‘social work’ as ennobling and purifying by virtue of its elevation above politics and money”²⁷⁹ that Thomas Blom Hansen has identified as an underlying motif of Hindu nationalism and its appeal, realism becomes here a synonym for morality and for the negation of the own class status. In context of commercial television, the viewer, in his incarnation as member of the (Hindi speaking) ‘people’, became in this pattern a synonym for a reality, which had been unrightfully sidelined in favour of what now appears as an intellectual dream world of social relevance and responsibility that was reserved for the English speaking elite. The reality of the viewer is discovered and reified as constituting reality as such – including the need for relaxation, escapism and “cheap entertainment”²⁸⁰ and in which, curiously, there seems no space for ‘interesting things’ (and for the English language). At the same time, this ‘reality’ is constructed as a reward in return for the struggle of coming to terms with rather drastic cuts in the former liberties of production in Star Plus under the unleashed pressure to create profit. The analogies with social work and the accompanying necessity of sacrifice are quite striking in the above-quoted interviewee’s framing of the situation: like a social worker, who accepts long working hours and too little pay in return of feeling useful and needed, does she present herself as consenting to limitations of expression and intellectual activity for the sake of ‘being closer to the people’ – with the important difference that this move serves now not least to *keep* a rather comfortable salary (Star TV pays the highest salaries of all private channels, which, as one Zee TV-executive pointed out, made it in the following extra difficult to win Star-executives for any lobbying in favour of anti-commercialisation and education on private television). The historical tension in the relation between English and Hindi – namely the realisation that

²⁷⁷ Star Plus-executive, Interview I/08 (italics according to pronunciation).

²⁷⁸ Sumita S. Chakravarty, 1993, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947-1987*, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 81.

²⁷⁹ Hansen 1999, p. 11.

²⁸⁰ Interview I/08.

English certainly does not deserve to be a synonym for privilege and the simultaneous knowledge that its ousting would hardly turn the world into a more just and equal place – corresponds here quite directly with the historical tension in the relation between public and private television – namely the understanding that public television has to open up from its focus on high culture and the simultaneous insight that private television offers a good pretext for, but not quite an expression of ‘peoples’ interests’. (Hypocrisy and cynicism, if not real despair, are two common outcomes of both these tensions on the part of producers as much as on the part of audiences, see 4.3.).

Other Star Plus-executives, however, and notably those who did not have a convent or college education (but were nevertheless English-speaking) were describing the turning point of 1999 in terms of a liberation from restrictions rather than of the beginning of limitations. Freed from the inner compulsions of a sociological justification, the unknown viewers are seen here as a positive challenge rather than as a reality-definer. It is quite openly admitted that attending to them was commensurate with the end of “sensibility”, yet the earlier audience is in hindsight declared to have been a burden that had basically stood in the way of proving oneself (leaving it open whether that refers to the potential audiences or to Rupert Murdoch): “As we had been half English-half Hindi we were forced to deal with this kind of a premium audience, making things like *Star Bestsellers*²⁸¹, this kind of smart, classy thing which brought a lot of critical acclaim, but no viewership. [...] We had built up a sensibility of what we think is good cinema, of what we think is good television, of what we think is good entertainment. But now suddenly the floodgates were about to open, and we were going to go and cater to like 300 million Indians. Now the opportunity was arising.”²⁸²

The concrete trigger that had in 1999 set in motion this discourse of realism, challenge and justification had been twofold. They did not at once start with the end of the “kind of rocky relationship with Zee”²⁸³, but became concrete with an internal audience survey, immediately commissioned by Murdoch and conducted still in 1999 by a public relations agency, the results of which were followed by instant action on the part of Murdoch himself. The survey was conducted under the objective of “Star Plus moving towards mass based audience in a phase manner” and of evaluating why “INTAM²⁸⁴ data showed low channel share.”²⁸⁵ It

²⁸¹ A series of telefilms built upon short stories and novels.

²⁸² Star Plus Head of Content, Interview I/15.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ One of the two official agencies in India, which are surveying TRPs (Television Rating Points).

²⁸⁵ Public Relations Agency *Quest*, 1999, *Star Plus: Understanding Viewer Behaviour*, Powerpoint Presentation, Bombay.

interrogated viewers in Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Bombay, Delhi and Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) and classed them along the SEC (socio-economic classification)-scheme common in advertising into SEC-A (upper middle class) to SEC-C (lower middle class – there also exist SEC-D up to SEC-F). Moreover, the study applied the three different categories of “Star Gazers, Non-Regulars, and Not Baptized” [sic!] as well as the two rather interesting characteristics of “within the bounds” (a paraphrasing of ‘traditional’) and “on the threshold” (a paraphrasing of ‘more modern’).

While the regular viewers (generally to be found in SEC-A) described the programming as „modern“, „classy“, „mature“, „smart“, “bold”, „Westernised“ (in a positive sense of accomplishment), they also pointed out that it “has a certain snob value”, is “not for the masses”, is “BBC Jaisa” (like the BBC) and also admitted that, at least at times, “more awe, less comfort” emerged. Amongst the “Non Regulars” and the “Not Baptized” (SEC-B – SEC-C), i.e. amongst those that could guarantee the channel’s expansion, Star Plus was often, despite the Hindi component, seen as an “English channel” or even as “foreign”, recognised by its “mismatch of half English-half Hindi” or discovered to have “a focus on English even in Hindi programmes.” It was suspected that characters in shows and serials or anchorpeople “won’t be overfriendly as he belongs to the upper class” and “would only talk to people of his standard.” They were seen as “Indians who copy the West”, like “women with short hair who work in offices.” Such characters were identified with having “studied English medium” and being “very educated”. They were classed as “ultra-modern” and “Westernised” (in a negative sense of degeneration and imitation), as “not tied to their roots”, having “lost their tradition” and “lacking Indianness” (“will not touch feet, will not say namaste”) – which was interestingly coupled with “lacking contemporariness.” Mainly the “Not Baptized” (generally in SEC-C) indicated that they “couldn’t relate”, were “feeling inferior” or “not good enough” (“*Bahut modern hai hamare khayal nahi milenge*” – “This is very modern, our lot cannot relate to that“).²⁸⁶

There are, of course, different ways of reading these results. What is particularly interesting is to look at them in relation to the earlier reception of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*. In the viewers’ statements in the survey, ‘English’ figures as a signifier of class at least as much as it does of culture, which has, of course, to do with the fact that the people seen on Star Plus then were themselves all unmistakably Indian and thus difficult to ‘other’ in terms of culture. The category of class returns, because it is the own society, which is under

²⁸⁶ All quotes from the *Quest*-survey.

inspection. The Indian characters and anchorpeople on Star Plus are perceived as ‘foreign’ in terms of ‘copying the West’, ‘having lost their roots’, and ‘lacking Indianness’, which describes them in terms of cultural deficiency as well as of treason. These cultural depictions are, however, intrinsically linked with the identification of education and knowledge and thus with a privilege of access that is restricted to an anglicised Indian elite and manifests itself in class-consciousness and arrogance (“would only talk to people of his standard”, “won’t be overfriendly as he belongs to the upper class”). Not because it is education, it seems, and also not because it is anglicised education, but because it is most of all (just) inaccessible education (and – unwittingly - displayed as such), it is not seen as an ideal but as a hindrance to the preservation of culture, that becomes, however, particularly worth preserving (and re-inventing) because its alternatives are limited.

In the reception of the American soaps, by contrast, class had hardly been a category at all, and particularly not a negative one. (American) ‘English’ had been seen as codifying a foreign (‘Western’) culture in ethnic terms and a deviant and dirty culture in moral terms, but while one could have expected that the opulently displayed wealth would provoke the perception of class, it rather – as earlier mentioned – inculcated in its utopian depiction the imagination of attainment. The riches and plenty in *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* evoked far less a feeling of exclusion than did the by comparison far more modest interiors and sometimes even minimalist living conditions shown in Star Plus’ telefilms and docu-dramas of the late 1990s (which to some degree were even situated in rural areas). It was in the Indian telefilms, which were telling of the luxury that the choice of reduction entails, rather than in the American soaps, which provoked through their hyper-real excess the imagination of accomplishment and participation, that English was detected by Indian middle class audiences as signifying a barring of access, which refers back to the differences between social realism and imaginative realism.



Stills from the *Star Bestsellers*-telefilm “Telephone” (mainly in Hindi - Star Plus archives)

The realistically depicted living conditions of the Indian intellectual upper middle class, or even the literarily framed stories of rural life (which were generally coupled with the raising of social problems like drunken driving or – as in “Telephone” above – with mental illness), were identified mainly with sophistication and elite education rather than with money and wealth. While good education has been experienced as being restricted to particular classes, wealth can potentially also be made without an education – or at least without an anglicised one – which with the American soaps had for the first time presented itself as a ‘realistic’ alternative.

At the same time is it striking that neither SEC-A nor SEC-C viewers argue much with culture or language, but either indicate acceptance and admiration for a programming they consider to be of high quality and ‘cultured’ or admit to their lack of understanding and feelings of resignation and inferiority (the argument of SEC-C viewers, significantly, was not that the seen was ‘very Western’, but that it was ‘very modern’). Despite particularly the latter being classified in the research design as “within the bounds” (‘traditional’), the survey made it quite clear that the definition of Indian culture and language was the domain of the ‘more modern’ new middle classes, and there can be made out a certain pattern here that corresponds with the range and limits of the “socially convincing sense of the real.” Whereas, as earlier described, Maharashtrian villagers qualified even Doordarshan’s commercialised programming of the 1990s as not relating to them, as it was made out to be ‘for rich people’, lower middle class viewers in cities saw a programming ‘for educated people’ as out of their reach. The represented wealth is here not only, in contrast to middle class viewers, associated with class; wealth and education are also seen as equally utopian by the respective group.

Middle class viewers, on the other hand, situate themselves in far closer proximity to both wealth and education, and also tend to see themselves as the rightful receivers of both.²⁸⁷ The denial of one – elite education –, and the accompanying prestige, seems to support a dissociation of education and wealth in the “socially convincing sense of the real.” It would, of course, be too simple to construct some binary causality of the sort that the more education is denied, the stronger shows the urge for wealth, which would turn wealth into a mere compensation for a lack of education. Yet there indicates itself a not so uncommon relation here, in which perceptions of distance define framings of the realistic. It seem to be the relative (or imagined) proximity to the upper strata of the society – coupled with the

²⁸⁷ For the dilemmas of education in India see also Pavan Varma, 1998, *The Great Indian Middle Class*, New Delhi: Viking, pp. 55-58.

appreciation of the own material distance from the poor - that multiply, in the case of lacking access and the increasing realisation of it, not only feelings of acute exclusion and downgrading and that fan the articulation and emphasis of cultural difference and incomparability, but that also go along with an open disdain for these upper strata, particularly as far as education is concerned.

The controversy, for instance, around and partly ferocious opposition against the looming implementation of the Mandal Commission Report in 1990, which proposed a 27%-reservation for so-called OBCs²⁸⁸ in addition to the already existing 22%-reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs/STs) has to be seen in this context. “The existing middle class”, as Pradip Kumar Datta underscores, “has always been drawn overwhelmingly from the upper castes.”²⁸⁹ As the Mandal Commission advocated – and the V.P. Singh-government eventually implemented - a guaranteed access to state-run educational institutions as well as to white-collar jobs in government administration for members of lower classes and castes, it seemed to hopelessly block the rightful path up the hierarchy for members of the middle class, which provoked a feeling of scandal particularly at a moment in time when upward mobility started developing into an imperative.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ OBC is often interpreted as ‘other backward castes’, which would also have explained more soundly the upper caste-protests. However, the Mandal Commission defined OBCs as those who live of physical labour and are socially, educationally and economically backward (underprivileged). As there does exist a rather clear “class-with-caste identity” (Datta: 192), the OBCs do hence indeed largely comprise of lower castes, but are not identical with them, just as there does exist quite a percentage of lower class Brahmins (see, for instance, S.S. Gill, 2006, Merits of Mandal Report, in: *Times of India*, June 13, and Christophe Jaffrelot, 2003, “Are the OBCs a social and political category?”, in: *ibid*, *India’s Silent Revolution. The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, pp. 363-386).

²⁸⁹ Datta, 2003, p. 192.

²⁹⁰ The Mandal Report was implemented in 1990 by the Janata Dal-government under V.P. Singh after its victory in the general elections against Rajiv Gandhi’s Congress Party, leading to dramatic public protests with more than sixty students from upper castes immolating themselves, most of them in Delhi, and nearly hundred being killed in riots and police firing. The implementation of the Report contributed to the quick fall of the Janata-government (because the the BJP immediately withdrew its support), bringing the Congress under Narasimha Rao back to power in 1991. Yet it has given unprecedented rise to lower castes and classes in politics in course of the 90s, even if the actual degree of the implementation in institutions remains disputed (as, for instance, the situation in Doordarshan testifies); see a.o. Jaffrelot, 2003; Gail Omvedt, 2001, “The Anti-caste Movement and the Discourse of Power”, in: Niraja Gopal Jayal (ed.), *Democracy in India*, New Delhi: OUP, pp. 481-508; Dipankar Gupta (ed.), 2004, *Caste in Question. Identity or Hierarchy?*, New Delhi/London/Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications; and Mankekar, 2000, who not coincidentally starts her whole study on television with a description of the anti-Mandal protests in the streets of Delhi (pp. 1-3). The controversy has seen a new round in 2006, after the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-government under the leadership of the Congress announced the plan to extent the quota system into the private sector (including Information Technology (IT) and educational institutions which are run not by the central government but by different states, which include the currently particularly high-ranking Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) as well as of Management (IIMs) and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). A simultaneously proposed quota for Muslims has even intensified the debate, which, on the other hand, seems to be led in a more differentiated and less fanatical fashion than 16 years ago (see Conclusion).

It is one of commercial television's inherent objectives to reshuffle perceptions of distance and of the realistically attainable, and I will elaborate on the concrete programming that can be seen as the consequence of the cited survey – and that essentially consisted of the K-formula – in chapter 8. For the moment, however, I would like to stay with the topos of education, the significance of which was ironically equally mirrored in the situation Star Plus itself was then acutely facing – which was basically the situation of having no programming other than the existing one. The denial of their own elite education that viewers detected in Star Plus' programming was directly linked to a lack of televisual training and preparation on the part of the elite-educated executives.

Indeed, Murdoch's ideological and administrative withdrawal from Star Plus and the much-appreciated island-existence of the channel by its executives had resulted in a complete lack of groundwork and debate for the case of a change of circumstance. There was certainly no agreement any more to maintain Star Plus as a channel for the 'well off and educated' (like it existed indirectly for Star News/NDTV), but neither existed, university-degree or not, concepts or even ideas of how to address viewers outside the elite-educated circles, which pointed towards the absence of earlier audience research and evaluation and thus towards the lack of a picture of the 'actual' audiences. The two years of Hinglish freedom had not served to learn about the viewers and to develop ways of evoking a "socially convincing sense of the real" that might bridge the gaps of access and mediate the feelings of exclusion that later showed in the survey. The commercial vacuum of Star Plus, in other words, could have been used, utopian as this may sound but in accordance with the somewhat utopian existence the channel had led so far, as a chance for a less coercive approach to the long-term desired viewers rather than merely as a representational playground of the elite. That this did *not* happen, could be seen as being indicative of the larger picture in the Indian television industry, particularly in the entertainment channels, which, as one Zee TV-executive angrily pointed out, showed increasing tendencies of acquiring features that have traditionally been characteristic of the vernacular press, namely of patrimony and kinship-structures, because the push towards profit-making had priority and professional training was not being cared about.

Even though private television during the 1990s offered a career opportunity to many, who would not have had such a chance in the old state-monopoly system, "you see how the trends are turning today. It's narrowing into more control factors than there have ever been, and we are in effect very, very much in awe of our own film industry, and we want to be like the film

industry is. And the film industry looks down upon us. Half the film industry's housewives have become television producers. It's become a very convenient thing like 'Put my wife on the job'. Television is like something that anyone can do. That's the attitude. Instead of like actually endeavouring to set up training institutions for the industry to collectively get together and put up schools of writing or production. [...] When it comes to writing institutions and educational institutions, production, all aspects of television programming, thoughts about what the medium actually is, it's just become normal like 'Ok, I'm a television family, so my wife will also start doing another serial for another channel, my son and daughter in law will become their actors', so you just keep up controlling the entire thing instead of putting your money out. And corporatising yourself and creating a world which becomes a good environment for people to work in. Like you have management institutions that deliver trainees to the whole corporate industry every year. Why in 15 or 20 years till date we don't have a television institution that is delivering some sort of talent to the industry?"²⁹¹

The process of commercialisation, which is often thought of as dissolving and professionalising patrimony, clan- and kinship-structures, thus also helps re-installing them. They are in a re-invented form the outcome of a de-institutionalisation of public access and state guarantees (like unions), which the privatisation process fosters and supports. However, as this statement makes also clear, the absence of coherent training and education is not inherent to the commercial logic, but a *decision* (even if an unconscious one) on the part of the corporate agent, not least of Rupert Murdoch. His complete non-agency in this field emphasises the narrow interest of profit-making that he pursues in countries like India, but at the same time also turns out to be extremely short-sighted with regard to this very interest. As the same Zee-executive put it: "They know that if they come into an area they don't belong, for seven or eight years they will have losses and then eventually they're going to make profits. It works, it's fantastic. [...] Of all the money he [Murdoch, B.O.] has invested over here in losses not a paisa went into the training of TV professionals or some audience research. [...] Tell me, that money that they're losing over seven years, if they had trained professionals over those seven years, wouldn't they have that money back in three years?"²⁹²

Curiously, thus, the representation of the educated on Star Plus had gone at the cost of educating professionals for commercial television programming (and particularly of those not coming from the English language elite) as well as of researching audiences, and the acute

²⁹¹ Zee-executive, Interview I/13.

²⁹² Ibid.

pressure that started to be executed onto Star Plus from the moment onwards that the results of the cited study were on the table, can be seen not as a simple expression of market forces but as also the outcome of a disabled training and a neglected interaction with the ‘real’ audiences, which now intensified the pressure. As a former Sony-executive commented: “There was such a hullabaloo made about their TRPs, ok, they were behind Sony, but it was not that they didn’t have viewers, and they could have been content with that. But, of course, they had to get all aggressive.”²⁹³

As far as the Star Plus-management and executives themselves were concerned, it is difficult to say if they would actually have had the freedom to conduct audience research at their own leisure, even though the broadcast programming, which was virtually anti-Murdoch, spoke of a high degree of independence that probably would have allowed for such decisions, which, moreover, could have been put to Murdoch, who might even have detected their usefulness. It is, of course, very understandable if the most is made of a situation that works in one’s favour, in this case a well-equipped but floating TV channel that offered unique possibilities to well-educated intellectuals who, realistically, were facing diminishing chances for their ideas to be represented on entertainment television: “Television being a money-spinning proposition has not really entered the people’s head till about a year ago. Before one year, people thought that one day, television is going to arrive in India, it has not yet arrived. And I was comfortable working in a space like that. The moment people thought ok, we have arrived and we have a formula to arrive where we want to arrive, then I could not fit myself in. Because then people thought they knew the trick to success.”²⁹⁴ Yet, while there could be read a resistance in the sense of a hijacking into using the channel for the own interests, it was not quite like that, as this quote also demonstrates. Rather, it seems to have been a certain naïveté and the taking for granted of such chances that were basically guiding the Star Plus-executives’ perception and agency and that were quite resistant to realising the own situation as exceptional – which, regrettably, confirms many prejudices about ‘English’.

This naïveté became apparent when the pressure of ‘reality’ appeared, for a start in person of Rupert Murdoch’s son James, who operates in the transnational version of kinship-structure and increasingly takes over responsibility for Star TV from his father. This sudden pressure seems to have met at first with innocence on the part of the Star Plus-management and the executives, who apparently had read the results of the study in quite a different way than

²⁹³ Interview I/06.

²⁹⁴ Writer and director, Interview I/10.

Murdoch, retrieving new inspiration from a more substantial contact with the viewers that exceeded the mere TRPs. James Murdoch is reported to have “come down [to India, B.O], and the top executives again wanted to do some new programming, because they were so used to making experimental programming. They said, why not try also this, why not try also that. And James Murdoch - I know that, because I have very good connections in Star - James Murdoch told them if you want to do experimental programming, do it on your own money, don't do it on mine. If you want to stand out, let's see how much of a salary cut you are willing to accept right now, let's put in that money and we'll make a bank of very different programming. But don't do it on my money.”²⁹⁵

One can almost hear the carefree world of the Star Plus executive, so far involuntarily but generously nurtured by a paralysed and hapless giant, break down and collapse as the giant recovers his power. In contrast to the executives, the Murdochs – the younger one of which significantly has no quarrels talking about “my money” – had read the study's results in an entirely different fashion. To them, they represented, taken together with the final opportunity to broadcast in Hindi, the ultimate chance to match the ‘nation of numbers’ with the ‘nation of values’ along a union of language and culture. Moreover, they offered the long-awaited chance for Murdoch to execute the ‘cultural turn’, become ‘invisible’ as a foreign investor/exploiter – and as the most disliked at that - and vanish for larger audiences behind a ‘wholly Indianised’ programming.

Most likely, it was the near-total ignorance of Murdoch himself vis-à-vis what exactly such a programming could look like that made him renounce of resuming direct ideological supervision. Instead, pressure took the new, ‘content-free’, and de-ideologised form of a direct threat regarding the executives’ income, and eventually the job itself. It was thus, converted into financial and existential pressure, relieving the Murdochs but turning the executives’ former reality upside down. As they were now carrying the responsibility for creating and making successful a Hindi-language ‘Indian’ programming, which a non-Indian could not anticipate, they somewhat metamorphosed from being News Corporation's employees in India into representing ‘Indians’, re-acquiring a national and cultural identity or at least the role of cultural experts rather than having a practical and professional position.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

4.3. *Terminating Hybridity: From the Elite to 'The People'*

The survey remained the only one ever commissioned by Murdoch on behalf of Star Plus, and the one-sided reading of its results was instrumental in shaping the image of the middle class to lower middle class Indian viewer within the channel. Even though the study's underlying story was one of class (and caste) conflict and many respondents, not only from SEC-A, had answered in English or Hinglish, the viewer now to be addressed became Hindi speaking and "basically religious."²⁹⁶ As one Star Plus-executive put it, who had internalised the new market strategy particularly thoroughly: "If you go Hindi, then you go Indian, if you go English, then you go West."²⁹⁷ While the ideological supervision regarding the concrete contents vanished, ideology got to an extent transferred onto the level of language itself. Whatever was broadcast did not really matter, but it had to be in Hindi, with the language itself becoming the guarantor of adequate cultural expression and thus of final profit.

One of the immediate consequences of Star Plus' newly proposed 'Hindi nationalism' was that it virtually eliminated English-based Hinglish and that the production in English by Indians became a non-issue, particularly in the realm of entertainment. While Star Plus started in 2000 to broadcast entirely in Hindi, English language programming was not merely relegated to the Star World-channel but also consisted exclusively of programmes *made* in England or the US and representing English or American protagonists and contexts (like *Little Britain*, *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, *Boston Legal*, *General Hospital* and lately *Desperate Housewives*). 'English' thus got relieved from its indicating class and from its status as a language and became synonymous with *being* English (or American), re-constituting a holistic culture concept.

As a Zee-executive described it: "When Star did the Hindi channel, it turned *totally* Hindi. They had Star World and they brought in all the English programming with Star World, which they knew people like [name of a colleague] and me would enjoy. But [name of a colleague] and me cannot *create* it. How can [name of a colleague] and me create English programming that is happening on Star World?"²⁹⁸ Moreover, as Star Plus' entry into the commercial arena instantly fuelled the competition for the creation of Hindi language audiences, Zee English – in analogy with Star World - also started restricting its schedule to American and English serials and shows, which took all alternatives to the new rigid language

²⁹⁶ Star Plus Head of Content, Interview I/15.

²⁹⁷ Interview I/04.

²⁹⁸ Zee-executive, Interview I/13 (italics according to pronunciation).

segregation in Star TV away. The ‘totalising’ of Hindi thus had the effect of aggravating reservations against it and of associating the language with a decay of intellectual and cultural possibilities: “For the last two months we have been basically discussing how we should somehow bring intelligent and very intellectual writers and directors to make English serials of Indian origin and try to pack them on Zee English. So that that intellect doesn’t go to waste. Your entire youth in India today is expressing in English! [...] They have been forced to express and create in Hindi, no problem, they all express in Hindi etc., and they are Indians. [...] (But) there are three, four pilots lying here with me, nobody is ready to touch them. [...] Why I want to make a serial called *Colour*, is because I want to put my main traditional Hindi Indian character in an environment which is predominantly Western and Asian mixed to be able to look at *all* the issues. I want to bring objectivity into the picture. [...] There should be an entire movement where the money gets divided well. This kind of programming. A Coke should sponsor a good Indian English serial produced in India. Because Coke has a huge market here, like me, our children and various kids all over India growing up in colleges and schools. They would love to watch English serials about their own life, because they talk in English, they read in English, they write in English, they learn in English and they believe in English!” And in a very upset manner she added: “The West has done this to us, it also needs to undo this for us. That’s the only way out.”²⁹⁹

The West (in its transnational reincarnation) is thus not (any more) accused of its imposition of English, but of its sheer power to take far-reaching decisions, which also include to take English *away* and to promote a culturalised Hindi speaking ‘India’. The account above not only surely slightly exaggerates the all-encompassing Englishness amongst youngsters, particularly outside the English public schools³⁰⁰ and once more underscores the class consciousness (or rather oblivion) of the educated and the self-evidence with which they take a medium like television – particularly in its post-Doordarshan avatar - to ensure intellectualism and to promote the intellect. It also suggests that this intellect is not to be found with Hindi speakers. Yet, it also points to two important factors. One concerns the growing feeling amongst executives of various channels, but particularly in the entertainment sector covered by Star Plus, Zee TV and Sony, of being acutely limited and sustainably underchallenged in their capacities, which had reached a peak with the overwhelming success

²⁹⁹ Zee-executive, Interview I/09.

³⁰⁰ See, for instance, Butcher, 2003, p. 122, who finds a more varied application of language amongst young people: “In this sense, language circumscribed for some young people multiple spaces of identity [...] – one language for education, one with friends, one for viewing popular culture (such as Hindi films) and another in the home where they would also be called upon to act as translators.”

of K-soaps at the time of my fieldwork (see 7.3.). It could not sufficiently be explained away or compensated for by the intellectual sociologicalisation and anthropologicalisation of the viewers and the moral obligation to get close to them. This notion bore, particularly considering the novelty of the development, stark signs of real despair and helplessness that had not yet translated into the cynicism common amongst long standing producers in commercial television. The extreme schism between expectation and reality, between the possible and the happening that lies at the heart of cynicism did already show quite clearly, but it was a new experience that challenged some into developing strategies of rescuing their convictions into the new logic of things and others into elaborating convictions in accordance with the new circumstances. “There is a whole lot of people”, as one free writer and director explained, “who say that personally, we don’t believe in this, but for the business we are doing it. [...] The conservatism of the output is remarkable, and there is also a new class creeping in, people who believe in what they are doing, who come across stronger and who will be more convincing in the long run.”³⁰¹

The other factor was that viewers simply were far less confronted with English in their daily television consumption. One could now easily have the TV-set running for 24 hours with hardly hearing an English word. The whole surrounding – and thus, to a degree, the whole *normality* – of sound in the home changed slightly but sustainably. English was still there, in the form of English and American channels as well as of Star World and Zee English, but it had been turned into a matter of active choice rather than being part of the surrounding normality and thus been externalised. This had, on the one hand, implications for the increasing subliminal perception of English as a foreign rather than as an Indian language, while it ran on the other hand counter to motions and demands in Indian society that media people repeatedly pointed out in the face of the development: “It is clear as day that everybody who even only dreams of belonging to the elite speaks English, and that has certainly not decreased, on the contrary.”³⁰² Others pointed out the long-term dangers in terms of unlearning and lack of exposure: “Think of all those who are excluded from education and for whom television is one window to the world. The Dalits are craving for learning or improving their English, and this whole Hindi-madness keeps them not only where they are, it throws them back.”³⁰³ As a journalist from Star News/NDTV formulated it: “Like it’s becoming really tough to confront people with facts and news that do not pander to their

³⁰¹ Interview I/21.

³⁰² Journalist (Outlook Magazine), Interview II/07.

³⁰³ Journalist (Indian Express), Interview II/18.

religious feelings, it's becoming harder and harder to insist that English is an Indian language.”³⁰⁴

In turn, this complaint re-emphasises that the direct linkage between English and secularism, and consequently between Hindi and religion, was instinctively constructed particularly by members of Star channels, including Star News/NDTV, which featured a particularly high degree of alumni from the very prestigious St. Stephen's College in Delhi. While this journalist, however, seemed to mount inner opposition against the development, now on his part becoming defensive of his identity, another Star News-journalist, similarly ridden by feelings of remorse and the compulsion of anthropologicalisation as the Star Plus-executive cited before, came to the conclusion that “I found or I find increasingly that if I want my work, my stories to speak to people, instead of just making a lecture on what I think they should be like, I have to learn the language of faith.”³⁰⁵

In this context, Hindi became an index not only of (cultural) ‘authenticity’ but of success that also created growing rifts even within media companies. When Star Plus had – with its success of the K-formula – proven its ability to ‘reach out to the people’, a leading executive remarked in 2002 with regard to Star News/NDTV: “They are just too brown-sahib³⁰⁶, too remote, too public school, too south Delhi³⁰⁷ and too studio.”³⁰⁸ What could thus be made out was a certain pattern in which it was particularly those English speakers who most accepted their own elite status (and the negativity associated with it) that were most interested in ‘going vernacular’ in the sense of ‘going authentic’, thus expressing their moral commitment to ‘the people’s reality’. The ‘authentic’, on the other hand, (or those who claimed to speak for them) seemed to be most interested in going professional, and professionalism entailed here the signs of ‘Western standards’. The area where this showed visually the strongest was the clothing of the anchor-women on news channels, which, while the actual reporting continued to be done overwhelmingly by men, started at the time to make for a substantial part of the 17% of women in the news business altogether in 2006 that the earlier-quoted survey showed.

³⁰⁴ Interview II/06.

³⁰⁵ Interview II/09.

³⁰⁶ ‘Sahib’ is the colonial address of the white man, ‘brown-sahibs’ are seen as being imitative of their behaviour.

³⁰⁷ South Delhi, encompassing neighbourhoods like Defence Colony, Lodi Gardens, Golf Links, Greater Kailash (which is not coincidentally where the studios of NDTV are located) etc., is referred to as the living area of the “old middle classes” and the secular elite, which have access to public schools and which are increasingly contrasted with ‘new neighbourhoods’, like Goregaon and Noida, which rather stand for “the new middle classes” and quicker options of career-making in business administration, IT or BPO (Business Process Outsourcing), even though this does by no means exclude privileged education.

³⁰⁸ Interview I/15.

While female newsreaders and moderators on Star News/NDTV often, not always, sported 'salwaar kameezes' (rather than saris) that had a handloom and ethnic touch (avoiding popular fabrics like polyester), female newsreaders on Aaj Tak were generally seen in Western-style blouses or jackets.



Star News English, 2002



Aaj Tak, 2002

Within the thrust of the respective motion, this picture remained unaltered after the final launch of NDTV's Hindi channel in 2003 (see 6.3.2.) that was accompanied by the start of Aaj Tak's English language channel in the same year (see below).



NDTV India, 2003



Headlines Today (Aaj Tak English), 2003

4.5. *Aaj Tak: The Upward Mobility of ‘Hindi Hindi’*

It had actually been Zee News, which had aired news in mainly a Hindi-based Hinglish since 1997, that represented the first news channel in India, extending news from being an integrated component of otherwise entertainment-oriented channels into a distinct category. Aaj Tak however, the first visual endeavour of the India Today Group and launched in 2000, was not only the first channel to cultivate live-coverage in the form of the 24-hour channel (see 7.2.). It also set new standards in language that basically consisted of abolishing Hinglish as a televisual representation altogether, which quickly became a model of how to go about in pursuing the ‘nation of numbers’ for all Hindi (turned) channels. It was a transformation that left Zee News in the mere position to dismiss, not unrightfully, Aaj Tak’s strategy as “aggressive marketing”.³⁰⁹

A telling example of the speed with which language ascriptions have changed and become naturalised as ‘how the people speak’ in the span of the few years that saw the emergence of Aaj Tak is provided in an article by Daya Kishan Thussu, which refers mainly to the development of Zee TV during the 1990s. It emphasises that Zee News “received a major boost [when it] adopted the style of Hinglish”³¹⁰ and quotes the then head of news at Zee, Rajat Sharma, as explaining that “Zee News in that particular mix of languages served basically two purposes. [...] One was our observation that this was the language of the people, the kind of language with which Indians feel comfortable.”³¹¹ The same Rajat Sharma, who had left Zee, had had for a while a late-evening news slot in Hindi on Star Plus and meanwhile worked independently, evaluated in 2003, in an interview with me, the situation very differently. Even Hindi-based Hinglish was now described not in terms of a representation of authentic contemporary language usage, but in terms of a power relationship and the actual absence of ‘real’ language, which – resonating with the “Indian Indian” in the visual representation of the K-formula – returns in the form of exaggeration: “When I set up Zee News, I set it up as a medium which did not have a language either English or Hindi. I did not set it up as a Hindi Hindi [sic] channel, because it was also telecast in England. [...] It never gave people an impression this is a 100% Hindi-oriented channel. It is still not

³⁰⁹ Zee News-executive, Interview II/11.

³¹⁰ Daya Kishan Thussu, 2000, “The Hinglish Hegemony: The Impact of Western Television on Broadcasting in India”, in: David French/Michael Richards (eds.), *Television in Contemporary Asia*, New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London: Sage, p. 301.

³¹¹ Ibid.

absolutely Hindi, you still have programmes which are called *Special Correspondent*, it's still *Zee News*, *Behind the Headlines*, *News at 9*.”³¹²

It made an important difference now that even the logo of Aaj Tak, in contrast to all other channels, was written in Devnagari and not English (Latin), completing not only a “consistency of sound”³¹³ but of the whole visual experience. The ‘Hindi Hindi’ introduced by Aaj Tak, however, was framed, in order to reach the utmost amount of viewers possible, in terms of just the opposite of traditional, sanskritised and elite Hindi. “We decided that we don’t want to be understood only in the drawing rooms of Lucknow and Allahabad. We want to break that, we want a person sitting in Mumbai suburbs, a person sitting in Hyderabad, Ahmedabad to understand what we’re saying. And for that we said let’s use the language of the Hindi films which are watched all over the world. Hindustani.”³¹⁴ A leading executive clarified in this context that all Hinglish was somewhat artificial and on television had been just the expression of a transitory and insecure state that Aaj Tak had grown out of: “We were not the puritanical Hindi-wallahs, we were not the proponents of chaste puritanical Hindi. We spoke a language which was more Hindustani, you know. It wasn’t Hinglish, it wasn’t a mindless mix of Hindi and English. But we were not adverse to using an English word if it had become part of the popular folklore, if it is part of the popular idiom.”³¹⁵ In contrast to Zee News, the construction of a “socially convincing sense of the real” had come down to the employment of single words, and Zee News re-appears in the different light of not having been a success in bringing down a supremacy of English, but rather of having been a docile move in avoiding ‘Hindi Hindi’ (Hindustani): “In the case of Zee, they just went for English words, to give you an example, we wouldn’t mind using the word ,hotel‘ or ,train‘, we would use the word ,train‘ or ,rail‘, but Zee took it ... a step ahead. They would call it ,capital‘, we would not use the word ,capital‘, we would say ,rajdhani‘ instead of capital, because ,rajdhani‘ is known to everybody.”³¹⁶

³¹² Interview II/18.

³¹³ Star Plus Head of Content, Interview I/15.

³¹⁴ Former Aaj Tak-journalist, Interview II/22.

³¹⁵ Aaj Tak-executive, Interview II/14.

³¹⁶ Ibid.



Logo of Aaj Tak



Logo of Zee News

While Zee News was thus re-framed as basically being imitative and subservient, Aaj Tak employed a largely de-anglicised Hindi not to carve out more space for hitherto neglected and traditionally Hindi-associated themes like popular culture, rural development (and misery) and religion, but, on the contrary, to establish Hindi as the language that is connected to the increasing significance of numerical power and the growing aspirations of these numbers in professional as much as in material terms. A Zee-journalist pointed out: “Hindi journalists become journalists because they need a job. The English language journalists become journalists because they want to be journalists. When your only concern is job, you can’t be a journalist. You have to have some clarity in your mind, some freedom of thought, and the Hindi press does not have that, it’s a fact. [...] The Hindi news channels can be better than the Hindi press, because only the cream of the vernacular print media has joined.”³¹⁷ Significantly, Aaj Tak relied to this avail actually even less than Zee News (but even there I could lead the interviews in English) on merely Hindi language journalists. Instead, it was able to transcend the idea of ‘culturally authentic’ representation by enacting the entrepreneurial spirit, backed by the financial resources of India Today, that things can work as well in Hindi.

To this end – after four years of producing a daily bulletin on Doordarshan’s metro channel – they ventured into the hitherto unemployed form of the 24-hour news channel, which was used to establish Hindi as a new vehicle in order to access and represent themes that so far would not have been seen as ‘realistic’ with regard to the Hindi speaking media consumer. The objective – and the effect - was to release Hindi from its stigma of secondary importance and to actively establish it as signifying the ascendancy of the Hindi language class to levels

³¹⁷ Zee News-journalist, Interview II/13.

even beyond those of the English language groups. This entailed a profound shift in the established perspective, as it did not merely claim an equality between English and Hindi but bore the suggestion that it might not be the realm of the Hindi speaking that is limited, but that of the English speaking, which was achieved by profoundly changing the parameters of ascription and representation. The ‘icing on the cake’ in this respect was the launch of Aaj Tak’s own English language channel Headlines Today (HT) in 2003, which has been seen as outright infantilising English – a BBC-correspondent described it as “a children’s channel”³¹⁸ – by following the maxim of a “quick fix” for the new generation of English language viewers up to 30 years of age, who are “politically not interested” and “wouldn’t get the same in-depth reporting that Aaj Tak provides you with.”³¹⁹ The tables were turned with this undertaking, working towards the marginalisation of English: while English might still be the language of the privileged, it is the Hindi speakers that actually know. The autonomy of the elite was not broken but re-invented as an autonomy of the restricted.

As far as Aaj Tak was concerned, a leading executive explained, again in direct relation to Zee, the applied psychology that helped the channel being accepted by the viewers: “One of the things that we did at Aaj Tak was, we made watching Aaj Tak, watching Hindi news, fashionable. Because we carried everything that an English news carried and more. We were carrying film festivals, we were carrying fashion shows, we were carrying fairs, religious festivals, we were talking about cricket, we were talking about golf, we were talking about Wimbledon, the French Open. Even when Zee did its Hindi bulletins, they were more focussed on hunger in Kalahandi, power shortage in Bihar, you know, misbehaviour of the cops, we did all that as well, because all that was news, but we also did a whole lot of other things that affected the lives of people.”³²⁰ ‘Real life’ existential trouble like hunger, electricity supply and police violence were now shown not because they mainly concerned the vernacular language areas, that also had a right to representation, but because they were *news*, thus getting elevated from being a rather marginalised moral appeal into becoming a professional category that ranked on the same level as a Bollywood film premiere or a meeting of industry magnates. A similar approach was enacted, for instance, with regard to education, which changed from being an intended or even unintended part of the contents of the representation to also becoming a topic of news itself: “For instance, when Delhi University admissions were happening, we positioned a satellite van there to live-broadcast

³¹⁸ Irregular Interview, May 2003.

³¹⁹ Aaj Tak-executive, Interview II/14.

³²⁰ Interview II/14.

some of the percentages, to cover who got into which school etc. We, for some reason, it happened accidentally, but it was partly, I think, also because of the newspaper hangover, that when the Hindi channels went to a school to take a sound bite of a principle, it was a government school, and when Star News [NDTV, B.O.] did it, it went to Vasant Valley, it went to Shri Ram School, one of those English public schools. We changed that. We went to government schools and we also went to these expensive schools.”³²¹

This form of a mediating approach between between ‘realism’ and aspiration, that also entailed a direct, participative communication with the potential viewer and that resulted in the impression of equality was supported by the same method with regard to advertising, which became in itself a formula for other Hindi language channels, news or entertainment, for pursuing the ‘nation of numbers’. “We developed this feeling that vernacular, like the vernacular press which had huge circulation, but they don’t get any ads. Because the feeling is that people who are in the northern belt, they don’t buy, and even if they buy, they will buy consumer durables, they won’t buy a car or an airconditioner, where the big advertising money goes. Maybe they buy a slipper, or maybe underwear or undershirt, something like that.”³²²

While thus the limited amount of advertising in Hindi language papers suggested some abstinence from consumption amongst Hindi speakers, Aaj Tak developed a way of instigating it that directly resonated with the procedures of transnational companies to tie up with existing brands rather than merely trying to introduce unfamiliar ones. Aaj Tak acknowledged and augmented whatever people *did* buy and successively increased the quality of advertising for these goods, which was integrated with a boost in self-confidence through the display of commodities so far out of the ‘Hindi’ reach. Aaj Tak made upward mobility realistic, and thus all the more attractive, by linking realism with aspiration: “We realised that in the whole of middle India, outside metros, there was a huge subterranean middle class which had a lot of disposable income. [...] Now, if you look at Aaj Tak you notice that when Toyota launches Corolla, they advertise on Aaj Tak. Three years ago it would have been considered unimaginable that a Corolla which costs 12-14 lakhs would be advertised on a Hindi channel. [...] You must understand how advertising happens in this country. You have to go to largely an ad agency. Now who are the people who work in these ad agencies? These are English speaking upper middle class-kids who... some of them have an MBA, or some of

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Former Aaj Tak-journalist, Interview II/22.

them are marketing people who put on a tie, they're wearing nice clothes, they drive a car and they go to all these big brands, Pepsi, HL [Hindustan Lever, B.O.], Colgate, that kind of thing. But there was this segment, that was something our sales team, our marketing team very smartly had spotted. That there were all these people who had a prime need for advertising, whether it is undergarments, whether it is household goods, whether it is spices, cooking oil, soaps, detergents, anything that was consumed by this middle India. And they wanted a pan-Indian vehicle, because the newspapers, regardless how big they were, they were still local in influence.



Advertisement (2002) of the spice-manufacturer MDH

And Aaj Tak, except for a very small pocket of India, that's Kerala and parts of Tamil Nadu, Aaj Tak provided a pan-Indian vehicle. So, you didn't have to go to a Mudra or a Lyntas or a Clarins, you know, all these big agencies, get a slick commercial done which costs you 6 lakhs or 10 lakhs, that perhaps was the entire budget of that guy. So they make simple commercials, they went to a simple producer somewhere, they got a simple, cheap commercial made, so we created an avenue for them to advertise, and we had the numbers, it began to reflect on their sales, so they started coming back. In fact it's a very interesting study that the first year the guys came with very cheap commercials, now the same advertisers come back with slicker commercials, because they have the resources, and more than resources they have the confidence to go to a specialist ad filmmaker, ask him to make a film, it's still not in the same league as a Coke or a Pepsi, but they go to a better guy, they get it done, and then they put it. So the quality of ads on Aaj Tak has gone up without a change of product. The same products are coming up with better quality ads, slicker and superior ads."³²³

³²³ Interview II/14.



Advertisement on (2002) for the Indian motorbike 'Victor', manufactured by TVS (a cheaper alternative to, for instance, Hero Honda or Yamaha)

Moreover, Aaj Tak not only did away with the prejudice that Hindi speakers are not interested in international news, it also sought to establish Hindi as one of the languages in international reporting, which was again directly linked to an aspirational and upwardly mobile way of representation: "On the side of the viewers Aaj Tak was very slickly packaged, new technology, very high level of graphics, very modern, you know, in your face. People who were here, I mean the anchors and the reporters, looked and sounded upmarket. But Aaj Tak also changed the paradigm, you know, Hindi channels always carried news from within the country. But we, ever since we launched the channel, we've been present in every theatre, wherever it is, every theatre of news, whether it is national or international, we were the first channel from this part of Asia, not just India, to have landed in Afghanistan, and we were there all the way. We were the only Indian channel who had sent its camera team to Germany when the Afghan peace conference was happening. You know, not even Star News sent it, because it was an event considered right only for the CNNs and NBCs and BBCs of the world. But Aaj Tak was the only Indian channel, so in terms of branding we also held out a promise to our viewers that we were there, that we are rubbing shoulders with the biggest and the mightiest of news."³²⁴

While a slight awe of English language journalism is still traceable in these explanations, Aaj Tak indeed not only managed to confirm – through its first-time complete reliance on the interactivity of the commercial image (see 8.1.) - that it is not a whole different world of topics that interest the Hindi speaking viewers and that it is not modernity 'as such' that alienates them, but particular ways of representing it that are unable to convincingly take into consideration the stark differences within this vast group as well as their aspiration to access and participation. It in turn also generated a new perception of this Hindi language universe as encompassing wide areas of agency and as factually already being everywhere – and not least

³²⁴ Ibid.

in the Indian government - where other publications or channels would have suggested it was absent (and in this sense, Rajagopal's thesis of – commercialising – television's equalising powers holds). It was a bit as if one would dub CNN in Hindi and suddenly realise that this is *not* absurd, but merely another way of listening to the same, or at least a very similar world (a comparable effect as is provoked by watching Al-Jazeera). This is an experience which would have been very unlikely a mere ten years ago and which cannot be explained alone by the homogenising consequences of using the same technology but calls into attention that this technology, in turn, also enables the representation of real-existing and meanwhile developed similitudes. Aaj Tak's merit, and the reason for its success, lay in having succeeded in performing this translation and avoiding its absurdity (in which Murdoch had so miserably failed), which also points to the increasingly fine lines to be observed in the representation of (cultural) differences.

At the same time, Aaj Tak lent through its focus on a growing mass audience of commercial television legitimacy and support, against traditional and modern Hindi fanatics, to a colloquial, de-sanskritised form of Hindi that was referred to as the language of Bollywood – with its rather strong historical Muslim input – and that can maybe indeed be seen as today's Hindustani. Alok Rai has described “the possibility of Hindustani [...] as the natural vehicle of popular democracy as well as of secularism.”³²⁵ Yet, while Hindustani is commonly seen as a mixture of Hindi and Urdu (the latter of which had once been the language of the Mughal courts and the Muslim Nawabi nobility and has been after Partition, not least by the Sangh Parivar, stigmatised and externalised as the language of Muslims and Pakistan), Aaj Tak also contributed to a process in which a Hindustani is becoming nationalised that absorbs Urdu more rather than that Urdu would be enabled to contribute to the development of Hindustani.³²⁶ Thus the “ghost of Hindustani [that] continues to haunt the language debate in our country”³²⁷ would have re-invented itself even on the colloquial level, as its actual form always seems to be unbalanced (generally veering towards Hindi) and can thus be declared to be either Hindi or Urdu. A producer of Urdu programming (on the south Indian broadcaster ETV) claimed “that Urdu is dying to a certain extent as it is being hindinised by Hindustani”³²⁸, while another explained the process in territorial and categorical terms: “Urdu

³²⁵ Alok Rai, 2003, “The Persistence of Hindustani”, in: Geeti Sen (ed.), *India – A National Culture?*, New Delhi/London/Thousand Oaks: Sage, p. 79.

³²⁶ A very captivating engagement with the slow decay of Urdu in North India after Partition offers Anita Desai, 1985, *In Custody*, New Delhi: Penguin.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 71.

³²⁸ Interview II/45.

doesn't relate to a particular region but to the presence of the language with people. That's why it is so difficult to carve out a target audience for itself. Broadcasters want Urdu to target the Muslim viewers, but it is not only them who know Urdu, and many don't at all. So we tried to work as an overarching channel that wanted to revive Urdu segments also in Hindi and Hindustani. But because we couldn't define a clear target group most cable operators didn't even air the channel.”³²⁹

Moreover, Aaj Tak made it also plain that Hindi was not only being redefined from signifying the 'language of the disinherited masses' into the language of the aspirational masses, which inherently tended to shift the focus away from the actual plight of these 'masses', and particularly of those who were not yet within the reach of private channels. 'Hunger in Kalahandi', 'power shortage in Bihar', 'misbehaviour of cops', while figuring as equal bites in a now continuous flow of news, were not subject to an investigative approach towards uncovering the patterns of exclusion and deprivation that were gaining even greater salience with neo-liberalism. The potential Hindi-language 'haves' were thus rather systematically separated from the Hindi-language 'have-nots' (see also 7.2.). In this context, Hindi became also a sign of a reconfiguring Indianness that was quite disconnected from the actual practise of English in the country, and particularly from the possibilities of developing and integrating it. The exclusive focus on Hindi generated a situation in which, on the one hand, – for instance on a certain occurrence – Hindi-speaking experts were brought to the fore which otherwise may not have appeared on screen, thus opening a space for broad recognition that had indeed been overdue. On the other hand, an expert on a certain matter would now not be consulted on air if he or she expressed in English, which – as Aaj Tak (in contrast to the 2003 launched NDTV India) largely renounced of subtitling – had obvious repercussions on the choice and the representation of subjects in the first place. The success of Aaj Tak and the accompanying 'Hindimania', moreover, became also imperative for successively launching Hindi channels, like Murdoch's new Star News (from April 2003 onward), where the close observation of Aaj Tak's model led to such involuntarily comical instances of interviewees on air being reprimanded to speak in Hindi, when they had naturally lapsed into English, no matter how bad their Hindi was. Such occurrences most clearly underlined the actual artificiality of the growing language segregation.

Finally, all this expansion of Hindi did ultimately not touch the privileges that English continues to have in a globalised context. It makes a big difference whether a potent and

³²⁹ Interview II/19.

resourceful agent gets marginalised or a weak and non-influential one. The weak one dies, while the potent one finds other fields of activity. Marginalisation of a resourceful agent does thus also spell his release from certain representational pressures and responsibilities, which can be enjoyed when basically sure that the own mental resource is widely recognised and is, moreover, backed by sufficient financial and technological resources. As a Star News/NDTV journalist pointed out: “Now that everybody is jumping onto the Hindi bandwagon, there will be more room to try things out in English. We’re less observed now.”³³⁰ While Aaj Tak may have been able to symbolically and practically marginalise English in its presence as well as to move its activity as the first Hindi news channel towards international reporting, and thus to substantially change the former conditions within India, things had already started to develop elsewhere, namely precisely in the now ‘less observed’ English language sector. It is no coincidence that one of Star News/NDTV’s leading journalists, Rajdeep Sardesai (see chapter 6), after parting with NDTV, in 2005 started the first ‘totally English’ Indian news channel in cooperation with CNN, introducing the pattern that it is now CNN-reporters that also report to *him*. This is a complete novelty in the transnational television market as it is turning the former pattern on a global scale upside down and could – for the time being - only be realised on the basis of English.³³¹ What thus looked like a marginalisation of English in the Indian national context became again the marginalisation – or limitation - of Hindi from a global perspective, and the ‘split public’ re-established itself not only with reversed premises, but in its old power-relationship as well.

³³⁰ Interview II/06.

³³¹ See Manisha Bhattacharjee, 2006, CNN IBN: Combining speed with solidity, at: www.indiantelevision.com/special/y2k6/cnn-ibn.htm.

Part II

5. *The Ethnographic Moment: Arriving at 'Gujarat'*

5.1. *Time and the Vanishing Other*

I have so far, apart from repeatedly and consciously referring to 'the time of my fieldwork', even in the empirical parts largely been using the past tense, despite describing a historically embedded yet very current scenario. But, remarkably, so have many of my interview partners despite often depicting circumstances they were still working in at the time of our conversations. This concurrence seems to point at a common perception that things are 'becoming past' increasingly fast or are at least not adequately representable in a present that suggests endurance and stability.

In my, the researcher's case the usage of the past tense is in a double sense related to what Johannes Fabian, one of the protagonists in the 1980s 'Writing Culture'-debate, describes in his critical account of anthropology's history as travel in secularised time: "Religious travel had been *to* the centres of religion, or *to* the souls to be saved; now, secular travel was *from* the centres of learning and power to places where man was to find nothing but himself."³³² Before forming into a more coherent idea of anthropology, not least in the wake of colonial administration consolidating itself in many parts of the world, 18th and 19th century travel and science - while unable to imagine that women could take part in this - was already able, it seems, to anticipate that the time would come when a researcher would in these 'places' not only find, but also seek (and actually know in advance of) people who are very similar to herself – with a similar education and political socialisation that would prepare us for a similar struggle in similar careers and enable a similar grasp and assessment of contemporary developments and occurrences. The above-cited sentence was, of course, not written with this anticipation in mind, and I will come to its actual reference below, but as it suits the character of my 'field' so well, I choose to consciously misinterpret it here for a moment.

Arjun Appadurai, as I have shown in chapter 2.1., has argued that it is the process of migration and re-grouping that makes the conventional anthropological assumption of stable

³³² Johannes Fabian, 2002, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, New York: Columbia University Press (reprint of the first edition 1983), p. 6.

and repetitive cultural systems and communities problematic. While he argues with the components of space and mobility (the general applicability of which I have so far tried to dispute), the same argument can be made with regard to those who stay and the components of time and change. In both cases, however, as I have also tried to demonstrate so far, the unquestioned application of the very concept of culture, even as an adjective, becomes debatable. There were, theoretically, even for non-religious, non-missionary travellers from West to East and North to South, which was – like still for today’s transnational television and a good percentage of current anthropology – the dominant route of travel, ‘people like oneself’ actually to be found rather early on. The possible realisation of similarities, however, was complicated by aspects such as language, lack of long term-contact as well as pre-existing projections. Members of the local elites, moreover, tended to be seen, particularly with unfolding imperialism, as being involved in matters of administration and politics and to be excluded from an anthropology that did not merely draw catalogues of the native population but that also developed its vocation in “an effort to salvage [them] from the pulverizing effects of Western imperial expansion and industrial capitalism”³³³, which conditioned a focus on ensuring empirical testimony of the ‘native point of view’. The *ethno* in ethnology tended to reserve the term of culture for this point of view, and the *anthro* in anthropology did thus seem to apply only to ‘natives’ and somewhat de-humanised members of the elite as well as of the middle classes. While this actually implied an (undeclared) political attitude and ethical positioning, as ‘the natives’ were not researched and analysed because they were ‘natives’, but because they were subjected, under-represented and threatened, it also helped to shape the impression of the non-West as altogether ‘native’, ‘human’ and culturally completely different lands for a (too) long time. To some degree, this relation has been repeated with the focus on audiences and popular culture in media and cultural studies.

Alas, where is ‘the native’ today, and whose point of view is he or she to represent? A researcher in the field of commercial television that is peopled by members of different, partly intertwined elites (Hindi, English, commercial) and the upper middle class is not only taking a politically ambivalent position as she is providing an additional representational space for a group that generally has no troubles of getting its ideas represented. She is also expected to have a rather thorough grasp not only on the political and cultural history and situation but

³³³ Liisa Malkki, 1997, “News and Culture: Transitory Phenomena and the Fieldwork Tradition”, in: Akhil Gupta/James Ferguson (eds.), *Anthropological Locations. Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 88.

also on the development of television in the country beforehand in order to be taken seriously by her interview-partners in the first place. This, in turn, inevitably creates the provision of a discussion between equal participants rather than an interview with an Other that in my case also included a sometimes common, sometimes divergent struggle to come to terms with, assess and find explanations for the ongoing processes and events, generating a situation in which, as Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin have aptly noted, “our [the Western anthropologists’, B.O.] ability to assert a privileged claim for cultural representation is sharply limited”³³⁴, if not altogether suspended.

Beyond that, a focus on today’s professional producers of culture shows, as elaborated in chapter 4, that it is precisely the former self-evidence of their views that has meanwhile come under scrutiny and that it was members of the elite and the middle classes that were now in their functions as TV executives, producers and journalists somewhat in the role of the anthropologist, ordered ‘as Indians’ to represent (translated into ‘cater to’) a population that was (for the sake of commercial gain) increasingly framed in terms of cultural patterns and religious sensitivities – a development, which generated amongst these producers typical ‘anthropological’ feelings of unleashed empathy and affection at the sight of ‘the native’ (‘the people’), of over-protectiveness, over-identification and a craving for closeness (resulting in a tendency towards over-representation), as well as of irritation and even repulsion and struggles to retain a self and to keep a personal distance. The ‘native point of view’ is today not far from ‘the viewer’s/consumer’s point of view’. This constellation of anthropology and media populism intertwined, which is maybe not as new as it seems, obviously had an impact on my own role as an anthropological researcher, as it forced me to think of anthropology’s contemporary options and compulsions and almost ‘naturally’ led to an impression of moving amongst (involuntary) colleagues of a second order rather than mere informants. They were – instigated by the pressure from a transnational commercial agent - learning about and simultaneously constructing ‘their own’ culture at the same time that I was trying to research its visual representations, altering Appadurai’s self-determined ‘production of locality’ into a compulsory ‘production of nationality’.

Moreover, conventional differences between anthropological researcher and interviewees, which also include the silent norm of an educational and financial gap that essentially mirrored the historical economic gap between ‘First’ and ‘Third’ World, have particularly in a field such as the media not merely started to level themselves out but have already taken a

³³⁴ Ginsburg et al. (eds.), p. 23.

reverse relation. The main difference between me and my informants was that their education had in some cases been far more elitist than mine and that their income lay, in a now predominantly economically rather than intellectually or bureaucratically framed job, in many cases relatively, and in quite a few also absolutely above the means that I could even dream of as an ordinary Western scholar. This reversal alludes in the case of education to the effects of a particularly British colonialism and in the case of income to the upshots of a globalised economic liberalism that partly rejected and partly reinforced each other. While this reversal seems to even underscore the urgency to engage in a work of rescue and preservation of whatever is left of indigenous forms of life, it on the other hand illustrates the rapidly changing parameters of the economical and the political, which also complicate an approach to the indigenous, let alone of whole systems and societies, in merely cultural terms. The cases where the anthropologist's 'indigenous objects' had upon his or her arrival vanished in a car, were existing under miserable conditions in scattered places, were busy with protecting – and thus inevitably re-inventing – their heritage (not seldom using different media themselves) or had become part of political culturalism, activism or majoritarianism have been numerous and obvious, fundamentally obfuscating framings of the 'natural' or the 'ontological' (see 5.3.2.).³³⁵

In this context it is not without irony that it seems to be the political which enables to keep up the old imbalance between anthropologist and researched at least to some extent, also evidencing that projections of culture are strong components in maintaining and establishing power relations on a global scale. Despite a BJP-government in power that sought to actively restrict the work of foreign (Western) academics in the country, I received for each stay a six-months visa attached to which were no obligations of official affiliation with an established institution or any further inquiries (I am aware that this description supports critics of this liberal practise, but can here only emphasise that this is not at all my intention). At the same time, there were TV-executives on the management level that were out of reach for me and who I only saw coming or leaving in their air-conditioned limousines, while I generally drove up in a three-wheeler (or auto-rikshaw), usually drenched in sweat and exhausted after being stuck in traffic jams and overcrowded local trains and out to meet miraculously freshly dressed and well-perfumed informants. But I found relatively easy access even to leading

³³⁵ Hugh Raffles, for instance, in his account of life at the Amazon as a century-old interaction between humans and nature rather than an untouched wilderness, refers to this when he writes that "in Amazonia, visitors have struggled to locate new experiences on old intellectual maps, returning again and again to discover the region, as if for the very first time (2002, *In Amazonia. A Natural History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 6.

executives' offices, where the objective of my work was generally immediately understood and also openly appreciated (only two people categorically declined a meeting), leading in quite a few cases to an extension of our conversations into the interviewee's spare time and private life. This certainly had to do with similarities between us in interests and lifestyle, with places in the city we would go after work (even if getting there on different transportation), and sometimes even with common friends or acquaintances. Apart from the acute political situation (see below), in which an outsider appeared most welcome (to some) as an interlocutor, this openness may partly still have had to do with the fact that I am from the West, but rather in the sense that the process of commercialisation was in its sudden predominance still a new experience, which a Westerner was seen to be more accustomed to as well as – representatively - responsible for (even though this ignored the substantial differences between Europe and the US, but also within Europe in this regard) and which engendered a higher level of reflection amongst my informants on the dimension of change in my presence. I had, amongst other things, the function of offering a reality-check. But there has developed over the past ten years a strong pursuit of documentation and research in India, sometimes through universities but often also through independent and small institutions and organisations, which prominently include the media and which have effectively broken through former barriers of access and ignorance in traditional bureaucratic India. Executives of commercial television, who themselves often belong to another generation in being part of the above-described post-Doordarshan elite are generally more aware that they are answerable to requests for information.

However, those of my informants but also those of the independent researchers who would have been by their academic training equipped and interested in pursuing a similar research amongst TV stations in Europe or the US (which is overdue!), would in many cases face hurdles receiving visa equally easily (unless being on a professional trip, having undergone the complicated process of university affiliation or being invited by a relative which is an increasing likelihood), let alone getting swift access to the decision-making levels in these stations (which would, however, also not necessarily be easy for a Westerner). Similarities, like differences, are thus (unfortunately) not merely a matter of empiricism but of recognition and acknowledgement, and free mobility in legal security is still largely a prerogative of those holding a Western passport.

The quote relating to secular travel above, however, is obviously not really anticipating these empirical similarities between researcher and researched that have developed over time and

have actually eradicated the sense of difference as much as of a past tense (and are, in fact, more talking about the future than anything else). Indeed, this is a process that early anthropology was just *not* able to fathom and that current anthropology still grapples with. The ‘finding of nothing but oneself’ the way it is meant in the quote is predicated upon the idea “to complete the history of man”³³⁶ in the sense that “sailing to the ends of the earth, is in fact travelling in time [and] exploring the past; every step [the philosophical traveller] makes is the passage of an age.”³³⁷ This 19th century perception of the ‘other’ in secularised and naturalised – in the sense of geographically evolutionised – time has in modern anthropology been transformed into the ‘ethnographic present’, which describes “the practice of giving accounts of other cultures and societies in the present tense”³³⁸, as if the researched could be assumed to still live in the same way by the time the report would be completed and read, in the years to come, by other scholars. The ethnographic present has since long been probed as unduly generalising the researched and as denying them the dimension of history by freezing them in a timelessness that resonates with colonialism’s denial of modernity to them (see chapter 2.1.). It has increasingly been modified in the sense that younger anthropologists have taken to understanding their fields as embedded in a (post)modern process – including the “modernity of ethnicity” in Appadurai’s sense – as well as researching aspects of genealogy and change and present their findings within historical timeframes. Moreover, as Fabian points out, the ethnographic present has also the simple quality of being a literary practise. Yet it is, “on the whole, [...] clearly temporalizing”³³⁹ and still prevalent in anthropological work, not least prepared through anthropology’s basic approach to go somewhere in order to find out how it (or something) *is* there, even if it is change itself.

My use of the past tense is thus related to a growing consciousness of the pace of general change, with the media being a field that generates and reflects this speed in a particularly salient manner. Consequently, it is intrinsically bound to the sense in which my informants tended to use it, namely to what Benedict Anderson has called “condensed secular time”³⁴⁰ as a precondition of conventional modern media’s capacity to generate the simultaneity of consuming them, and to the rapid pursuit of this simultaneity in the face of an acute turning point – in terms of intensified pressure of commercialisation – and of the particularly fast development in the Indian media sector as a whole. Many of my informants, while still

³³⁶ Ibid, quoting La Pérouse, p. 8.

³³⁷ Ibid, quoting Degérando, p. 7.

³³⁸ Ibid, p. 80.

³³⁹ Ibid, p. 87.

³⁴⁰ Anderson, 1991, p. 33.

moving in the same circles, are as I am writing this not any more in the same position I interviewed them in three years ago, and most of them, I suspect, would not even answer the same questions any more in the same way (see chapter 6).

On the other hand, the past tense is used in order to illustrate the impossibility of an ethnographic present in the face of accidentally conducting research at a moment of acute calamity – in my case the pogrom of Gujarat, which literally commenced the day I took up my fieldwork. The necessity to use the past tense in such a case, condensed even when doing research on media, has been most aptly expressed by Liisa Malkki in her very own approach to acknowledging the significance of the news media for anthropology. While anthropologist and journalist are intrinsically bound by being equally dependent on ‘good material’ and ‘expressive interviews’, Malkki’s observation that “the journalists arrive just as the anthropologist is leaving”³⁴¹ makes plain how strongly anthropology is in its basic approach focussed on the ‘normal’ – and thus the re(present)ative - and has inherently no space for moments of unforeseeable rupture. The anthropologist makes sure of taking ‘the present’ away with him as untainted as possible by literally fleeing that moment, while the journalist arrives in order to make a story of which she knows that it will be past tomorrow.

The research of mass media, unless it is concerned with general systemic or historical aspects, always and inevitably entails the momentary, simply because the media themselves live off the momentary, which might partly explain anthropology’s particular obstruction towards them. To work with the mass media in a country necessarily means to commit oneself to quite an extent to the ephemeral, a condition which is, metaphorically speaking, driven to extremes with digitalisation that allows through instant eradication of the product also the eradication of the impression that a picture was taken or a word was written at all. This does not mean that research of the mass media would not allow for lasting insights, as, for instance, Raymond Williams’ first and to date influential account of television as a popular practise shows.³⁴² Yet, even he cannot renounce of giving programme examples (from US television) in order to support his explanations, which locates his work not merely in a rough period, but at a very precise date in time. This does particularly account for the area of news but also for that of entertainment, even though research of the latter seems less exposed to the grip of time. While analysis of news has thus predominantly been focussed on their structural

³⁴¹ Malkki, p. 93.

³⁴² Raymond Williams, 2003, *Television*, London/New York: Routledge (reprint of the 1974 edition).

characteristics, studies of soaps and shows have often not coincidentally concentrated on long-running successes and milestones, as I have done so far with *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* and will continue doing with the ‘K-formula’. Analysis – of the contents, production or reception – of internationally known programmes such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Coronation Street*, *Crossroads*, *Neighbours*, *Wheel of Fortune*, *The Cosby Show*, *The Price is Right* etc. has generally attempted to escape the momentary and evoke some general representativeness, yet have often done so (or had to do so) at the cost of looking at the changes that such a long-running show undergoes within even one year in terms of new or altered characters, plotlines, costumes, backdrops, directors, production members or even companies etc., and on the reception side in terms of assessments and popularity. While we have thus a slowly building, still highly Western and English language-dominated history of popular TV-programming, each of which is contingent upon a period in time, we have hardly any knowledge of the short-term experiences with television, i.e. of the way in which certain programmes get selected for screening, of flops and failures, of attempts, negotiations and denials and of the changing moods and receptiveness of audiences – and thus of the way in which television, its producers and its consumers actually relate to each other. Given that conventional television itself turns out to be increasingly subjected to time and might be history sooner or later, as shown in chapter 2, respective research might not even be able to make up for this, particularly in non-Western countries. In a situation of acute change in the media landscape itself, moreover, as I have witnessed in India with regard to the emergence of news channels between 2002 and 2003, using the present becomes equally hard. As I have indicated in the previous chapter, half the news channels I had started with in 2002 did not exist any more in 2003, but had reorganised themselves (or been reorganised) – partly with the same staff - in a completely new way by 2005, and it is likely that this changing process will be the norm rather than the exception.

But to work with the mass media in a society also necessarily means to draw a different picture of that society, which is, however, no less ‘true’, particularly given their increasing ubiquity. Media are not any more an addition to (any) society, as earlier framings of ‘society and the media’ have suggested, but are becoming an intrinsic part of it, even for those who lack access, as the increasing knowledge of different media’s existence and emergence generates a consciousness of their relevance as well as of (permanent) change. To stay with Malkki’s observation, the leaving anthropologist at a moment of concrete rupture in terms of a political upheaval, an armed conflict, a genocide, civil war, a bomb attack or a natural

catastrophe takes with her the – not entirely altruistic – hope that nothing happens to ‘her field’, while the journalists arrive in order to make this happening the focus of their attention. The journalists, even though at least partly from the same society, might know nothing much in advance about the concrete area they are going to report from (which casts additional doubts on concepts of coherent cultures), whereas the anthropologist might be thoroughly acquainted with it (which is why she is then called onto television as an expert). The helplessness, worry, disgust, even trauma might be the same with the reporting journalist (see chapter 6) and with the anthropologist, who is generally following – in case of an internationally ‘relevant’ occurrence – the development in front of his own TV-screen in safety (in Malkki’s case the genocide of the Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda and Burundi in 1994). Yet for one rupture and change are part of looking at the world, while for the other change is liable to still be an exception before a background of ‘normality’. The very focus on ‘change’ in much anthropological work recently seems to emphasise rather than to refute that.

Doubtlessly particularly the news media are not only immanently focussed on change, they also, as CNN’s history and the just described development of Aaj Tak (as well as the boom in Indian news channels after the Gujarat pogrom) evidence, grow on and with conflict and war. However, anthropological research on mass media makes it, in a very immediate sense, at least possible *not* to leave (in fact, it makes it almost compulsory to stay), which leads to a very different representation of the researched field not – as I hope to have made clear by now – necessarily in the sense of an affirmative depiction of the media but in the sense of making rupture and discontinuity an integral part of the work. More generally or metaphysically, the critical recognition not only of the mass media’s existence and inherent temporary logic in nearly every country of the world by now, but also their rapid development particularly outside the West may allow for taking into account the aspect of continuous transformation also in other fields of anthropological research more thoroughly, leading, hopefully, to a greater constancy and interdisciplinarity of research itself.

At the same time, the above-described constellation also underscores that fieldwork itself is always not only temporary, but also temporal and coincidental, and in that shaping the very perception of the researcher over time. Our stays in the field are not only limited, even if they take months on end, they also in their practise depend on numerous factors such as the release of funds, university obligations, flight schedules, family considerations, coordination with colleagues or co-investigators and assistants, climate considerations, availability of

informants and many more, which make us end up in the continuing history of a place at a coincidental point in time.

Between 2002 and 2004, when I conducted the fieldwork for this study, India saw, amongst many other things, the most thorough communal assault on Muslims since Independence, India and Pakistan at the brink of war, the re-election of BJP-Chief Minister Narendra Modi in Gujarat (see below), the voting out of the BJP-led NDA-coalition at the centre and its replacement by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) - the first coalition government headed by the Congress – and ongoing substantial shifts in the media landscape. All of these I followed directly during the spans of my presence and more indirectly – even though far more immediately than even six years ago through e-mail, phone, Internet etc. - during the times of my absence. The former nevertheless developed a far greater impact on my perception – and, for instance, the questions I put to my informants – than the latter. Altogether, though, is it basically these two years that inform the perspective of my current writing. Had I, by coincidence, started this research a mere two years earlier, say, at the peak of *KBC's (Kaun Banega Crorepati)* success (the first relay of which was not on air any more during my fieldwork, making necessary my evaluation of it through archive material, while a second relay started only in 2005) and before the start even of the Sangh Parivar's latest campaign to start the construction of the proposed Ram Mandir (temple) at the site of the destroyed Babri Masjid in Ayodhya (which commenced in late 2001 and as embedded in which the Gujarat pogrom should be seen – see below), the material would have been substantially different and so would have been the written results which other scholars read in order to get an idea of 'television in India'.

While climatic change, moreover, is increasingly a truly global phenomenon, causing ruptures and the loss of former life conditions equally in many parts of the world, political moments of rupture are still different. The immense number of nearly 2000 registered armed conflicts, which have taken place in the world since 1946, does not even include attempted genocides such as the one in Gujarat and what Paul Brass has termed as an “institutionalized system of riot production”³⁴³ in India that involves recurring provoked and organised violence between Hindus and Muslims and that has generally not been recognised or included in studies other than those consciously researching this violence or the structures and organisations implicated in its occurrence (see below). At the same time did the registered armed conflicts partly

³⁴³ Paul R. Brass, 2003, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. xv.

involve Western states, particularly the US, France and Britain, but have hardly been staged on Western soil or directly concerned Europe (apart from the conflict in Northern Ireland, the Basqueland, and the war in Yugoslavia 1992-1995).³⁴⁴ While this shows the West's capacity to export its wars, it also underpins that violent conflicts of dramatic scale, often in a postcolonial context, take place overwhelmingly in the areas of the world, where anthropological research is still for a good part carried out, even though there have been increasing moves away from this pattern, particularly with research on migration. But in terms of a 'peaceful present' it has, at least for a very long time, been the West that had a fairly uninterrupted and continuous existence (as opposed to the image of unperturbed permanence in indigenous areas), and the initial disbelief over the 09/11-attacks also reveals how much we had taken this state for granted. The untroubled picture of the West shows increasing rifts and vibrates with growing repercussions of conflicts elsewhere, which have not least increased with the 'war on terror' and which at the same time generate globally common patterns regarding questions of nationalism, democracy, minority politics, ethnic, religious and gender discrimination and social and economic exclusion. As far as concrete violent conflict and rupture on a large scale is concerned, however, chances are still to be confronted with it outside the West. Landing coincidentally at such a moment, which could not possibly have been anticipated and included in the preparations, is still entirely different than consciously going out and do fieldwork at temporary locations in the aftermath of violence, like Malkki did in refugee camps in Tanzania³⁴⁵, or on a riot itself, as Veena Das did during the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi 1984.³⁴⁶ It takes away the preliminary decision to examine something and forces one to completely re-think its appropriateness at that very moment (see below). On the other hand, however, it is not all that exceptional that basically my whole perception of developments in India over the past 16 years has been coined by coincidentally arriving at moments of rupture.

Amongst my very first impressions of India, which I then travelled not yet as an anthropologist, were the young upper caste-men combusting themselves in the streets of Delhi at the impending implementation of the Mandal Commission Report after V.P. Singh's

³⁴⁴ See the database provided by the Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW) at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) and the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University at www.prio.no/cwp/ArmedConflict/ (July 2006).

³⁴⁵ Liisa Malkki, 1990, "Context and Consciousness: Local Conditions for the Production of Historical and National Thought among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania", in: Fox (ed.), pp. 32-62.

³⁴⁶ Veena Das, 1985, Anthropological Knowledge and Collective Violence: The Riots in Delhi, November 1984, in: *Anthropology Today* 1 (3), pp. 4-6.

victory in the election 1990, which also marked the initial impact on Purnima Mankekar's beginning fieldwork at the time and which she not coincidentally describes at some length in the first pages of her book, emphasising their influence on her whole analysis. Only two years later, then part of a group out to do research on Indian cinema but ending up with a documentary on the just begun 'invasion from the skies' and the abrupt development of private and transnational television, we were caught by the destruction of the Babri Masjid while shooting in Madhya Pradesh and happened to be on a train towards Bombay when the second, even more violent phase of the post-Ayodhya riots broke out in the city in January 1993 (see below). Our nearly empty train pulled into a Victoria Terminus in which large crowds of Muslims had gathered in the hope to catch a train that would take them out of the place, and our following stay in Bombay witnessed terrible scenes of violence and destruction, including the counting of corpses in the streets.

My only pretty rupture-less time of research was in 1996/97, even though it fell into the time of the quick succession of four different governments in a span of two years and the near-complete dismantling of the old Congress-system, with the 'democratic revolution', on the one hand, manifesting itself for the first time in coalition governments of the United Front – first under Deve Gowda, then under Inder Gujral. On the other hand, it became increasingly obvious that the BJP was able to claim a rather strong position in this revolution. After it had already been in power in June 1996 for a whole 13 days, it was re-elected in 1998 to then remain in power until 2004.

I was thus, through these former coincidental arrivals at ruptures and particular moments in India's contemporary history, which only in hindsight form into a more coherent story of Hindutva's way to power, somewhat pre-destined to particularly react, when news from Gujarat appeared on the TV screen. Two days after my first landing in India, in the morning hours of the 27th February, 2002, the Sabarmati Express-train, filled with about 1700 kar sevaks – or 'Ram sevaks', as they were now called (Hindu-nationalist volunteers in pursuit of building a Ram Mandir in Ayodhya) -, on its way from Ayodhya to Ahmedabad caught fire just outside the train station of Godhra in the state of Gujarat. The fire killed 58 (some sources speak of 59) of the Ram sevaks, amongst them many children and women, and the first violent attacks on Muslims were reported from different places in Gujarat on the same day. To be sure, it had been clear to me that Hindu nationalism would have to play a part in my fieldwork, not least because I was to conduct it under a BJP-led government. But I had not been sure to what extent and in what form I would have to consider it, as it was, after all,

mainstream commercial television that I was focussing on, whose relations to the government and state politics, particularly in the absence of coherent legislation, were themselves part of my questions, as the previous chapters have shown. Now it became evident to me that Hindutva's role would be far more immediate than I had thought, even though I could not even have known then that the unfolding pogrom would basically span the whole three months of my first stay (it did not really die down until the middle of May, when finally special commandos were brought in by the central government).

This is not to say that it would – for instance, for a researcher who had accidentally arrived at less precarious moments before or maybe for the first time altogether - not have been possible to make the quest for Hindutva's significance less of a central issue and that there would not exist other and more general aspects to the development and practise of the television landscape, which I have tried to cover in the chapters up to now (even though they already show how impossible it actually is to keep Hindutva out). It would even, given that the actual violence remained confined to Gujarat and thus occurred 'far away' from my main places of research, Bombay and Delhi, and most interviewees were not particularly pushing the topic, been possible to largely sideline the complex and get on with the leading questions I had prepared.

There were particular reasons why I did not do so. 'Gujarat' was certainly not only the communal violence least possible to fully ignore ever in India, and to conduct interviews and watch television in what would have become an artificially secluded bubble seemed somewhat impossible. But Gujarat also, as was discernable quite quickly, marked a climax of Hindutva's power and influence most clearly in the state of Gujarat but also in the larger national arena. In this context, it was also the very possibility of disconnecting anthropological fieldwork from moments of political rupture, as long as they do not immediately and physically affect the field itself, which I suspect to support readings of cultural agency or cultural resistance that actually become questionable precisely through such ruptures. Media and their contents are never disconnected from the political climate in which they operate, including a de-politicising environment, but they are also not quite that environment itself. Thus in my particular case *in how far* my field was immediately and (physically) affected by the pogrom became a practical as well as an ethical question. The source of my material were not only interviews and conversations with executives and journalists, on some of whose assessments and even constitution the events in Gujarat had an immediate impact. Some news reporters in particular were quite traumatised (see 6.3.1.), and

to sideline the violence would also have meant to sideline their (first time) experiences at the cost of those who had the luck or were indifferent enough not to be directly affected. But my work was also dependent on the near-daily consumption (and recording) of television programming, which was, at least in 2002, to an unprecedented degree dominated by reports on 'live events' – and thus on the Gujarat violence -, and to sideline this substantial percentage in favour of reporting on other – 'general' - topics would have meant a bias in itself. The near absence of reporting on Gujarat the year after (see 6.1.) thus inevitably (and rightfully) came to be understood as being contingent upon the excessive reporting a year before rather than as representing 'the normality'.

While thus on the one hand the images that I saw in 2002 daily on the TV screen related directly to the violence in the sense that they were reporting and (partly) analysing it, they on the other hand also appeared - and this included the 'K-formula' on the entertainment channels, which had a near-total presence and a highly receptive viewership - in their very form almost as an expression of the larger transformation in terms of ideology and commercialisation and that connected India's transnationalised and re-nationalising television development over the past decade with the political climax that the violence in Gujarat turned out to signify.

This did clearly not mean that the national media, and television in particular, had simply become the mouthpiece of Hindutva ideology. On the contrary, most of my informants in the television business were very clearly dissociating themselves from any such suspicion, and neither propaganda nor manipulation, even though neither were absent, were fully appropriate terms in the situation. The correlation happened on quite different levels, which involved dramatically changing levels of influence, appropriation, and understanding of the media, and particularly of the English language media, as indicated in chapter 4, as well as an interlinking of different forms of *de*-ideologising that I have already referred to in chapter 3 and will further elaborate in chapter 8. What could basically be observed in the context of Gujarat, I argue, was a rapid dismantling, actively and passively aided by the agency of the Sangh Parivar, of the representative functions of conventional media, and of television in particular. In order to approach this context in the coming parts of the study, this chapter starts off with a brief description of the events in Gujarat and their framing and representation through agents of the Sangh Parivar. An ensuing comparative analysis of the larger frameworks of the violence in Gujarat and the violence in Bombay, capital of the state of Maharashtra, in 1993 is to elucidate the changing and differing evaluation of the ideological and the economical over

time and in different regional contexts of India (including regional media) in order to assess more closely what kind of a climax Gujarat actually represented.

5.2. *Not Just Another Riot: Why Gujarat was Different*

I did thus not arrive at Gujarat in a geographical sense. Rather, it was Gujarat that got somewhat relieved from its geographical definition and became a signifier of a turning point in time, recognisable through expressions like “after Gujarat”, “at the time of Gujarat”, or “before Gujarat happened” entering everyday conversations and interviews, particularly during my second stay in 2003.

It is not my intention here to recount the events of Gujarat themselves in a detailed way, which has been done by others extensively with often-admirable clear-headedness and speed.³⁴⁷ Suffice here to say that what became known as the above-described ‘Godhra incident’ - the burning alive of 58 or 59 Ram sevaks in the Sabarmati Express train - was not followed by a mere ‘riot’, triggered off by the anger of one group at what looked like a provocation by the other. The term riot suggests an equal or at least balanced involvement and strength of two parties, in this case of Hindus and Muslims. As Paul Brass has argued, the long history of Hindu-Muslim violence in India has after Independence formed into an institutionalised form of a riot system, which “is functionally useful for both political parties [communal and secular, B.O.] and the Indian state.”³⁴⁸ This system, however, has undergone a shift insofar as “in fact, several of the riots of the 1980s and 1990s have been closer to pogroms or massacres of minorities than riots.”³⁴⁹ The pogrom of Gujarat was the first that was, even before the assaults finally died down in May 2002, associated with the term genocide.³⁵⁰ This was not because of the death toll, the actual height of which has not been

³⁴⁷ See, apart from the numerous fact-finding reports, Panikkar/Muralidharan (eds.), and Flavia Agnes (ed.), 2002, *Of lofty claims and muffled voices*, Bombay: majlis.

³⁴⁸ Brass, 2003, p. 317.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ See, for instance, Pamela Philipose, 2002, A word called ‘genocide’, in: *The Indian Express*, April 24; Shail Mayaram, 2002, “Genocide of the Idea of Gujarat”, in: Siddarth Varadarajan (ed.), *Gujarat. The Making of a Tragedy*, New Delhi: Penguin, pp. 404-407; and the Report of Communalism Combat (a Bombay magazine that aims to fight communalism), edited by Teesta Setalvad and Javed Anand, 2002, *Genocide – Gujarat 2002*, in: Dayal (ed.), 2002, pp. 425-681.

reliably assessed till today, mass graves still being detected.³⁵¹ While the Gujarat government put it not higher than 900, an Indian independent fact finding report estimated around 2000 killed as early as May 2002.³⁵² Within the UN a figure of 3000 was given in 2005³⁵³, which is around the number that got killed in the anti-Sikh riots after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. The toll of displaced persons of the Gujarat pogrom varies between 100 000³⁵⁴ and over 200 000³⁵⁵, which is in the same range as during the Bombay riots 1993 (see below).³⁵⁶ The term genocide came into play because of the plain and uncompromising hatred that was unleashed at the Muslim minority and that was not operating under the usual relative paradigm of 'teaching them a lesson' (in terms of submission under the majority community) but in the totalitarian logic of 'finish them once and for all', which entailed a striving for the annihilation of the entire community. This became most evident not merely in the merciless and holistic forms of the killings, which had an unprecedented sexual overtone and prominently included women (particularly in the form of gang rape and ensuing murder) as well as children³⁵⁷, but also in the subsequent threatening of displaced Muslims wanting to return to their homes.³⁵⁸

It is in this context that the circumstance has to be assessed that the pogrom of Gujarat was unmatched in terms of state involvement and orchestration by the BJP-government under Chief Minister Narendra Modi in Gujarat, which remained unperturbed by the BJP-led NDA-government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the centre (see 5.3.3.). From the permission of public processions and funerals of the Godhra victims in various places in Gujarat, which was bound to aggravate feelings of anger amongst Hindus, and the permission of a bandh (a

³⁵¹ Jake Skeers, "India: victims of Gujarat pogrom found in mass grave", World Socialist Web Site, 24 January 2006 (www.wsws.org/articles/2006/jan2006/guja-j24.shtml).

³⁵² Kamal Mitra Chenoy/ S.P. Shukla/K.S. Subramanian/Achin Vanaik, 2002, *Gujarat Carnage 2002. A Report to the Nation*, without publisher, reprinted in: Dayal (ed.), pp. 232-280.

³⁵³ United Nations, Conseil économique et social, 2005 (daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/GET?Open&DS=E/CN.4/2005/SR.39&Lang=F), pdf-file, p. 7.

³⁵⁴ Second edition of the Human Rights Watch Report, 2003, at: www.hrw.org/reports/2003/india0703/Gujarat.htm.

³⁵⁵ Biraj Swain/Somnath Vatsa, 2004, The importance of not forgetting, in: *Himal Southasia*, March/April, at: www.himalmag.com/2004/march_april/essay.htm.

³⁵⁶ See Eckert, 2003, p. 116.

³⁵⁷ See Fact-Finding by a Women's Panel, 2002, How has the Gujarat Massacre affected minority women? – The Survivors speak, in: Dayal (ed.), pp. 281-344 and Asghar Ali Engineer, 2005, "Gujarat Carnage and Muslim Women", in: *ibid*, *Religion, State & Civil Society*, Bombay: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, pp. 218-222.

³⁵⁸ *The Indian Express*, May 06, 2002: You can come back to your homes *only* if you... Drop rape charge, convert to Hinduism... villagers in Gujarat are setting terms for Muslims to return; *The Asian Age*, May 06, 2002: Riots break out as Muslims return home – 2 burnt alive in Ahmedabad.

general strike)³⁵⁹ on the 28th of February, called by the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parichad), which was to further generate violence, the large absence of actual clashes between Hindus and Muslims and their replacement by fast and calculated attacks on Muslim religious sites and institutions, like dargahs (shrines), mosques and madrasas, but especially on their homes and shops, the respective locations of which could only have been listed this quickly with the help of state organs, via the refusal amongst the police to file FIRs (First Incident Reports) by Muslim victims and witnesses, the quick transfer of police officers who tried to act against members of the Sangh Parivar and the later promotion of officers who had taken ‘stern action’ in the pogrom, to the indifference towards setting up relief camps for victims (which largely had to be run by NGOs or by Muslim organisations themselves) and the quick closure of existing ones (suggesting that actually nothing much had happened), the near-total absence of compensation and rehabilitation, the impediment of experts’ forensic probing of the Sabarmati train, the refusal to allow investigations by the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation), the systematic intimidation, threatening and hindrance of witnesses and human rights activists, as well as lawyers and journalists, the ostentatious use of Godhra victims’ ashes during Modi’s election campaign between September and December 2002, designed as a ‘gaurav yatra’ (procession of honour)³⁶⁰, the one-sided prosecution of Muslims for the ‘Godhra incident’ under the just then enacted Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA – of the 287 cases registered under POTA by December 2003 286 were against Muslims, 96 Muslims were still under arrest for the ‘Godhra incident’ alone in September 2004)³⁶¹ as opposed to the quick closure of cases investigating registered assaults during the pogrom (12 of the accused have been sentenced to life imprisonment in 2003, while nearly all others were acquitted), and the obviously protracted agency of the Nanavati Shah Commission, set up by the Modi-

³⁵⁹ Bandhs have the character of general strikes, which can be called by any organisation strong enough to hope to find reasonable response by the public. Most bandhs are called for by political parties, organisations or unions, and they involve the voluntary closure (bandh) of businesses, workplaces and shops in order to bring public life to a standstill. Bandhs are slightly different from hartals (strike actions), which have more the character of active sit-strikes and may also involve the closure of public institutions. They seem to be stronger rooted in the Independence Movement, initially institutionalised by Mahatma Gandhi in Gujarat (see, for instance, *Time Magazine*, January 18, 1943: “India’s Hartal” at: www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,802590,00.html).

³⁶⁰ A very interesting photographic documentation of the yatra can be seen on the website of the Gujarati BJP at www.bjpguj.org/220902.htm. The section on “calamities”, which interestingly exists, is still under construction, but is most likely to tell about the handling of the catastrophic earthquake in the area of Bhuj in 2001 through the BJP-government (which was, however, effectively so deficient that the BJP lost in most of the successive local elections).

³⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, 2004, *Discouraging Dissent: Intimidation and Harassment of Witnesses, Human Rights Activists, and Lawyers Pursuing Accountability for the 2002 Communal Violence in Gujarat*, at: <http://hrw.org/backgrounders/asia/india/gujarat>, and “Godhra carnage accused arrested” at <http://in.rediff.com/news/2004/sep/02godhra.htm>.

government itself to probe into the Godhra-Gujarat violence (failing to present a report till today), the developments form a rather clear story-line: the interest of the Modi-government to contain the violence and to ensure the protection of the minority was lacking from the very beginning, and its interest in using and even promoting the violence in order to establish itself and the BJP as the ultimate defenders and representatives of Hindus in Gujarat was considerably larger, rendering basic constitutional rights and state obligations defunct.³⁶²

The Sangh Parivar was careful to keep the representation of the events within their known formula applied to communal riots, the bottom line of which constitutes the ontological and ethnically loaded narrative of ‘Muslim provocation’ or ‘Muslim aggression’. The Hindu violence was justified as an understandable outrage and the need to retaliate at the gruesome loss of 58 lives in the Sabarmati train, which then got out of hand. Modi employed in this context Newton’s third law - ‘every action has an equal and opposite reaction’ – thus effectively naturalising the attacks and their scope.³⁶³ But, considering the dimensions, the violence was also immediately framed in terms of powerlessness in the face of growing international Islamist terrorism. The Sangh Parivar, despite contradicting indications and supported by Doordarshan, which was quick to provide a platform for Modi to broadcast his interpretation of the events, made sure that the ‘Godhra incident’ fell in the category of pre-organised conspiracies.³⁶⁴ The VHP classified it as a “manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism”³⁶⁵ and framed the anti-Muslim violence in terms of “an answer to jihad”³⁶⁶, which suggested the involvement of Islamist militant organisations operating outside and inside India as well as the usual first address of accusation, the Pakistani Intelligence Service ISI (Inter Services Intelligence). This instantly built scenario acquired particular plausibility in the still-immediate post-09/11 atmosphere, which was even enhanced through the recent attacks on the Indian parliament in December 2001 and the American Centre in Calcutta in January 2002, the culprits of which were then still to be found. It was instrumental in establishing that the ‘Godhra incident’ had at least been an attack, most probably by Muslims, as a widely accepted fact, silencing the basic question for what had actually happened from

³⁶² See interview with Teesta Setalvad: “Does the Constitution not apply to Gujarat?” at: www.rediff.com.

³⁶³ See *Times of India*, March 03, 2002.

³⁶⁴ *Times of India*, February 28, 2002: Modi terms attack as pre-planned. Teesta Setalvad, after having investigated her report, pointed out that “the theory that [the Godhra incident, B.O.] was pre-planned was floated only at the instance of Mr. Modi. Till 7.30 pm on February 27, Godhra district magistrate maintained that the killings were not pre-planned but once Mr. Modi described it as pre-planned on DD channel, the Gujarat government changed its stance” (‘Anti-Muslim anger grew over 10 years’, in: *The Asian Age*, April 26, 2002).

³⁶⁵ *Times of India*, February 28, 2002: Arrest culprits in 24hrs, VHP tells govt.

³⁶⁶ *The Asian Age*, April 2, 2002: Gujarat riots are an answer to jihad: VHP.

the start.³⁶⁷ While Muslim organisations, fearing the worst, issued condemnations of the “killing of 58 people in Godhra”³⁶⁸, even the most critical stand against the Gujarat pogrom was thus put under the moral obligation to first acknowledge the “heinous crime”³⁶⁹, as it was mostly termed, that had preceded the pogrom, thus fundamentally pre-organising the ensuing public discourse, particularly in the national news media (see 6.2.1.).

Till today, not least because of the systematic impediment of information gathering through Gujarat state officials and organisations, it is not clear what happened in Godhra. However, after first reports still in 2002, which uttered doubts about the possibility of inflaming the Sabarmati Express from outside³⁷⁰, and the presentation of Justice U.C. Banerjee Committee’s interim report, commissioned by the UPA, in 2005, what seems secured is a very provocative behaviour of the Ram sevaks on the train. This appears to have been continuous since they had been going back and forth to Ayodhya on the Sabarmati Express in February as partakers of the VHP’s latest and carefully crafted campaign to start construction on the Ram Mandir, scheduled for the 15th of March, 2002.³⁷¹ The preliminaries of the campaign consisted of a ‘Ram Naam Jap’ (chanting of Ram’s name), begun already in November 2001, which involved “for supporters in a particular locality [...] to recite ‘Shri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram’ non-stop for sixty-five days”³⁷² and which served to create the simultaneity of an emotional gear-up. Those joining the Bajrang Dal and taking part in the ‘yagna’ (literally ‘sacrifice’) in Ayodhya preceding the construction date were given trishuls (tridents, generally the size of a knife, symbolising Lord Shiva’s mythical weapon), saffron

³⁶⁷ See, for instance, Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, 2002, Whither Gujarat? Violence and After, in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 16, p.1009: “[...] three coaches were burnt by a mob after the train was stopped by pulling the chain [...]”

³⁶⁸ *Times of India*, March 01, 2002: Muslim leaders condemn killings in Godhra.

³⁶⁹ See, for instance, Sanat Mohanty, even months after the incident, in his article “Only non-violence can end violence”: “That people were burnt in the train in Godhra was heinous. What was worse was the anger it caused” (*Indian Express*, October 2, 2002); and Bikhu Parekh, 2002, “Making Sense of Gujarat”, in: *Seminar*, Vol. 513, May: *Society under Siege*, p. 28, who engages in a particularly detailed judgement: “All the current available evidence indicates that it was planned. Several hundred Muslims, supported, guided, and even aided by the Mayor and the municipal corporators of Godhra, stopped the Sabarmati Express a little distance from the station, poured petrol, and killed 58 people including children and women. [...] In short, burning down the carriage was a heinous and terrorist act, devoid of mercy, moderation, prudence and even an elementary concern for self-interest.”

³⁷⁰ *Times of India*, July 8, 2002: Godhra bogie burnt from inside, says report; Anosh Malekar, Mystery of the Bogie S6 inferno, in: *The Week*, July 07, 2002; Jyoti Punwani, 2002, “The Carnage at Godhra”, in: Varadarajan (ed.), pp. 45-74.

³⁷¹ The start of the construction, which had been announced and prepared with a bombastic campaign, was eventually toned down into a ‘shila daan’, a public blessing of the columns to be used in the construction, outside the disputed spot in Ayodhya (see *Times of India*, March 16, 2002: Ayodhya build-up ends in tame ‘shila daan’), because the Vajpayee-government knew it could not risk a second violent escalation in the wake of Gujarat and took immediate precautions (see 5.3.2).

³⁷² Punwani, 2002, p. 46.

headbands and ‘Ram sevak-cards’. Altogether over 300 000 Ram sevaks were recruited from all over India (and the fact that they were ultimately kept at bay in Ayodhya on the 15th of March graphically shows that even such a number can be controlled if the state is willing to do so).³⁷³

The Hindi language newspaper Jan Morcha (People’s Front), published in Faizabad, near Ayodhya, had brought a story as early as the 25th of February, reporting that “Bajrang Dal workers armed with trishuls, travelling to Ayodhya on board the Sabarmati Express this morning, let loose a reign of terror upon dozens of helpless Muslim passengers, Burqa clad women and innocent children. They also targeted the people waiting at the platform, forcing them to shout slogans of Jai Shri Ram. A few even declared themselves to be Hindus in order to escape their wrath.”³⁷⁴ The ongoing actions of Ram sevaks thus could have been known – and doubtlessly *were* known by members of the Sangh Parivar, which includes Narendra Modi and his cabinet - and encountered by preliminary security measures along the route of the Sabarmati Express.³⁷⁵ On the 27th of February, the provocative behaviour included the physical harassment of Muslim vendors and the molesting of women on the platform of Godhra station³⁷⁶, which went unhindered by the scarcely present police and resulted in angry stone pelting that involved Muslims as well as Ram sevaks.

The fire itself, which only occurred after the train had left the station again and been brought to a halt by a pull of the emergency chain, cannot convincingly be explained other than having been an accident, caused maybe by “a smouldering object under a berth eventually burning the latex seat” or “a half-smoked cigarette thrown down carelessly, a stove used for making tea not turned off properly [because of] the panic induced by the stoning.”³⁷⁷ In reverse, the ‘Godhra incident’ hence seems to confirm and enhance a general pattern. While

³⁷³ Coomi Kapoor, 2002, Reassessing Hindutva. The guilty sound of silence, in: *The Indian Express*, April 15.

³⁷⁴ “Bajrang Dal Activists on Sabarmati Express Beat Up Muslims, Forcing them to Shout Jai Shri Ram Slogans”, in: Dayal (ed.), p. 1148.

³⁷⁵ Later statements by the former Gujarat Intelligence chief R.B. Shreekumar testified that the return of the Ram sevaks from Ayodhya had been announced by fax through the police in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh (see *Times of India*, August 31, 2004).

³⁷⁶ “Foodstuff was picked up, a vendor’s beard was pulled, another had tea flung in his face, [...], a cigarette-vendor’s tray overturned, and some Muslims were forced to say ‘Jai Shri Ram’. [...] Piplodwala saw a burqa-clad lady running up to the waiting commuters and asking them to do something, not just stand there” (Punwani, 2002, p. 48 and 51).

³⁷⁷ Siddarth Varadarajan, 2005, The truth about Godhra, in: *The Hindu*, January 23; Saba Naqvi Bhaumik/Darshan Desai, 2005, The Coach, The Bogey, in: *Outlook*, January 31 (www.outlookindia.com); “Godhra train fire accidental: Report” at: <http://in.rediff.com/news/2005/jan/17godhra.htm>. In Oktober 2006, a Gujarat High Court ruled that the U.C. Banerjee Committee was ‘illegal’, giving Narendra Modi the opportunity to describe “the High Court order as evidence of a political plot hatched by the UPA government” and indicating the submission of the Gujarat judiciary under Modi’s agenda. Both failed, however, to disprove the findings of the report (Pankaj Vohra, 2006, Between Us: Facts Will Be Facts, in: *Hindustan Times*, October 16).

the Bombay blasts of 1993 have been interpreted as an answer to the riots in the city (see below) and can be seen as signifying the increasing communalisation even of the Bombay underworld, none of the later attacks in India which can indeed be ascribed to Islamist or Kashmiri terrorist groups, from the Parliament attack in December 2001 to the recent bombing of local trains in Bombay in July 2006 (that still awaits clearing up at the time I am writing this), were *followed* by riots. This subscribes to the meanwhile well-established thesis that riots in India, and the bigger they turn the more, have all to do with careful preparation and orchestration and little with spontaneous, uncontrollable eruption.

5.3. *The Economical and the Ideological*

The Gujarat pogrom had a quality that was quite different from earlier Hindu-Muslim violence. Even though the violence remained largely confined to the state of Gujarat, the 'locality' of the violence was larger than ever before, comprising of a whole state. The repercussions on and the meaning for the rest of the nation were even graver than those of the Bombay riots 1992/93, which had been concentrated in India's largest and most metropolitan city.

On the one hand, 'Bombay' and 'Gujarat' stand in a historical lineage with regard to the unfolding open power and influence of Hindutva in Indian society over the past decade (marked not least by a BJP-Prime Minister during Gujarat). Both were, in contrast to earlier Hindu-Muslim violence, non-local in the sense that they were directly linked to the Ramjanmabhoomi-Movement and to the employment of a Ram Mandir's erection in Ayodhya as a symbol of India's proposed redefinition as a 'Hindu Rashtra'. Bombay was connected to the breakdown of the Babri Masjid and confirmed at the time to a political coherence of Hindu nationalist activity on a public national level that had been less developed, or less visible, before (see chapter 7). Gujarat was, ten years later, connected to the enforced agenda to now erect a Ram Mandir in the place and betrayed an unprecedented scale of possible (even though repetitive) mobilisation and of the occupation of public life through the Sangh Parivar (see also chapter 6). In compliance with this genealogy, Gujarat signified a clear step-up in the level of state involvement and organisation of the violence.

But there is also another aspect to this, which has its own meaning for the larger national scenario. Bombay and Gujarat also mark the growing significance of differing regional manifestations of Hindu nationalism – and their divergent successes – under autocratic and charismatic leaders in the wake of (intended and unintended) decentralisation and in interdependence with ‘national Hindutva’. In this context, I propose, the relation between the ideological and the economical plays a salient role. It is no coincidence that the most organised and lethal anti-Muslim violence between 1992 and 2002 occurred in the most affluent and economically developed regions, the ‘power houses’ of India. Quite independent from their genealogical position and beyond the actual violence, Bombay and Gujarat also represent two extremes in the performance and appearance of commercialisation and capitalisation in India and their interaction with Hindutva. While the regional Hindu nationalism of Bal Thackeray’s Shiv Sena in Bombay is continuously compromised by the forces of economic liberalism, Gujarat under Narendra Modi’s BJP signifies the first example in the Indian context where a flourishing neo-liberalism is subordinated to Hindu nationalist ideology. Both variants have a direct relevance for as well are supported by the respective regional media.

5.3.1. Contained by the Global: Bombay 1993

The Bombay violence, which saw altogether over 1000 dead, was the first that occurred in direct relation to an event almost at the other end of India, which could hardly be called a ‘Muslim provocation’, namely the organised destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by forces from different organisations of the Sangh Parivar on the 06th of December 1992 (in this case, the ‘provocation’ consisted in the very existence of the 1528-built mosque on the spot now claimed to be Ram’s birthplace).

The demolition was followed by protests from Muslims in quite a few areas in India (also in Gujarat), including assaults on public property, the police and Hindu temples, and in Bombay by the staging of a celebration rally in Dharavi, Bombay’s (and Asia’s) biggest slum area. The rally was organised by the Shiv Sena (Shivaji’s Army)³⁷⁸, Bombay’s particular brand of Hindu nationalism, which combines in itself the characteristics of an eligible party, like the

³⁷⁸ Named after the Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Bhonslé, short Shivaji (1630-1680), founder of the Maratha empire (1674), who is seen as the ideal Hindu king in resisting the Mughals and carving large territory out of their empire, mainly through an organised system of guerrilla tactics.

BJP, and of a paramilitary force as well as a social-service system, like the RSS, which is organised in over 200 local 'shakhas' (branches) all over the city.³⁷⁹ Protests by Muslims were immediately met by attacks from the Shiv Sena, and ultimately, these first clashes saw more victims amongst the Muslims, most of them through police firing. The second wave of the 'riots', starting on the 06th of January 1993, consisted of more systematic and brutal violence, in intensity and form (the practise of tossing burning tires round Muslims' necks acquired a sad fame at the time), if not in scope quite comparable with the Gujarat pogrom.

Jim Masselos, in his analysis of the Bombay riots, names three factors that provoked and generated the violence. The most obvious is the rise of communalist politics, which involved the increasing public spectacularisation of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement (see chapter 7), the growing influence of the BJP in national electoral politics³⁸⁰, and the particular Marathi Hindu nationalism of the Shiv Sena. The Shiv Sena aims at a 'Maharashtra for Maharashtrians', the construction of which has used up a number of 'foreigners' as enemy-image since the 1960s - when the Sena was founded by its infamous charismatic leader 'Supremo' Bal Thackeray - ranging from South Indians via Gujaratis to Muslims. The latter have remained the main target in accordance with the rise of the BJP. The Shiv Sena had done increasingly well in the municipal elections in Bombay during the 1980s, and even though its electoral support base was in decline by the beginning of the 1990s (which most certainly influenced its decision to stage a riot)³⁸¹, it represented a genuine force in the political arena as well as in Bombay society. Shiv sainiks (members of the Sena) had been prominent amongst the kar sevaks (Hindu nationalist volunteers) that tore down the Babri Masjid. After the December violence had ebbed down, the Sena organised over the New Year in various locations in Bombay continuously so-called 'maha aartis' (great pujas), which are largely a Sena-invention ('aartis' normally not involving a big congregation of people) and which served to agonise Muslims performing 'namaaz' at the same time. Towards the second week

³⁷⁹ Eckert points out that the Sena's shakhas are more organised as branches of the party, while the RSS shakhas rather have the character of training cells (Eckert, p. 16). The actual success of the Sena's more socio-political provision-system, however, is disputed. While Eckert sees the social services of the Sena as the effective proficiency of 'getting things done' and thus legitimising their claim, Thomas Blom Hansen has pointed out that the image is not quite coherent with the reality, as he found the shakhas often closed and inactive, suggesting that the Sena "mainly exists as a movement when engaged in high-profile, often violent actions" (Hansen 2001, p. 56).

³⁸⁰ While the electoral success of the BJP had been very modest in the 1980s, it has seen a constant rise since 1989, when it was already needed to tolerate V.P. Singh's government. It was responsible for its quick fall, immediately withdrawing support after the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report (see A.G. Noorani, 2000, pp. 64-66, and Partha S. Ghosh, 1999, *BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism. From Periphery to Centre*, New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 94/95).

³⁸¹ See Eckert, p. 127: "It is only through the large scale riots and tensions of the post-Ayodhya period that the organization was able to recover."

in January they increasingly turned into “physical gathering points and emotional rallying spaces from which gangs moved out to attack Muslim targets.”³⁸² The dimension of this mobilisation was immense. Between the 26th of December and the 5th of February, 498 ‘maha aartis’ took place, a good number of them attracting crowds of more than 1500 people.³⁸³

The second factor in the generation of the January violence concerns the role of criminal gangs (goondas) and real estate developers, who form an unholy alliance in the fight for foundation soil and profit on Bombay’s increasingly congested peninsula. Masselos suspects that “there is a clear connection between developers and gangs in manipulating the outbreaks of communal hostility [...]”³⁸⁴ “And once the riots had got going there was hardly any law and order mechanism in force able or willing to control what was happening throughout the city. In some cases the legal landowners or developers employed gangs to set fire to shanty settlements and thus clear the land of occupants and enable subsequent middle class development to take place.”³⁸⁵ These actions were dissociated from an ideological enemy image. They hit Hindus and Muslims alike and were the work of gangs which had Muslim as well as Hindu leaders, whose competition may have been influenced by their community background but were not exclusively guided by it. Even if “the Mumbai riots tell very few stories of an economic restructuring”³⁸⁶ in the end, violence executed in its pursuit was not marginal.

The third factor that Masselos names is what he describes as diffuse violence, which he attributes to Bombay’s fast changing urban landscape. The disintegration of industrial structures (particularly the textile mill industry) and trade unions and the spread of un- and underemployment as well as work outside legal control (like, for instance, the private television business on the one hand and unsecured daily pay on the other), the rapid growth of an immigrant population assembling from all over India, the speedy evolvment of big money and high rise upper class housing as opposed to the decay of older residential structures and the expansion of slum areas (which have come to provide housing not only for the really poor, but also for parts of the lower middle classes), and the resulting insecurity regarding safe life

³⁸² Jim Masselos, 1996, “The Bombay Riots of January 1993: The Politics of Urban Conflagration”, in: McGuire/Reeves/Brasted, p. 116.

³⁸³ Pralay Kanungo, 2002, *RSS’s Tryst with Politics*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 209.

³⁸⁴ Masselos, p. 121.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 120.

³⁸⁶ Eckert, p. 119.

perspectives contributed to “the readiness of many Bombay people to resort to street level violence of an especially malign kind.”³⁸⁷

In Masselos’ depiction the last two forms of violence, goondaism and diffuse violence, seem to have worked largely independently from the one organised by the Shiv Sena and even been in some competition with it, which is, however, not quite convincing. Riots doubtlessly provide a space for organised crime as well as for looting and stealing, and an opportunity to release anger and frustration. Yet it remains doubtful whether they are – unless really existential matters are at stake – actually motivated by them. If that were the case, we would see far more rioting of this kind in the swelling metropolises round the globe, and we would most probably have seen more in Bombay since.³⁸⁸ Goondas and developers are not likely to even have instigated communal incidents would they have not been able to rely on the Sena to act in a foreseeable manner and to carry the violence further under its agenda. Similarly, feelings of powerlessness and fear as well as prejudices and even hatred amongst wider sections of society may well be diffuse, but are usually contained and need the occasion of an already happening mobilisation in order to get translated into action.³⁸⁹ Without the Shiv Sena, which provided, supported by the biased action or non-action of the police, not only an organised force but also the indispensable ideological justification for the killings (as a necessary act of defense and action against ‘Muslim provocation’)³⁹⁰, behind which other motives could work themselves out, the Bombay riots would most certainly not have happened the way they did.

However, while the Bombay riots showed that the Shiv Sena was largely successful in destabilising law and order and in thriving upon the decreasing performance of as well as trust in state functions (while at the same time recommending itself as the sole force to restore working structures), Masselos’ discussion also shows that ideology itself nevertheless seems to have had a feeble stand against economic, tactical and psychological factors. The fact that a good share of the killings, while dependent on the pretext of Shiv Sena’s ideological agenda, had private, business or rivalry motives, underpins that the anti-Muslim ideology of Marathi

³⁸⁷ Masselos, p. 122.

³⁸⁸ Rioting has remained a recurring feature of Bombay, and closely connected to the Shiv Sena, particularly in the northern district of Thane, one of its strongholds (see Hansen 1999). But it has, despite increasing liberalisation and congestion, not taken the same dimensions again.

³⁸⁹ See Eckert, pp. 125/126.

³⁹⁰ See Masselos, p. 117, quoting Bal Thackeray from press and video interviews: “Muslims have been constantly provoking Hindus. Hence the current riots... At no place were Hindus aggressors. They only acted in self-defence. Hindus cannot be held responsible for the current riots. [...] Muslims started the riots, and my boys are retaliating. Do you expect Hindus to turn the other cheek? I want to teach Muslims a lesson. Our fortitude has gone.”

nationalism was itself used rather than that it could make sustainable use of these acts in terms of a growing ideological commitment. On the other hand, and more importantly, even if the ideological commitment was there, it was not openly adhered to. Even though lower middle class people from Dharavi had actively taken part in the killings, and the violence also spread to middle class apartment blocks in other areas³⁹¹, the attacks were largely ascribed to “‘the mob’, the ‘lumpen’ of Mumbai.”³⁹² The impression of the Shiv Sena as a lumpen-party also occurs – and prevails - because the middle classes refrain from openly declaring their allegiances beyond momentary solidarity. It is not so much a taboo to attack minorities, as it is to admit to it. The Sena’s electoral success rose again in the 1990s, which can, however, largely be attributed to its increased power to distribute funds and provisions after the riots as well as to the growing insight even amongst Muslims, which is expressed in increasing absconding from voting in the first place, that “a Sena in power is less dangerous than a Sena in opposition.”³⁹³

All this does not make the Shiv Sena itself less dangerous, not least because it nevertheless emphasises its power to create – but also to suppress – riots, which testifies that it has succeeded in instigating a basic atmosphere of fear, and Bombay’s face changed forever after the riots (particularly in terms of the residential ghettoisation of the Muslim population). But it explains why its Marathi Hindu nationalism has always remained a chimera rather than a real danger. Despite the Sena’s participation in the Maharashtra government (together with the BJP) between 1995 and 1999, and its spread in some parts of Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena is a distinctly metropolitan creation (the very imagination of the rather dazzling and capricious figure of Bal Thackeray appearing in a Maharashtra village seems quite bizarre). It seems to survive rather than succeed, and it owes this survival to its embeddedness in Bombay’s fast changing economic structure and its disintegrating as well as homogenising effects rather than to its ability to transcend it.

³⁹¹ See Srikrishna Commission Report, 1998, at: www.sabrang.com/srikrish/sri%20main.htm, and Hansen, 2001, pp. 123/124.

³⁹² Eckert, 2003, p. 117.

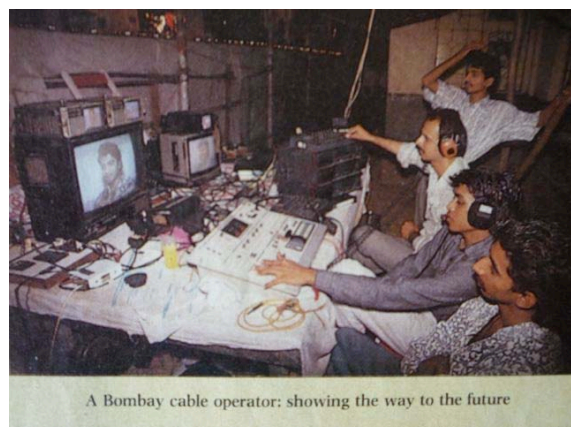
³⁹³ Television director, Interview II/37.

One area that illustrates this point most vividly is the media, which have in course of the 1990s seen an unprecedented rise particularly in Bombay (all national entertainment channels, and increasingly also news channels, are located here). While Thackeray very consciously



interacts with the media, making sure of appearances and headlines, his own newspaper Saamna (Confrontation) is well-known and identifiable as the Sena-mouthpiece and has limited readership amongst a variety of other Marathi as well as Hindi, Urdu, English, Gujarati and Konkani papers, local, regional and national. Rather than being able to extend

Saamna's readership, Thackeray had to go the opposite way of appeasing it. He deviated from insisting on Marathi and launched a Konkani edition of the paper, which takes into account that a lot of the potential readers in the Thane-district of Bombay, a Sena-stronghold, are Konkani speakers (from the Malabar coast stretching to the south into the state of Goa), who show little ambition to 'integrate' and learn Marathi and would otherwise be lost for Saamna as well as potentially for the Sena itself.³⁹⁴ Thackeray is thus on the local level starting to



operate in the same mode of de-ideologising – even though certainly more unwillingly – as transnational companies and, particularly, Rupert Murdoch, in his readiness to also supply what is demanded rather than to simply try and convert consumers to a pre-defined agenda.

A similar picture of unevenness and necessary compromise occurs with regard to the local visual media, which are increasingly embedded in regional, national and global developments on different levels: technological, infrastructural and legal. Cable operator stations, which basically serve as transmitters for international, national and regional satellite programming, were in the beginning of the 1990s completely independent and unmonitored and initially also ran their own local channel, generally not reaching further than the respective neighbourhood and mainly running local advertisements,

Above: a) Bal Thackeray on Aaj Tak (April 14, 2002, with Hindi subtitles).

b) independent cable operator station in Bombay 1992 (from: *India Today*, November 15).

³⁹⁴ See www.southasianmedia.net (November 07, 2005).

Hindi and Western films as well as partly locally produced news.³⁹⁵ In this set-up, cable operator stations which were in the hands of Shiv sainiks were able to freely run propaganda material, even though they had to take into consideration the local viewers' preferences and to compete with other cable operators. But the cable business has rather dramatically de-fragmented since the middle of the 1990s. The increasing frequency of compulsory and cost-intensive technological upgrading threatened to ruin many independent cable operators, so that they started assigning themselves to so-called MSOs (Multi-System Operators).³⁹⁶ These are run by larger companies that are partly associated with television companies themselves (Siti Cable, for instance, belongs to Subhash Chandra's Essel Group that is also producing Zee TV, Hathway Cable is part of Murdoch's News Corporation).³⁹⁷ Even if a head of these new local 'control rooms' is a Shiv sainik has he no influence any more over the contents of the local channel, which is now the same in all areas covered by the respective MSO, whereas Thackeray, as long as he does not hold the Chief Minister's office, has no legal sway over the business. In Bombay's case, these developments towards homogenising thus prevent a consistent ideological influx on the local level and the emergence of a coherent pro-Sena image. Similarly do the 'shakhas', the local offices of the Sena, meet with many other, non-Hindutva forms of local and nationally connected activism and lobbyism in Bombay.

The Shiv Sena takes money from the rich in order to mobilise and empower – with the silent and momentarily unconcealed support of the middle classes - in a “virile struggle”³⁹⁸ one section of the underprivileged against another section on the base of their religious community. Confined to this cruel logic, it functions as a *sign* of how things could be in a 'perfect world' of Hindu supremacy, which was not least expressed in Bombay's pompous re-naming into Mumbai in 1995 on the Sena's unrelenting demand and which is worrisome enough even as a chimera. But while the Sena is facing an acute crisis also because of the 'Supremo' Bal Thackeray's advancing age and a commenced fierce battle for his succession amongst his nephews, it is beyond that constantly compromised by the widespread knowledge about the Sena's own entanglements with Bombay's underworld, goondaism, organised crime and the glamour world of Bollywood and by a boosting and reckless globally connected

³⁹⁵ See Samina Mishra, 1999, “Dish is Life. Cable Operators and the Neighbourhood”, in: Brosius/Butcher (eds.), pp. 261-278.

³⁹⁶ The number of cable operators in the whole of India has roughly halved between 1997 and 2002 from around 60 000 to 30 000, with the growing technological demands producing the 'information revolution's' first wave of unemployed.

³⁹⁷ See Britta Ohm, 2001, *Ist dies eine Invasion? Transnationale Sender und Nationales Fernsehen in Indien*, Münster/London: LIT.

³⁹⁸ Eckert, 2003, p. 97.

economy that follows other (even though no less cruel) directives which do not – unless they directly serve its interests - take into consideration local political ideologies.

5.3.2. *Contained by the Local: Gujarat 2002*

The situation in Gujarat 2002 seems to have been substantially different. While Bombay is India's most affluent city, Gujarat is amongst its richest and industrially most developed states, which features, however, no metropolitan city and has hardly a cosmopolitan tradition. In 1960, Gujarat was separated from its earlier union-partner Maharashtra, with which it had formed the bilingual state of Bombay (a relic of the Bombay Presidency under British rule). The bifurcation has led to a certain competition between the two new states, which showed in particular forms of Marathi and Gujarati nationalism (the Shiv Sena, as mentioned above, was founded in 1966). But it appears to have been the very cut-off from the metropolitan (and not, as Ashis Nandy suggests, its exposure to it – see footnote 96), in which many Gujaratis had taken leading industrial positions since the 19th century³⁹⁹, that has supported a creeping communalisation and ideologising of Gujarat's politics. Most analyses agree that the quality of communal violence in the state changed after the 1960s, leading to a ghettoisation of the Muslim population not only in residential but also in commercial areas that after the Gujarat pogrom “is practically complete”⁴⁰⁰, thus pointing towards a sustained process of the Muslims' de-nationalisation.

Gujarat shared with Bombay its strong tradition of the textile mill industry as well as its decline in the 1980s, but while Bombay got increasingly entangled in the forces of global capitalism, in Gujarat a certain parochialisation coupled with what A.R. Vasavi has described as a caste-based, hierarchically structured “backward capitalism” in the sense of a growing “cult of capital” and “wealth accumulation by any means”⁴⁰¹ seems to have set in. This development offered a particularly well-suited terrain for the Sangh Parivar to unfold its basic ideology of an economically strong ‘Hindu Rashtra’ in a more unmitigated way than

³⁹⁹ “Bombay ‘Classique’ and Its Demise”, in: *ibid*, pp. 38-41.

⁴⁰⁰ *Times of India*, July 23, 2006: How Gujarat is Divided, referring to the latest study presented by Suchitra Sheth and Nina Haem, *Sovereignty, Citizenship and Gender*. See particularly Rowena Robinson, 2005, *Tremors of Violence. Muslim Survivors of Ethnic Strife in Western India*, New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London: Sage, which undertakes, amongst other things, a first evaluation of the re-organisation of urban spaces in a direct comparison of the violence in Bombay and Gujarat.

⁴⁰¹ A.R. Vasavi, 2002, Gujarat's proclivity to violence, in: *The Hindu* (Magazine supplement), May 05.

elsewhere in India. In course of the pogrom, its realisation expressed itself in alarmed assessments of Gujarat as a “Hindutva laboratory” that could successively be repeated in other states.⁴⁰² In contrast to Bombay, Gujarat did thus not claim a distinct regional form of Hindu nationalism but grew it under the auspices of the Indian Sangh Parivar.

However, this option of a Hindutva lab stands notably for the BJP in an ambiguous relation to the non-eligible organisations of the Sangh Parivar that comprise of the RSS, the VHP and the latter’s own action force Bajrang Dal, close ties with which the BJP as an eligible party – in contrast to the Shiv Sena, which openly hails violence as a legitimate means of “getting things done”⁴⁰³ even at the electoral level – has always been eager to conceal. Especially the BJP under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was seen as moderate enough to head coalition-governments at the centre, was less interested in violent spectacles like the infamous ‘rath yatra’ (chariot procession), that L.K. Advani (in 2002 Union Home Minister) had led in 1990 towards Ayodhya in a first attempt to bring down the Babri Masjid, leaving “hundreds of minor and major incidents of anti-Muslim pogroms in its trail” (see 8.1.).⁴⁰⁴ The central BJP of 2002 was predominantly concerned with broadening its electoral base as far as possible, particularly, though, amongst the rapidly growing middle classes (see 8.3.2).

In this context, ambivalences were especially strong with regard to Gujarat’s Chief Minister Narendra Modi, whose eminence in the development was reflected in the wordplay of a ‘modi-fied Gujarat’ in the English language media and amongst those protesting against the violence.⁴⁰⁵ Modi, in his student days a member of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the students’ organisation of the Sangh Parivar, and later a ‘pracharak’ (full-time unmarried volunteer) of the RSS, had been in charge of building the BJP in Gujarat since the late 1980s, after the RSS had already done substantial groundwork since the 1970s, joining hands with the anti-corruption Navnirman Andolan⁴⁰⁶, and engaging profoundly in the rural and Adivasi-areas. Since the late 1980s, i.e. since Modi’s activity for the BJP in the state, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal have been particularly active. The VHP is reported to have over

⁴⁰² See Dayal (ed.), who used the term even in the title of his voluminous compilation; Rajdeep Sardesai, 2002, Beyond Ideology. In Gujarat hatred is now the only passion, in: *Indian Express*, April 09; *The Asian Age*, March 25, 2002: “Gujarat used as Hindutva laboratory”; Human Rights Watch, 2002, “Gujarat: A Hindutva Laboratory”, in: “*We have no order to save you*”. *State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*, first edition of the report, in: Dayal (ed), pp. 394-397.

⁴⁰³ Eckert, 2003, p. 14.

⁴⁰⁴ Hansen 1999, p. 165.

⁴⁰⁵ See, for instance, *Times of India*, April 28, 2002: Modi-fied priorities in Gujarat.

⁴⁰⁶ The Navnirman Andolan (Reconstruction Movement) was started in the early 1970s by the Gandhian Jayaprakash Narayan.

5000 committees in Gujarat today, working at every level of society.⁴⁰⁷ In the Assembly elections 1995, the performed groundwork bore fruit as the BJP was elected for the first time with a two-third majority, at the cost, however, of Modi who at the request of the new Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel was transferred to Delhi, apparently for reasons of rivalry. Patel himself was known as a Hindutva-hardliner, while Modi appeared as being too ambitious not create trouble. An article in *Frontline*, a fortnightly magazine, quotes a BJP-insider as saying that “whichever State he has gone to, he has created dissidence within the party and within the coalition government. Wherever he has gone, State units have asked for his removal.”⁴⁰⁸

After the (irregular) 1998 Gujarat Assembly elections, though, the BJP performed badly in all by-elections in the state (as well as in the panchayat-elections)⁴⁰⁹, and in 2001 Modi was brought in as Chief Minister without the voters’ consent in order to ensure a quick and sustainable recovery of the BJP. The emphasis in the English language press that with Modi for the first time a RSS-pracharak was taking office as a Chief Minister thus seemed to have less to do with this very fact, as the same point was not made with regard to the highest posts in the whole of India, occupied by Vajpayee and Advani, both of whom are known to be RSS-‘swayamsevaks’ (volunteers). It indeed rather seemed to refer to Modi’s “arrogant and egoistic”⁴¹⁰ ways, backed by the RSS, and the danger of them to over-perform in a regional set-up that offered even less chances of containment than the central coalition-government. Modi on his part seems to have exceeded the worst apprehensions in this regard. Knowing that he had been installed by the central BJP despite himself and without the voter’s mandate, the Gujarat pogrom also has to be seen in terms of a most macabre electoral manoeuvre. It represents a hitherto unparalleled example of the pattern that was also at work in Bombay, namely that the orchestration of riots – and increasingly: of pogroms – through the Sangh Parivar serves the immediate interest of consolidating the organisation and winning votes. Even before the violence had actually calmed down in May 2002, Modi began to press for early Assembly elections in order to increase the likeliness of his mandate through the Gujarati voters in the wake of the pogrom. The Election Commission (EC) of India was not in favour of the proposed early elections (regularly due in February 2003) and delayed them

⁴⁰⁷ Coomi Kapoor, 2002.

⁴⁰⁸ Dionne Bunsha, 2002(c), An ambitious pracharak, in: *Frontline*, December 21, 2002 – January 03, 2003 (www.flonnet.com).

⁴⁰⁹ Originally an assembly (jat) of the five (panch) village elders, panchayats represent today the elected local governing and adjudicating level. Elections, like on the regional and national level, usually take place every five years.

⁴¹⁰ Bunsha, 2002(c).

several times. It finally conceded to them on the condition of the VHP calling off its already planned election yatra⁴¹¹, in which replicas of the burnt Sabarmati Express-coach were to be displayed. All these attempts at containment, however, rather seem to have elevated Modi in the voters' eyes. In December 2002, he was elected with an absolute majority. Modi - in contrast to the media-savvy Bal Thackeray who actively cultivates his capricious and dazzling image that keeps the Shiv Sena as an independent, self-made, efficiency-based and ostentatiously anti-intellectual organisation⁴¹² in an ambivalent position to other forces in the Sangh Parivar, somewhat emphasising Bombay's exceptional role - thus appears as a precariously over-ambitious yet utterly devoted servant of the RSS-VHP hard-line Hindutva ideology, whose difficulties with the BJP leadership derive from this particular form of lacking submission and restraint.

However, the 'successful' pogrom offered Modi also a chance of emancipation from the centre and to turn the request for restraint into an accusation against the central leadership itself, which was seen as being "detached from mass politics" and now partly "in awe of the intimate contact that Modi retains with the most subterranean and destructive elements in politics."⁴¹³ The swelling mantra that "India is not Bombay and Delhi", which plays with the old figure of 'the real India' as opposed to its - therefore distorted - urban centres and which I heard so often in my interviews with TV-executives, had been driven to a consequence in Gujarat and worked as an effective lever. While 'Bombay' has in this narrative come to stand for chaos, dirt, glamour, danger, money, decay, crime and sell-out (an assessment that is also shared by sympathisers of the Left), 'Delhi', as the administrative and opinion-shaping centre has, irrespective of belonging to the BJP, the Congress or the new 'alternative elite', become a synonym for the loss of touch with 'the realities on the ground'. This puts the leading groups of Indian society - including, as shown in the previous chapter, national (news) media production - into the same boat on another level than mere party-political affiliation. It suggests that 'the reality' looks very different from what either of them could even imagine and that every attempt at its representation would lack 'authenticity' and 'realism'.

Modi's trump card lay in having gained the opportunity to establish himself not only as the incarnation of aggressive Hindutva, which was effectively further polarising moderates and hardliners in the BJP-central leadership (see below). He had also managed to lend vigour and

⁴¹¹ *The Hindu*, November 14, 2002: EC bans VHP yatra citing Gujarat Govt. report; Sukumar Muralidharan/V. Venkatesan, 2002, Secular Intervention, in: *Frontline*, November 23-December 06 (www.frontlineonnet.com).

⁴¹² See Eckert, 2003, pp. 47/48.

⁴¹³ Muralidharan/V. Venkatesan, 2002.

legitimacy to this positioning by presenting himself as the speaker of the ‘ordinary Gujarati people’, who were not any more, like the Shiv Sena’s “common man”, entangled in permanent struggle.⁴¹⁴ The ‘ordinary Gujarati people’ did not stand for the subjected, underprivileged but upright – and basically male - ‘good Indian’ who fights for functioning, self-determined structures on behalf of the larger but ignorant, or hypocrite, society. Rather did they form a moral majority that openly included the non-organised middle classes and women as well as rural areas and Adivasis and that now stood empowered not any more against “the paternalism inherent in the developmental state”⁴¹⁵ but against Delhi-centrism in a much broader sense.⁴¹⁶ Modi, in an interview on Aaj Tak (but on every other occasion as well) was able to successfully thrive on this point of a moral superiority of the Gujaratis: “You have an ethos in Gujarat which you don’t have in Delhi.”⁴¹⁷ ‘Gujarat’ came in this context to stand not merely for a regional Hindu nationalism and for a time in India’s historical record, but for an uncompromising, earth-bound and ‘clean’, yet sophisticated and already existing ‘reality’ that was produced as a viable new model for India’s future.

What made this ‘reality’ appear real was the rather thorough and unambiguous penetration of Gujarat’s society and institutional framework with Hindutva forces, the recognition of which was clearly in Modi’s interest. It became, in contrast to the Bombay riots, evident in the subordination of the economical – as well as the social – under the ideological, which showed in various ways during and after the pogrom. It was not the first time “that the anti-Muslim violence of middle-class Hindus, including their women, broke the affective barrier and spilled over into such activities as looting.”⁴¹⁸ The post-Ayodhya riots in the city of Surat in then still Congress-ruled Gujarat that took place at the same time as the Bombay riots (with more than 400 dead), had already seen middle class families on the rampage in a less concealed way than in Bombay. This was enhanced in 2002, when, for everybody to see, “affluent people walked into shops in Ahmedabad’s main business district and loaded their

⁴¹⁴ Eckert, 2003, p. 47.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, p. 9.

⁴¹⁶ Very illuminating in this regard is Modi’s own website, which states that “The common man and now the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, in his second term, is riding a massive mandate, delivering promises and fulfilling aspirations“ (www.narendramodi.org/cmguj.htm). The emphasis on a „second term“ suggests a continuity of electoral support that was factually not given, but the picture that is painted here is that it is not Modi, but ,the common man’ himself who is governing Gujarat.

⁴¹⁷ *Sidhi Baat* (Tacheles Talk), weekly interview programme on Aaj Tak hosted by Prabhu Chawla (editor of India Today), April 03, 2002.

⁴¹⁸ Sudhir Chandra, 2003, “A lament for a decade”, in: Panikkar/Muralidharan (eds.), p. 11.

Marutis [India-made middle class-car, B.O.] with loot” from Muslim shops.⁴¹⁹ Shilpa Paralkar has described this situation in a short story, which expresses its macabre chill as well as the brutalisation of Gujarat’s society over the past generation more forcibly than a journalistic or fact-finding report could: a Bajrang Dal activist, who earns his wage as a physics teacher, brings home a new television set to his widowed mother, out of which, once turned on, the face of a weeping old Muslim refuses to disappear. It is the owner of the burned down electronics shop, out of which the TV had just been looted. While the man remains visible only to the mother, who in time develops an emphatic relationship with him over common childhood memories, the young Bajrang Dali indulges in watching Star Plus’ game shows (see chapter 8) and comes increasingly to the conclusion that his mother, displaying an ever gentler behaviour over her ‘secret relationship’, has gone senile.⁴²⁰

But it was also not the first time that Adivasis had taken part in rioting. As M.J. Akbar has shown, Adivasis have been pulled by the RSS into communal violence in the area of Jamshedpur (a steel-mining district in the heavy-industry belt of Bihar and today’s Jharkhand) since 1964.⁴²¹ But it was the first time that both groups, Adivasis and middle class people, did it at the same time on the same occasion in the same state, thus forming the image of a rioting – ‘revolting’ - (Gujarati) society. While the hope in the middle classes, which most of them came from themselves, had already faded amongst many activists, commentators as well as my interview-partners, the widespread participation of Adivasis and village-population in the pogrom represented a matter of immediate concern.⁴²² As the Sangh Parivar traditionally adheres to the upper castes and employs an arsenal of rituals and symbols that are largely brahminical (see 8.1.), the Adivasis somewhat represented the utmost possible non-compliance with Hindutva. Their involvement seemed to ultimately take away a hope and a projection that one of my interview partners had formulated most openly: “It is only the poor and the underprivileged that can save us now.”⁴²³ The Gujarat pogrom showed how successful the Sangh Parivar had been over decades at the grassroots- and local network-level and how neglected this level had been by the state, by secular agents and other political parties. As one activist put it: “If the RSS builds two roads and six wells, and along one of

⁴¹⁹ Sardesai, 2002. See also R.P. Subramanian, 2002: Can’t blame it on the mob. In Gujarat, it was made up of people like you and I, in: *Indian Express*, April 16.

⁴²⁰ Shilpa Paralkar, 2003, Maniben alias Bibijaan. A homely tale from Narendra Modi’s neck of the woods, in: *The Little Magazine*, Vol. IV, Issue 2: *Via Media* (www.littlemag.com/viamedia/shilpaparalkar.html).

⁴²¹ Akbar, 2003, p. 22.

⁴²² Dionne Bunsha, 2002(b), Rural trauma. The communal ‘cleansing’ process extends to Gujarat’s villages, and the tribal districts erupt in anti-Muslim violence for the first time, in: *Frontline*, March 29.

⁴²³ Star Plus-executive, Interview II/44.

these roads sits an NGO documenting this and telling the people that the water from this well is not good for them, but offering no well itself, what do you think these people will do?”⁴²⁴

A similar pattern applied to the area of education. The ‘vidya sahayak’-system of volunteer teacher recruitment at the village level, promoted by the BJP in the state⁴²⁵, turned out to be largely in the hands of the RSS: “Most of the 20 000 ‘vidya sahayaks’ recruited to man the schools in the villages were handpicked from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad was encouraged to open schools in remote villages. The syllabus in the schools was often subtly changed to suit the saffron ideology.”⁴²⁶ During the pogrom, the regular English class 12 examinations were discovered to feature questions that were positively referring to Nazi methods⁴²⁷, and it became obvious that Gujarat school textbooks generally showed substantial distortions particularly in the teaching of history, which turned out to be “often conflated with legend and mythology.”⁴²⁸ The curricula, however, were part of the National Curriculum Framework 2000 (NCF), elaborated by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). It is closely linked to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) that was headed under the NDA-government by Murli Manohar Joshi, a known Hindutva-hardliner (the BJP had been keen to secure this ministry as well as the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for itself). While the NCF can be rejected at the state level, Gujarat, as one of eight states in the Indian union with a BJP-government at the time⁴²⁹, had introduced courses on Vedic Astrology and revised its textbooks even before the new NFC guidelines came out (and before Modi was installed as

⁴²⁴ Irregular interview, May 2002.

⁴²⁵ The system of so-called ‘para teachers’, who constitute a workforce outside regular education and employment as teachers, started in Rajasthan in the 1980s and was since the beginning of the 1990s systematised under guidance of the World Bank. It is common in many states in northern India today. See Government of India, Education For All in India. Sarva Shiksha Abihiyan (District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), 2000, *Para Teachers*, at: www.educationforallinindia.com/page154.html; Unesco, International Institute for Educational Planning, 2004, *Para Teachers in India. A Review*, at: www.unesco.org/iip/eng/research/basic/PDF/teachers5.pdf; Krishna Kumar/Manisha Priyam/Sadhna Saxena, 2001, The trouble with ‘para-teachers’, in: *Frontline*, Oct. 27-Nov. 09.

⁴²⁶ Human Rights Watch Report, 2002, in: Dayal (ed.), p. 394/395.

⁴²⁷ *The Asian Age* printed on April 23, 2002 a facsimile of the respective examination sheet, which read under Question 3 (B): “Join the following sentences to make one sentence: There are two solutions. One of them is the Nazi solution. If you don’t like people, kill them, segregate them. Then strut up and down. Proclaim that you are the salt of the earth.”

⁴²⁸ People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Baroda, “A Note on History Lessons in the Social Studies Textbooks of the Gujarat Textbook Board, Classes 5-7”, in: Aakar Patel/Dileep Padgaonkar/B.G. Verghese, 2002, *Rights and Wrongs. Ordeal by Fire in the Killing Fields of Gujarat*. Editors Guild Fact Finding Mission Report, New Delhi (without publisher), p. 171.

⁴²⁹ The others were Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. In 2002, however, after severe losses in 19 State Assembly elections, it were, next to Gujarat, only Orissa, Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand that were BJP-governed.

Chief Minister).⁴³⁰ “In fact, [...] the Gujarat social science textbooks may have even exceeded the expectations of Dr. J.S. Rajput, Director, NCERT, and his mentor, Prof. M.M. Joshi.”⁴³¹

The recognition intensified an already running debate on the systematic infiltration of state institutions with Hindutva forces and the saffronisation of education in the wider context of India under the NDA-government, or, as the editors of a compilation on the communalisation of education were cited: “The communal forces are attempting to use history textbooks as instruments to further their vision of a narrow, sectarian and Talibanised Hindu Nation.”⁴³²

The decay of the educational standard in Gujarat over the past 30 years has been summed up by Yoginder K. Alagh: “ When I came to Gujarat in 1969, the Gujarat College and institutions of the Ahmedabad Education Society were nationally recognised. MSU [Maharaja Sayajirao University, B.O.], Baroda, even though in decline, remained a force. Presently no state level institution finds a place in the top 400 in India. The politicisation of education in a pedantic sense is complete, both in terms of educational administration and teacher politics. [...] Teacher leaders are sanskritized and play the same politics, setting up their own institutions. [...] An entire generation of young Gujaratis is being sacrificed at the altar of mediocrity and demagogy.”⁴³³ Yet this picture of coherent ideologising was not accompanied by a parallel decline of the economy, as conventional scenarios suggest. Gujarat has had one of the most constant growth rates since the 1990s in India (generally over 6%) and attracted growing private investment, both of which reached staggering heights after the pogrom (see below). ‘Gujarat’, while successful in concealing at what and whose costs this ‘achievement’ occurred, appears as the concrete manifestation of a later reported deal between the RSS and the BJP: “We don’t bother you on economic liberalisation, you don’t bother us on spreading Hindutva through education.”⁴³⁴ And as such, Gujarat appeared as the first-time proof in the Indian context that the old equation of a ‘good’ (democratic/secular) education and economic success (together forming the complex of conventional modernity) was not valid any longer.

⁴³⁰ On the question of Vedic Science in the context of BJP-politics see Meera Nanda, 2003.

⁴³¹ Nandini Manjrekar (University of Baroda/People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), “The National Curriculum Framework in Gujarat – Children’s Education in a Hindu Rashtra”, in: Editors Guild Fact Finding Mission Report, p. 169.

⁴³² *The Indian Express*, January 28, 2002: Communalisation of Education. Fighting history’s textbook war. See also Mushirul Hasan, 2003, “Textbooks and Imagined History: The BJP’s intellectual Agenda”, in: Panikkar/Muralidharan, pp. 103-116.

⁴³³ Yoginder K. Alagh, 2002, The powerhouse and its nemesis, in: *Seminar*, Vol. 513, May: *Society under Siege*, p. 76.

⁴³⁴ *The Indian Express*, May 14, 2004: Study Joshi to unravel BJP.

Finally, in contrast to the Bombay riots ten years before, an enlarged variety of media played an important role in documenting as well as in instigating the violence, which contributed to a scenario in which the relation between the economical and the ideological was contested to a hitherto unknown degree. In Gujarat itself the subordination of the economical and the social under the ideological became evident in the media used as well as in the contents disseminated. The Gujarat pogrom was not only the first ‘digitalised’ and in that sense privatised communal violence in India, in which “rioters and middle class looters were directed by mobile phone”⁴³⁵ and relied on e-mail and the Internet as well as well as their own visual media (see 6.3.1.). It also differed substantially from other riots in that “computer generated or more crudely and clandestinely printed pamphlets and handbills”⁴³⁶ were openly appealing to take direct action against the economic and the social base of Muslims. Pamphlets as such were not new to communal violence. Prior to the Bhagalpur riots of 1989 (in Bihar), for instance, the Hindu Mahasabha (the oldest coherent Hindu nationalist organisation, founded in 1921) circulated leaflets, which were, however, employing all the common ideological points in the Sangh Parivar’s repertoire, stressing the submerged, defenceless and over-tolerant role of Hindus ‘in their own country’. They rhetorically started each ‘argument’ with “Is it not true that... the Muslim population is increasing...; ... the Muslims are fully organised...; ... the Muslims have an endless supply of weapons...; ... while Hindus are in power, Muslims can live safely...; ... after the conceding of Pakistan the landmass that remained was manifestly that of the Hindus?; ... that Christians have their own ‘homeland’ or country, Muslims also have their own ‘homeland’ or country, where they feel secure in every way, but Hindus have not been able to retain their country because under the banner of secularism it has turned into a dharmshala [hospice]?” etc.⁴³⁷

The handbills during Gujarat had a completely different tone that renounced of the defense-rhetoric and switched to promoting the active marginalisation of Muslims, while it stressed the social-economic against the cultural-political and emphasised the ‘Muslim domains’ of the sexual (in terms of reproduction, aggression and women’s subjugation) as well as the glamour world of the Bombay film industry. A leaflet of the VHP, not coincidentally in the style of the Ten Commandments and a declaration of confession, the contents of which appeared with slight variations in a number of other circulated handbills⁴³⁸, featured as the

⁴³⁵ Patel/Padgaonkar/Verghese, 2002, p. 21.

⁴³⁶ Ibid, p. 19.

⁴³⁷ Printed in Ghosh, 1999, p. 173/174.

⁴³⁸ See Annexure 19, in: Patel/Padgaonkar/Verghese, pp. 217-232.

first point “From now on, I will not buy anything from a Muslim shopkeeper!” (Which obviously did not prohibit looting). Other points read: “I shall give my vehicles only to Hindu garages! From a needle to gold, I shall not buy anything made by Muslims, neither shall we sell them things made by us!”; “Boycott whole-heartedly films in which Muslim hero-heroes act! Throw out films made by these anti-nationals!”; “Do not let them buy offices in our business premises, nor sell or rent houses to them in our housing societies, colonies or communities”; “I shall certainly vote, but only for him who will protect the Hindu nation.”; “I shall be alert to ensure that our sisters-daughters do not fall into the ‘love-trap’ of Muslim boys at school-college-workplace.”; “I shall not receive any education or training from a Muslim teacher.”⁴³⁹ An RSS-leaflet was reported to have gone even a step further by enlisting different measures of how to extinct all the minorities, amongst them the injection of their newborns with poison and the encouragement of alcohol and drugs in their neighbourhoods.⁴⁴⁰

Slightly different cases were the Gujarati vernacular press and the local television networks and MSOs, which were not officially at the service of the Sangh Parivar and working under economic considerations. The verdict on the Gujarati press and largely also the cable networks in all reports, however, is devastating, despite (or because of) the emphasis of exceptions. Headlines of the Ahmedabad-issued paper Sandesh, for instance, ranged from “70 Hindus Burnt Alive In Godhra”, “Avenge Blood With Blood”, and “The Victims Mass Murders: 10-15 girls were pulled out by religious fanatics”⁴⁴¹ (all February 28, 2002) in the direct aftermath of the ‘Godhra incident’, via “Hindus Beware: Haj Pilgrims Return With Deadly Plans To Attack” and “Godhra: The Mini-Pakistan’s Karachi Connection”⁴⁴² (March 05 and 06) during the first wave of the violence, to “The Naked Dance Of Violence in Vadodara” and “3 Die Near Fatehpura Lal Akhada. Are The Two Muslim Policemen Posted At The Police Point Responsible For This?” (March 23).⁴⁴³ What is remarkable about this ‘reporting’ is not merely that all of these headlines were careful to project Hindus as being under permanent threat and attack (and suggesting that particularly (Hindu) women had to be rescued from (Muslim) aggressors and their uncontrolled sexuality), while they were

⁴³⁹ Printed in Chenoy/Shukla/Subramanian/Vanaik, p. 10.

⁴⁴⁰ PUCL, 2002 *The Role of the media during the Gujarat carnage: A brief analysis*, at: www.pucl.org/reports.

⁴⁴¹ Meaning Hindu girls and Muslim ‘religious fanatics’.

⁴⁴² Muslim neighbourhoods are termed ‘Mini-Pakistans’ by the Sangh Parivar to suggest the inhabitants’ lack of loyalty with India (‘proven’ time and again during cricket matches, when, for instance, some Muslims distribute sweets after a Pakistani victory).

⁴⁴³ All quotes from PUCL, 2002.

sanctioning every action to ‘fight back’ at a Muslim community that appears as sly, unpredictable and well-connected to Pakistan. It is also striking that religion – and religious fanaticism (in accordance not with a religious but moral majority of Hindus) - is ascribed only to Muslims, with the subtext that it is not any more the Hindu religion or even the Hindu nation that has to be defended, but safety and ‘common sense’.

Complaint letters and memoranda written to the Editors Guild of India from organisations and individual citizens in Gujarat on the performance of the local TV-networks and cable channels⁴⁴⁴, on the other hand - which also demonstrated that Modi’s ‘moral majority’ was not all-encompassing - were concerned that “being operated through private agencies, [they] played villain role and they abated violence, spread violence through their instigative, provocative, misleading, distorted telecasts.”⁴⁴⁵ A letter got more precise in describing that “they only show the Destruction of Majority people, they ignore the Minorities totally, for example 10 shops of Minority Community are burnt they won’t show it or specify it unlike if a single shop belonging to the Majority is Destroyed they make an issue of it. [...] Similarly during combing operations, they only show the minority’s area and if they are caught with any weapons, they will highlight it, but in case of majority, they don’t even mention the name.”⁴⁴⁶

Despite similar ways of ‘reporting’ in the vernacular press and the local TV channels, there seems to have been a difference nevertheless. Modi appears to have actively interfered with both, which included the selective use of applicable law. On March 02, 2002, he prohibited, in his function as the Chief Minister, to MSOs in the whole of Gujarat the dissemination of Star News/NDTV, which had been most unambiguous in its reporting and most outspoken about the government’s obvious involvement (see 6.3.). The prohibition was imposed for one day and justified by “the provocative reporting methods used.”⁴⁴⁷ Most probably, Modi claimed paragraph 19, Chapter V of The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995,

⁴⁴⁴ With the growing reach of MSOs, there have also come up local TV-stations which produce often low-budget and are carried sometimes only by some, sometimes by all MSOs in the state. As, on the other hand, more and more cable operators are involved in a single MSO whose profits are dependent on the respective reach, pressure, blackmailing, and embezzlement have entered the business in a big way, leading to the emergence of the so-called cable-mafia, which is more active in some states than in others, and which often cooperates with local or regional politicians (see, for instance, Veena Naregal, 2000, Cable communications in Mumbai: integrating corporate interests with local and media networks, in: *Contemporary South Asia* 9 (3): 289-314). A change of the role of cable operators will spell the slowly growing development of DTH (Direct-To-Home)-reception.

⁴⁴⁵ Shahpur Sewa Samaj, Ahmedabad, “Memorandum regarding Provocation and Instigation of Violence During February and March 2002 by Print Media in Gujarat”, in: Patel/Padgaonkar/Verghese, p.185.

⁴⁴⁶ K.R. Kazi, Vadorara, “Media’s Points against Sandesh and Electronic Media”, in: *ibid*, p. 187.

⁴⁴⁷ Modi in an interview with *Outlook*, March 18, 2002.

which legalises the power to, “by order, prohibit any cable operator from transmitting or retransmitting any particular programme, if it is likely to promote, on grounds of religion, race, language, cast or community or any other ground whatsoever, disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill will between different religious, racial, linguistic or regional groups or castes or communities or which is likely to disturb the public tranquillity.”⁴⁴⁸ The same provision was not applied with regard to the local TV channels, which entailed, obviously, a hidden guideline of what Modi wanted Gujarati viewers to watch, namely precisely what these channels were already airing. The prohibition of Star News/NDTV can thus be seen as a conscious act not only to keep the critical, but also the national media out (see 6.3.1.). As far as the regional press was concerned, on the other hand, Modi took the more direct route of encouraging Sandesh and a number of other vernacular papers with a letter of recommendation in which he emphasised their “decisive role as a link between the people and the government” and congratulated them as having “served the humanity in a big way” by helping the government in trying “its level best to restore peace.”⁴⁴⁹

The possibility to completely turn around the appearance of the factual situation with the help of applicable liberal law and democratic guarantees, which is one of the ‘specialities’ of the Sangh Parivar’ (see below and chapter 7), makes obvious the necessity of more concrete, ‘interpretation-resistant’ minority protection. But with regard to the press and the local TV-networks as different media Modi’s approach also tells something about their different dispositions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, large sections of the vernacular press, not only in Gujarat, are not only in the hands of upper-caste Hindus (which basically applies for the whole media sector), but have long-standing ties with claims of Hindu supremacy that has since the late 1980s partly translated into an emphatic representation of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement and the Sangh Parivar itself.⁴⁵⁰ This makes it all the harder for those vernacular publications that follow liberal ethics to escape the often-heard generalisation of a ‘pro-Hindu vernacular press’ as opposed to a liberal and secular English language press, which has taken root since the 1990s (see 6.3.2.). Even though ascriptions and positionings of the press in general have also undergone commercialised strategies of opportunism that transcend as well as reinforce this dichotomy, a more reliable ideological commitment can still be assumed amongst some of the papers, which might explain Modi’s direct encouragement. With regard

⁴⁴⁸ Quoted from Venkat Iyer (ed.), p. 138.

⁴⁴⁹ Annexure 4, in: Patel/Padgaonkar/Vergheese, p. 36.

⁴⁵⁰ A number of liberal Hindi newspapers were also directly put under pressure by the Sangh Parivar, amongst them the earlier cited Jan Morcha (see Rawat, 2003, pp. 169-174.)

to the local TV-networks and cable operators, on the other hand, Deleep Padgaonkar, editor of the Times of India and co-author of the Editors Guild Fact Finding Report on Gujarat, emphasised that "Modi might have manipulated some of them, others are hardcore-Hindus, no doubt. But at the end of the day it's a matter of money and market. That they support Modi today does not mean that this is irreversible. When the government changes things can turn the other way in no time. Whatever party pays more gets more attention and reporting."⁴⁵¹

However, the government did not change, on the contrary, and the local TV-networks, covering Modi's 'gaurav yatra', were certainly not exercising restraint given that the whole atmosphere during the election campaign suggested that 'Modi sells'⁴⁵², thus rather highlighting the trend-perpetuating function of commercial media, particularly under the pressure to increase viewership. Moreover, an incident that became public in the following year illustrated that the Modi-government can rely on cable operators also without paying them. In April 2003, Gujarat's MSOs were ordered to show, free of charge, several times a day a VCD that promoted the Modi-government's achievements after 111 days. Some cable operators said that "no MSO will ask the government for money", others argued that "if we ask for money or do not show it, they will threaten us, saying that the network will be shut down." Again others put the order into the category of a moral obligation and a public service: "After all, we also show religious functions and appeals in public interest free of charge."⁴⁵³ In contrast to Bombay, in the case of Gujarat the de-fragmentation and homogenising of the cable business in course of increasing commercialisation, corporate binding and technological development, coupled with the legal and authoritative power of the Chief Minister's office, has led to a greater efficiency in executing pressure and in passing down orders and to the emergence of a more coherent pro-Hindutva image on the regional level. Moreover, given its rather elaborated and legally supported form, the materialising Gujarat model had also the strength of a reciprocal effect *onto* the national level rather than the other way round. This was felt foremostly by Zee TV as the then only commercial national TV network that also ran different regional channels in the respective languages, the so-called alpha-channels, and thus operated in the difficult twilight zone of representing a national broadcaster that at the same time claimed some regional representation. As the responsible executive for alpha Gujarati in Bombay explained, rather helplessly: "The

⁴⁵¹ Interview II/24.

⁴⁵² One can get an idea of the bizarre atmosphere of the election campaign in Rakesh Sharma's documentary *Final Solution* (2004).

⁴⁵³ All quotes from *Indian Express*, April 23, 2003: Now showing on Gujarat cable: Modi 'hits'.

hijacking of the business there is almost complete, and the cable operators are part of it big time. There is not much I can do, Modi has the backing of the local BJP and the central government. What you think happens in case Modi makes only one phone call here complaining about my programming? I can vacate my chair, that's what it comes down to.”⁴⁵⁴

There thus emerges a clear contrast between Bombay's Shiv Sena and its autocratic leader Bal Thackeray and 'Modi's Gujarat' beyond the respective communal violence and their embeddedness in the larger Hindutva movement and its history. The Sena generally profits from decaying state functions, without, however, wholly being able to replace them with an alternative ideologically driven structure or make coherent use of the still-existing ones, and it remains in feeble competition with national, economic and commercial forces, including the media. Modi, on the other hand, has with the help of the well-oiled machinery of the RSS and the VHP not only been able to occupy the territory left deserted by the state (such as village education and infrastructure) to a significant degree and to replace and bend democratic state functions. Given the economic history and social preconditions in Gujarat (particularly the absence of an organised labour force and union structure as well as the weak representation of the lower middle class and farmers, i.e. lower castes, on the level of state politics), it has been one of his foremost interests to build upon and channel private investment and commercial agency, including the regional media, which has shown its full significance only since the pogrom. Gujarat represents indeed a new form of authoritarian rule within a democratic framework, which subordinates substantial capitalist growth to the ideological by silencing the political and organising social upward mobility within a hierarchical structure that may best be called economic populism. As Modi put it in an interview in 2005, making it clear that he regards not populism but political populism as a problem: “Gujarat is number one in generating maximum employment opportunities. This itself shows the amount of vibrancy in the economic activities, which has led us to be the number one in the country in generating employment. This also is a big achievement in itself. Unfortunately, there is populist politics in our country. But, we shifted from populist politics to populist economics.”⁴⁵⁵

In contrast to Thackeray's Shiv Sena, which is employing violence as a means of participation and of 'getting things done' in a highly competitive framework⁴⁵⁶, the promise that is entailed

⁴⁵⁴ Interview I/07.

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with Narendra Modi by the Economic Times, January 04, 2005, featuring on the BJP-website at: www.bjp.org/Newspaper/jan_0405a.htm.

⁴⁵⁶ See Eckert, 2003, concluding chapter “Violent Action as Participation”, pp. 265-281.

in this seems fulfilled in Gujarat. Modi, in addition to presenting himself as a speaker of a moral, religiously based majority in Gujarat, is also able to produce himself in the role of the energetic, successful and unrivalled supplier and protector who is not confined to talking and violence but continuously acts constructively on behalf and in the interest of the society by consequently replacing developmental politics and governance through the performative organisation and administration of large-scale investments that is put into direct competition with other Indian states as well as the central government. After a slump in the investments



immediately after the pogrom, which caused damages of several thousand crore Rupees⁴⁵⁷, Modi went out to aggressively advertise Gujarat as “a perfect blend of entertainment and enterprise”⁴⁵⁸, and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has been quick to restore relations with him.⁴⁵⁹ Gujarat has noted an industrial growth rate (including technology development) of over 12% and 15% respectively in 2003 and 2004⁴⁶⁰ and at the personal

initiative and under the auspices of Modi – in the form the “Vibrant Gujarat Festival” staged by him - reportedly attracted in 2005 ventures of over 87 000 crore Rupees (almost 2 billion US\$) for the coming years by potent investors such as Reliance, Essar, Larsen and Toubro, the Adani Group, Videocon and Torrent, who cherish the exceptionally low rate of labour

Above: Clipping of a whole-page advertising – disguised as a series of articles – on Gujarat’s economic and technological performance. Using the slogan “Gujarat Shining” obviously in preparation to the upcoming elections in 2007, it refers to the failed “India Shining” campaign of the central NDA-government in the general elections in 2004 (in: *Hindustan Times*, December 20, 2006).

⁴⁵⁷ *Times of India*, April 13: 2002: Riots just a small speed-breaker, claims Modi.

⁴⁵⁸ *Times of India*, April 30, 2003: Envoys dodge Modi’s invite to Ficci meet.

⁴⁵⁹ An example of the cordial relations, on occasion of a global investors meet in early 2003, can be seen at: www.ficci.com/media-room/photographs/2003/apr29-modi.htm.

⁴⁶⁰ *The Times of India*, August 04, 2005: Gujarat tops growth chart.

strikes and lockouts in the state.⁴⁶¹ The success of this strategy of supply instead of representation, which represents “the end of economic democracy”⁴⁶² and can with Hans Dembowski be termed as “neoliberal ‘good governance’” as opposed to “leftist democratization”⁴⁶³, will have to be judged in the coming Assembly elections (due in 2007). The alternative to its embracement by the voters, however, could involve another round of violence, at least if there is serious doubt about the election’s outcome. Unlike in non-democratic regimes, violence is in the logic represented by Gujarat not used in order to directly suppress the opposition but is in its communally charged form invested to re-assemble and re-confirm the moral majority in order to win the elections.

Bombay and Gujarat thus represent two extremes in the performance and appearance of commercialisation and capitalisation in India that stress the fact that there is no inherent effect of democratisation and ‘opening-up’ to unleashed market-forces. Rather do the antagonistic examples of the two places emphasise the advantage of economic liberalism over liberal democracy and state obligations as long as their functions are not actively ensured. In both cases it helps to further erode the classical functions of the liberal state and to enforce hierarchical social structures between rich and poor, privileged and underprivileged, and to naturalise the process as a ‘given’, if not a success. But whilst unfettered global liberalisation and commercialisation work in Bombay towards a mitigation of Hindu nationalism’s supremacy in order to ensure its functioning, in Gujarat large-scale investment and capitalisation support the re-invention of the state as a naturalised culturalist and economist authoritarian governance that is organising and administrating their unhindered performance.⁴⁶⁴

5.3.3. *Taking Sides*

Before this whole background, the contours of which materialised with the pogrom, Prime Minister Vajpayee’s agency was telling. After the ‘Godhra incident’ he was anxious to tone

⁴⁶¹ Gujarat to attract investments of over Rps. 87,000 crore, at: www.hindubusinessline.com, *The Economic Times*, August 14, 2006: Gujarat steps on the gas.

⁴⁶² Thomas Frank, 2001, *One Market Under God. Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy*, London: Secker&Warburg.

⁴⁶³ Hans Dembowski, 2001, *Taking the State to Court. Public Interest Litigation and the Public Sphere in Metropolitan India*, Asia House, online version at: www.asienhaus.de/, pp. 23-29.

⁴⁶⁴ See on Gujarat after four years of the elected Modi-government Prashant Jha, 2006, Gujarat as another country. The making and reality of a fascist realm, in: *Himal Southasian*, October, Vol. 19/7, at: www.himalmag.com/2006/october/cover_story.htm.

down the running Ayodhya-campaign of the VHP⁴⁶⁵, and during the unfolding pogrom in Gujarat he was seen as being increasingly unable to conceal his impatience with Narendra Modi, not least with his brazen request to go for elections as soon as possible that made the Sangh Parivar's immediate interest in the situation all too obvious.⁴⁶⁶ But Vajpayee did also not give in to demands, from activists, the opposition and coalition-partners but also from within the party, to sack Modi (let alone considering his own resignation)⁴⁶⁷, which obviously strengthened Modi's position to the extent that he could even offer to step down himself.⁴⁶⁸ On the one hand, Modi posed a direct danger to the BJP's obligations within the NDA-coalition government at the centre and the necessity of abiding by the rules of state and the constitution as well as the assessment that the 'hard Hindutva line' would find supporters less easily in other states, particularly amongst the upcoming business communities there. On the other hand, with 'soft Hindutva' increasingly occupied by the Congress and despite the particular preconditions in the state, Modi's emerging Gujarat represented an unparalleled seduction. The dimensions of the destruction and the loss of lives might really have touched Vajpayee (the expression on his face in a number of photographs and television reports, especially during his Gujarat visit in April 2002, is revealing), and he was in the following eager to sideline the pogrom's significance even at the cost of Modi, whom he reprimanded to observe 'rajdharm'.⁴⁶⁹ But the increasingly compulsory 'touch with the people' that Modi had come to successfully represent, which, moreover, had been ensured in a state that was clearly on the road to a high-level post-developmental economic performance, controlled and submerged by Hindutva's ideological agenda rather than compromising it, came pretty close to the Sangh Parivar's ideal (see 7.3.). Unsurprisingly, this transpiring constellation appealed to the hardliners in the BJP who were quick to take up the trope of an over-compromising,

⁴⁶⁵ *The Indian Express*, February 28, 2002: PM faces trial by Ayodhya heat, Gujarat fire; and *The Hindu*, February 28, 2002: We cannot change dates: VHP.

⁴⁶⁶ *The Indian Express*, April 05, 2002: PM gets emotional, Modi gets away. The sub-headline read: "On Gujarat visit, Vajpayee slaps Modi on the wrist: it's high time govt. and officials did their job properly"; *The Indian Express*, March 28, 2002: PM rejects Modi's plan for a snap poll.

⁴⁶⁷ *The Indian Express*, March 20, 2002: BJP hawks, moderates clash at meet; *Times of India*, March 30, 2002: Sack Modi to save Gujarat: activists; Bhavdeep Kang, 2002, Feud in the Family, in: *Outlook*, April 01; *The Times of India*, April 9, 2002: Sangh will not allow Modi's head to roll; *The Asian Age*, April 10, 2002: PM hunts for Modi Successor; *Times of India*, April 16, 2002: Oppn stalls house with sack Modi call; *The Asian Age*, April 17, 2002: Modi issue stalls both Houses for 2nd day; *The Indian Express*, May 05, 2002: Sacking Modi: we thought, then did rethink, says PM.

⁴⁶⁸ *Times of India*, March 30, 2002: It has become the fashion to ask me to quit: Modi.

⁴⁶⁹ 'Rajdharm', a motif from the *Mahabharat*, refers to a code of conduct in ruling a state, particularly in the sense of rising above personal petty vanities and biases. The use of the term by Vajpayee was quickly taken up in parts of the English language press with regard to his own agency, see *Outlook*, April 29, 2002, Mr. PM, what about your Rajdharm? (cover story).

watered-down and detached BJP at the centre and to increase their pressure⁴⁷⁰, additionally backed by the recent losses of the party in Assembly elections⁴⁷¹ and upcoming elections in five north Indian states in 2003 (three of which ended up being won by the BJP).⁴⁷²

Considering this pressure, as well the absence of a public outcry against the pogrom in larger Indian society (see below) and the less than indefinite stand of the coalition partners in the NDA, may have played a lead in Vajpayee's reasoning. He held not only his hand over Modi in the end, but also sided openly, at the BJP's national executive meeting in Goa on the 12th of April, 2002, with the hardliners, employing the VHP's ideology of international Islamist terrorism. This enabled him to catch a second bird with the same stone, namely to recommend India (rather than Pakistan) as the rightful, morally and culturally predestined partner in the 'war on terror' to the US. He said: "Wherever such Muslims live, they tend not to live in co-existence with others, not to mingle with others; and instead of propagating their ideas in a peaceful manner, they want to spread their faith by resorting to terror and threats. The world has become alert to this danger. [...] Now other nations in the world have started to realise what great mistake they made by neglecting terrorism. Now they are waking up, and are organising themselves. They are putting together an international consensus against terrorism. We tell them through our own example that a large number of non-Hindus live in our country, but there has never been religious persecution here. We have never discriminated between "our people" and "aliens." [...] It is for this reason that India's prestige is growing, India's reputation is rising. I have also had an occasion to visit many other countries. Everywhere Muslims live in large numbers. And the rulers in those countries are worried lest those Muslims embrace extremism. We told them that they should educate people on the true tenets of Islam, that they should teach science in madrasas, and that they should also teach other subjects in madrasas [...]." ⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ Senior BJP-leader Kailash Sarang, for instance, went public in complaining that the BJP was "moving away from its identity" and that "of late an impression was gaining ground that the BJP was not pursuing a number of issues with the usual vigour" (these issues foremostly comprising of the construction of the Ram Mandir, a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) that abolishes the Muslim Personal Law (see 6.2.1.) and the repeal of article 370 of the Constitution that currently grants a special status to Kashmir – *The Hindu*, April 29, 2002: 'Moving away from identity has caused BJP dear'.

⁴⁷¹ See *India Today*, April 15, 2002: BJP-The Party Is Over (cover story).

⁴⁷² Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh were won by the BJP in November/ December 2003, Delhi went to the Congress under Sheila Dikshit after it had already recaptured Himachal Pradesh from the BJP in March, see *Frontline*, March 28, The missing 'BJP wave', and *Outlook*, December 15, 2003: The Winning Team. A triumph for the BJP leaves the Congress in doldrums (cover story).

⁴⁷³ English text of the speech, delivered in Hindi, in: *The Indian Express*, April 24, 2002.

This was the first time that an Indian Prime Minister openly sided with the majority community in the wake of Hindu-Muslim violence, hence also lending legitimacy to using the central state machinery and judiciary not against culprits, but against Muslims.

6. *The Media and Its (Unravelling) Public*

My suggestion that the Gujarat pogrom represents a culmination point in Hindutva's way to power and its sway over Indian society, as well as, in contrast to the Bombay riots and the city's further development, an index for an extreme form of Hindutva's interaction with economic liberalism in a more general sense, inherently entails the question for the 'rest' of the nation or the larger mainstream beyond (and under the impression of) the ambiguous and ultimately partisan position of the Prime Minister.

With regard to the pogrom's more immediate character as a culmination point there were basically two closely related reactions to the pogrom itself at the time that I carried out my fieldwork, which were most striking. One was the absence of shock and mourning over the violence and its victims, or rather their confinement to groups that were professionally or politically predisposed, like activists or journalists. Even though the number of those who voiced their dismay or even anger about the situation was not exactly small and numerous demonstrations were held in different cities, this did not translate into opposition and protest as an underlying theme in the public discourse. Given that the Gujarat pogrom was certainly the least possible to ignore ever, not least because of a partly outraged and constant reporting through the national media (as becomes apparent, as far as the press is concerned, from the footnotes in 5.3.2. – see below), this reaction was in itself most remarkable and, to a degree, surreal, reminiscent of those of Western media consumers to catastrophes reported from far away countries.

Closely related to this was the often-voiced diagnosis particularly in the English language media and related interview partners of a 'polarised' society, which suggested a polarisation between Hindus and Muslims as much as between BJP/Sangh Parivar-supporters and – opponents. However, the term polarisation, much like the term riot, implies an equal

distribution of standing, power, and influence on both sides and brings to mind the image of an open fight and the exchange of argument and counter-argument. The evident evaluation of the Indian public showed different features, though. What seemed to encounter each other were an alarmed and outraged sector of activists and public figures that included a good part particularly of the English language national media and that appeared powerful in its anti-BJP/Sangh-Parivar stand, because it did speak publicly and was able to set the headlines. It was, however, encountered rather by a not-so-public majority that was not receptive to these headlines to the extent their presence suggested. A public minority thus seemed polarised against a private majority, which formed in a more acute way a ‘split public’ that I have discussed in chapter 4 and pointed, moreover, towards a profound crisis rather than important power-position of the conventional representative media, particularly television.

Similarly were the Muslims, apart from a few, and in their representative claim rather doubtful speakers (most prominent: Syed Shahbuddin, leading member of the Muslim Personal Law Board (MPLB), overwhelmingly silenced or included in this private majority. In this sense, the shift in the public discourse became less noticeable through what was talked about than through what was *not* talked about, which indicated the actual strength and non-withstood ability of the Sangh Parivar to frame and conduct the parameters of this discourse and to organise its uneven polarisation. This became palpable not least in the comparatively quick dying-down of the actual topic of Gujarat beyond the occurrence and the time of the pogrom. Before I turn to a discussion of assessments and representations within the field of the news media, I will thus first try to give an impression of the larger public atmosphere and lines of appraisal during and after the pogrom and then evaluate the related discourse of the Sangh Parivar and the national media’s positioning, which was largely characterised by the fact that it was not any more able to represent this discourse but had become a part of it.

6.1. The Inability to Mourn and the Unwillingness to Resist

One of the most frequently heard assessments amongst people I spoke to in my everyday-surrounding in addition my interview partners in Bombay and Delhi (rikshaw-wallahs, taxi-drivers, house servants, neighbours, clerks, secretaries and employees in various offices, acquaintances of friends, my doctor, co-travellers on trains and buses, people I got entangled

with in conversations in restaurants or shops etc.) as well as citizens who voiced their opinion on television was that India had always seen riots, and that Gujarat was, admittedly, a very bad one, but things would be back to normal as always sooner or later. This on the surface rather harmless assessment points towards the institutionalised character as well as the perceived normality of riots themselves, to their actually being a non-issue in the general flow of things no matter how outrageous they get. However, it complicated identifying the qualitative shift in organising the violence and the character of Gujarat as an organised pogrom, which was very evident amongst Muslims: “I was born in Aligarh, UP, and I am used to riots, we had them all the time, and the PAC [Provincial Armed Constabulary, B.O.] had a big hand in it even then, but this is different, this is organised and far more systematic. But at that time as now it could erupt just like that, say, you are a Muslim and I am a Hindu, we sit here together and start arguing about something, it becomes fierce, the next day you have a riot, people killed, then it is quiet for two years, until it erupts again. But the scale has changed and the systematic approach.”⁴⁷⁴ The general indifference to this qualitative shift lent plausibility to those who had a political interest in downplaying its significance and in evoking the impression that indeed things were going back to normal.⁴⁷⁵ At the same time, it left a void that was immediately filled by the ongoing mobilisation through the Sangh Parivar itself, which became evident during my second field trip a year after the violence.

In 2003 Hindutva was occupying the public sphere and its representations in an equally permanent but more spectacular way than the year before. The wake of the starting election campaigns particularly in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh had Narendra Modi flagging off a ‘parivarthan yatra’ (‘procession for change’) on behalf of the BJP in the Adivasi-dominated districts of southern Rajasthan, while VHP international general secretary Praveen Togadia mobilised with the Bajrang Dal a spectacular ‘trishul diksha’ (‘distribution of tridents’) in Rajasthan (which eventually saw him arrested in Ajmer by the then Congress-Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot). BJP-sanyasi and Chief Minister-candidate for Madhya Pradesh Uma Bharti launched her ‘sankalp rath yatra’ (‘chariot procession of resolution’), culminating in a controversy with the Congress which claimed that a cake offered by Bharti to Lord Hanuman in a temple was not entirely vegetarian but contained eggs and would thus hurt the feelings of

⁴⁷⁴ Muslim actor in TV-soaps, Interview I/24.

⁴⁷⁵ This did not only account for government-involved members of the Sangh Parivar itself, but, for instance, also for then Defence Minister George Fernandes (Samata Party), who after dropping the much-criticised line that there was nothing new about rapes during communal violence pointed out that there was also nothing exceptional to the violence in Gujarat (*The Asian Age*, May 05, 2002: What is new about rape, Mr. Fernandes?; *The Sunday Express*, May 12, 2002: ‘Gujarat no reflection of Hindutva, it’s a riot, plain and simple’).

Hindus. The VHP embarked on a 'satyagraha' (literally 'truth force', passive resistance), calling upon Muslims to 'vacate' the disputed land in Ayodhya and to officially hand it over to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas (Ram Janmabhoomi trust) as well as the Kashi temple in Varanasi and the Mathura temple in Madhya Pradesh. This was followed by a Supreme Court verdict turning down the NDA-government's plea to employ the spot in Ayodhya for religious activities, which again provoked bitter opposition from Praveen Togadia and the 'Dharam Sansad' (religious parliament), a congregation of 'sadhus' and 'sants' that partly enjoys the support of the 'shankaracharyas' (head priests of leading orders).⁴⁷⁶ Excavations in the remaining debris of the Babri Masjid went on, aiming at scientific proof of the previous existence of a Hindu temple there and keeping whole sections of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) busy. Meanwhile, the NDA-government celebrated its first five-year tenure (1998-2003) with much pomp and ceremony, occupying whole pages in various English language newspapers with a benignly smiling Vajpayee and long lists of the successes achieved under his guidance.

Regarding Gujarat, however, there dominated what Padgaonkar termed as "collective amnesia."⁴⁷⁷ Apart from the odd article or TV-report, particularly on the first anniversary of the 'Godhra incident', and despite 'Gujarat' appearing in conversations – often, though, on my initiative -, there was hardly a work-up or follow-up reporting regarding its implications and consequences, neither in terms of its larger meaning for Indian society and politics, nor in more practical terms (what happened, for instance, to the thousands of Muslims in relief camps who were denied the return to their homes?)⁴⁷⁸, inducing the perception that things

⁴⁷⁶ Founded in 1984 by VHP-affiliated sadhus from different Hindu sects, the 'Dharam Sansad' (or 'Dharma Sansad') operates as a regular platform in order to represent the righteous claim of the VHP to speak for matters of social, religious and spiritual concern. While the support of the 'shankaracharyas', whose weight counts more than those of mere sadhus, even if their areas of influence are limited, is difficult to make out, and there has been open protest on their part against the VHP's instrumentalisation of the Ramjanmabhoomi issue (see Murali Krishnan, 2002, *It's Four Sides to a Triangle*. The Shankaracharyas of the four main peeths are bitterly opposed to the VHP's temple movement, in: *Outlook*, April 01). Shankaracharyas, however, have repeatedly acted as mediators between the VHP/Sangh Parivar and the state, and the (self-proclaimed) Shankaracharya of Kanchi's (Tamil Nadu) arrest in a murder case in 2004 has laid open his rather clear affiliations with the VHP's politics (see *Frontline*, December 03: Behind the Arrest (Cover Story).

⁴⁷⁷ Interview II/24.

⁴⁷⁸ Robinson, 2005, reports that in 2004 in several Muslim-dominated areas in Gujarat such as Dahod, Godhra Himmatnagar, Vadodara, and Ahmedabad's Naroda Patia district "people remain packed and ready to flee at a moment's notice. As one activist said: 'It is virtually impossible to concentrate on peace-building measures, when, as in the area we work, Muslims have fled four times in the past few months alone due to fears of a repeat of violent attacks.' The words of the social activist, 'Nothing is normal', continue to ring in the ears" (p. 143). Two years later, in 2006, *The Hindu* reports on a visit of the National Commission for Minorities in 17 of the 46 camps that still accommodate over 5000 displaced Muslim families, which are described as living in "sub-human conditions." Zoya Hasan, member of the Committee, is quoted as saying: "While the Gujarat

were not only back to normal but that nothing really had happened at all. While there seems to exist a general human impulse after occurrences of extraordinary impact and traumatic potential to suppress their immediacy, particularly when that involves an assessment of the own responsibility, it was obvious that the lack of a public attempt to come to terms with the pogrom made further space for the Sangh Parivar to speedily occupy the emerging ethical vacuum with calculated spectacular public agency that created precisely the ‘normality’ one thought to have come back to.

Yet, the basic tone of the comments in my everyday surroundings in 2002 as well as in 2003 also suggested that such a work up was considered unnecessary in the first place. These statements are by no means representative, yet they convey an impression of the overall atmosphere. The contrast with the Bombay riots was fine but grave. As Thomas Blom Hansen has argued, after the Bombay riots there materialised, amongst slum dwellers as well as the Hindu middle classes in the city, a “rather triumphant sense of ‘having taught the Muslims a lesson’, of overruling and defying the state, of celebrating an ethnic-majoritarian justice opposed to what Hindu nationalist leaders had decried as the state’s ‘pampering’ and protection of minorities.”⁴⁷⁹ Yet, these triumphant gestures of come it strong were balanced by a true sense of shock and incredulity that something so horrid could happen in Bombay, a place that in so many ways represented India’s future at the time, which was not only, as Hansen claims, voiced by public and representative figures but also by average people in and outside the city. There was an atmosphere of spontaneous sorrow, which expressed itself in the repeated emphasis that “this should not have happened” as well as in the underscoring, practically supported by a number of initiatives, of the necessity of ‘communal harmony’ that was strong and genuine enough to create and ensure an alternative and reliable reality to the demonstrations of strength and victory amongst open Shiv Sena and Hindutva-supporters. The expressive feeling of having gone too far implicated a basic avowal of having silently endorsed the violence, or at least of having done nothing against it, of maybe having embraced the option of ‘teaching the Muslims a lesson’, but of not having wanted this outcome. It involved a conscious or unconscious acceptance of the own responsibility, and being ‘anti-Muslim’ was still labelled a prejudice.

Reactions to the Gujarat pogrom, however, were particularly in the middle classes overwhelmingly characterised by a justification rather than a regret of the violence, which

Government is refusing to recognise their displacement, it also seems that the nation has forgotten what happened in 2002” (*The Hindu*, October 24).

⁴⁷⁹ Hansen, 2001, p. 127.

was not sufficiently balanced by an alternative viewpoint and which tended to reject criticism as 'anti-Hindu'. While a rikshaw-puller in Delhi in the manner of a secret confession told me that "I cannot tell many in this place, but I am Congress", what I heard most frequently, often in exactly the same wording as if some secret agreement was at work, was the rather distanced formulation that "what happened is very unfortunate", implicated in which was already a "but" that was followed by a small variety of different endings such as "it could not go on like this", "some point had to be made", "our tolerance has come to a limit" etc. While after Bombay the subtext had been 'it is sad that it *could* come this far', after Gujarat it was 'it is sad that it *had to* come this far'. There was the sense of necessity rather than of catastrophe. Like the ongoing mobilisation through the Shiv Sena had during the Bombay riots enabled and generated the translation of prejudices and hatred into violent action amongst wider sections of Bombay society, the unabated public mobilisation of the Sangh Parivar in the larger Indian public sphere seemed to set free the verbal utterances of discriminations and exclusions that had been more contained or mitigated before.

The basic refusal to gauge the own role and involvement in the development became most clear in fundamentally segregating the (Hindu) self from the (Muslim) other in terms of ethnic rather than religious difference, which was not confined to open supporters of the Sangh Parivar, but, conversely, showed how accepted basic themes of the Sangh Parivar had become amongst the larger citizenry and the middle classes, or how well these themes had been able to connect with long existing prejudices and formed into a naturalised attitude. Most strikingly, this was not merely a matter of a creeping undermining or transformation; these themes could well live side by side with open-minded or even critical thinking. People that would in conversations on other topics hold perfectly liberal views, for instance, on child labour or gender-justice, like my doctor in Bombay, dropped them immediately when it came to majority-minority relations, thus defying precisely the ability of self-criticism that was claimed: "See, Hindus are self-critical. A Hindu would always be able to stand up and accuse a fellow Hindu if he is wrong, and he would be able to take it. Muslims cannot do that, they always stick together, and that's where our weakness lies. We are introspected, and we reason a lot. We get easily divided. They don't."⁴⁸⁰ Similarly, a filmmaker working for Doordarshan, after a meeting during which he had advocated a critical documentary on the deteriorating situation of farmers in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, said in a conversation with me: "Hindus are no followers, they have their own mind. Nobody can tell them to do this or

⁴⁸⁰ Irregular interview, April 2002.

that, they are too critical, because they use their brains. Muslims are just the opposite. Some mullah tells them something, and they do as they are told, because they are just not used to thinking for themselves.”⁴⁸¹ One of the basic themes of the Sangh Parivar, the proposition that a majority of over 80% Hindus is in a defensive position against 13% Muslims, resurfaced here in an everyday form, illustrated by the image of the impenetrable, incalculable, somewhat mute and therefore powerful and dangerous collective Muslim as opposed to the open, honest and self-reflective individual and therefore vulnerable Hindu, that the newspaper Sandesh in Gujarat had catered to excessively and that Vajpayee had equally emphasised in his Goa speech.

It were utterances like the above that came from middle class people one had so far thought to share the same wavelength and scope of opinion with, which engendered amongst others the feeling of creeping mistrust, thus also marking the difference between a political liberation and the mere falling of ethical barriers. “It ‘s like walking on cracking ice. You just don’t know any longer whom you share the table with. People I thought I knew well, friends even, suddenly let loose one of these bombshells, and you think: You as well? It makes me panic, because it’s the very opposite of censorship. With censorship you know what you are not supposed to say, now you can say anything. I always think now if I should test the person in front of me with some suggestive remark, or if I rather keep things on the surface so as not to destroy the positive image I might have of that person. But it makes me wonder how many of my type are left. And where have they gone? Did they exist even? Was it all just my imagination? Is this the reality?”⁴⁸²

Most interesting in this relation was the assessment amongst minorities, for instance of a cable operator in Delhi, a Sikh, with whom I have been in recurring contact since 1992 and who was upset about Modi’s banning Star News/NDTV in Gujarat, condemning it as an undemocratic act that “shows who this man actually is.” But referring to the violent Khalistan⁴⁸³ Movement for an independent Sikh state in the 1980s, the ‘Operation Blue Star’ in 1984 that destroyed the movement’s leadership as well as large parts of the Golden Temple in Amritsar (Punjab) from where it was operating, the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards and the following anti-Sikh pogrom, he stated that “Muslims are not with the country, that is the problem. When Pakistan wins in cricket, they always distribute sweets. [...] Even in the Kargil war [in 1999, see below, B.O.] you could feel they were not with the

⁴⁸¹ Irregular interview, May 2002.

⁴⁸² Freelance journalist, Interview II/16.

⁴⁸³ Literally: land of the pure.

country. The Sikhs also suffered attacks from the Indian government and Indian people, but we have gained their respect because at any given time we have shown that we are Indians first, that we are with the country. And what was it? Some crazy people with long beards shut themselves into the Golden Temple, they excluded everybody and had even women with them! For that we should give up India? And why did the killing start? Because some stupid fellows distributed sweets when Indira Gandhi got murdered! How can you do that and not expect retaliation? I do not justify the killings that followed, and Gujarat is a nightmare, but you also have to earn your respect, your acceptance.”⁴⁸⁴ This view did not only involve the logic that if the own community inflicted the wrath of the state upon itself, the other must have deserved it in the same way, irrespective of the particular circumstances. It also makes clear an acceptance and internalisation of the fact that religious minorities are just not self-evident Indian citizens, even if they have at no point even immigrated, but are under the constant pressure to prove themselves not to the state but to the majority community.

A director in Doordarshan, a Muslim, displayed another aspect of this internalised necessity to prove oneself and to earn one’s keep that also entailed a deep disappointment with the own community: “Who keeps them from anything? It’s their decision! They get supports from Saudi Arabia and give it to the clergy! Who has kept me from educating myself? From becoming a director in Doordarshan? Nobody! The Indian state encourages that, if you work hard, everything is open to you, when you learn you will reach somewhere.” He was the only Muslim director on that level, even though topped by the first time ever appointed Muslim as a Director General of Doordarshan, S.Y. Quraishi, who was, however, without notice or further explanation removed from his post in 2003.⁴⁸⁵ Interestingly, like the assessment above, this statement points towards an almost blind belief into the basic justice and impartiality of the Indian state, independent from time, government changes and the irrefutable evidence of a different reality. Particularly as both these assertions came from minority members who did not see themselves as underprivileged and had not been the victims of direct discrimination or even violence, they indirectly underline the immediate dependency of minorities *on* an impartial state. With the (imagined) state almost stubbornly occupying the centre of this interviewee’s reality-perception, the conviction that whoever does not succeed in India can blame it on nothing and nobody but her- of himself was also extended to other underprivileged sections when I mentioned that there existed at the time still

⁴⁸⁴ Interview I/37.

⁴⁸⁵ See B.G. Verghese, 2003, Which master’s voice? Prasar Bharati must serve us all, not just the government of the day, in: *The Indian Express*, August 20.

more than 500 million people in India who were not able to afford a television set and thus could not even receive Doordarshan: “They can work and get a set, no problem.”⁴⁸⁶

To a degree, these uncompromising assessments amongst Hindus as well as amongst minorities could indeed be referred to the fact that prior to the Bombay riots there simply had not occurred any immediate agency that could have been interpreted as a Muslim provocation (apart from their 16th century ancestors having build a mosque in a place that was now declared offensive). The ‘Godhra incident’, on the other hand, fitted seamlessly into a meanwhile more established ‘provocation by minority-retaliation by majority’ theme and thus into the grown anti-Muslim sentiments in the Indian public since the swelling of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement that was followed by the eruption of the Kashmir conflict in 1989. In this development a growing amount of Afghan mujahideen in Pakistan and Kashmir (after the ended Soviet occupation of Afghanistan), the Pakistani government as well as the growing dominance and ruthlessness of the Indian army in the state, which fuelled Kashmiri strives for independence, played a role. In 1990 the conflict escalated in the murder and exodus of more than 150 000 Hindu Kashmiri Pandits. The successively deteriorating relations with Pakistan that led up to the Kargil war in 1999 – which was accompanied by an enormous nationalist enthusiasm in India -, were embedded in increasing Islamist as well as Kashmiri terrorist agency inside and outside the country. This scenario did indeed play a recurring role, as the following utterance from an acquaintance of a friend underlines. An upper middle class returnee from New York after 12 years, she described the increasing attraction of the BJP “for people like me. In the beginning, we didn’t like the BJP at all. They seemed so vulgar and so retrograde with their dhotis and kurta pyjamas and chappals and all that. And all they seemed to produce was a big show with a Toyota that we were supposed to believe was Arjuna’s chariot.”⁴⁸⁷ We really thought they were a bit raving. But then we saw that they were actually taking a stand. People started to vote for them to protect their religion after they realised how much the Hindus are being bullied around by the Muslims. Wherever Hindus have been attacked, be it in Bombay, be it in Kashmir, the BJP has spoken up for them.”⁴⁸⁸

This description makes particularly clear how historical occurrences are selectively fitted into a coherent narrative of ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ and of provocation and retaliation along communal lines that lies at the heart of the Sangh Parivar’s ideology. The persecution and

⁴⁸⁶ Interview I/39.

⁴⁸⁷ Referring to L.K. Advani’s ‘rath yatra’ (chariot procession) in 1990, see 8.1.

⁴⁸⁸ Irregular interview, March 2003.

expulsion of the Kashmiri Pandits, a Brahmin caste that also the Nehru family belongs to, is a recurring theme of the Sangh Parivar as well as in public discourse, yet does this virtually never include a call to attention of their ongoing plight (around 400 000 of them still live in dismal conditions in Jammu or around Delhi) or concrete measures to the effect of their rehabilitation (while their re-settlement in Kashmir is advocated, for instance, by Yasir Malik, erstwhile leader of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). The Kashmiri Pandits most obviously serve as a welcome pretext for a political argument rather than a matter of concern in India, which in itself emphasises that Hindus must have nothing to do with Hindus merely because they are Hindus. In reverse, however, it is asserted that the Indian Muslims have ‘natural’ ties with Kashmiri or Pakistani Muslims, which empirically is as little the case. Indian Muslims are, also given their vast number, probably the least organised and most diverse of all Muslim minorities. Traditional Muslim or Islamic organisations that were founded in course of the Independence Movement split, as Frédéric Grare has shown for the Jamaat-i-Islami, with partition as much as did the country, leaving the, compared to Pakistan, much smaller Indian parts to formulate agendas of their own and “thus undermining implicitly the myth of a Muslim community overstepping, and even transcending, national borders.”⁴⁸⁹ While these agendas generally complied strongly with the Indian Constitution – as the remaining Muslims were very aware that they owed their protection as a minority to it – new organisations amongst them, at least outside Kashmir, did not really blossom as they were (and are) as diverse as the rest of the Indian population: “There are various trains, over 15 crore Muslims in this country, 150 million. So no single person can ever claim to be solely representative or solely responsible. There are different trains. There are leftist trains, there are right-wing trains, there are middle of the way-trains, there are fundamentalists, there are very secular Muslims, lots of trains, and they co-exist, these trains.”⁴⁹⁰ The bomb blasts in Bombay in March 1993, on the other hand, which were carried out “mainly [by] Muslims affiliated with criminal networks”⁴⁹¹ in the city and which followed the riots, killed more than 200 civilians and wrecked bus terminals, the stock exchange- and the Air India building. The blasts also took the lives of many Muslims and were mainly a sign of the growing communalisation of the Bombay underworld, which manifested itself in the break-up of the former union between the two most influential dons, the Hindu Chhota Rajan

⁴⁸⁹ Frédéric Grare, 2002, *Political Islam in the Indian Subcontinent. The Jamaat-i-Islami*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 25. See also A.G. Noorani (ed.), 2003, *The Muslims of India. A Documentary Record*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁹⁰ Scholar and activist, Interview II/31.

⁴⁹¹ Hansen, 2001, p. 125.

and the Muslim Dawood Ibrahim.⁴⁹² However, the conviction that it is always Hindus that are targeted in a well-aimed manner by an organised and monolithic Muslim force and thus entitled to ‘resistance’ is brought forward with great self-evidence and is truly believed. The blacking out of the bigger picture, the own involvement and the lack of differentiation lead to the evolvment of a self-perpetuating ‘truth’ that again re-feeds into the already formed conviction and that, with regard to the ‘Muslim problem’, increasingly finds resemblances in different countries on a global scale.

The same interviewee also made a very interesting remark concerning democracy: “The poor are clinging to the Congress, they like this dynasty thing and the eminence that surrounds it, it gives them something to look up to. But for the middle class, democracy means something else, and the BJP has shown a new path there.” The focus on an established Other, however, entails not merely the simultaneous weakening of the democratic, but of the political as such. A reader, for instance, answered a well-researched article on the doomed situation amongst the Muslim community in various parts of India thus: “If we are a secular country, it is only because the overwhelming majority is hindu. The hindu population in Bangladesh and Pakistan has plummeted, and they occupy the lower rungs of civil society. Why do you not quote statistics to show the percentage of pakistani hindus in government jobs? You cannot because there are no pakistani hindus in any place of power. You should be aware that it was in the AMU that proposals of an independent state of Pakistan was introduced and Sir Sayyed Ahmed also supported it.⁴⁹³ The average muslim has a lot of freedom and advantage, if he fails to capitalise on them and if the community cannot throw up a moderate leader then there is really not much that the hindus can do for them. If India is secular, then why does it not have equal laws for all its citizens?”⁴⁹⁴

This comment encapsulates a whole range of topics that have come to be occupied by the Sangh Parivar, from the equation of Hinduism with secularism (see below), the question of the legitimacy of the Muslim Personal Law to the demand for moderate Muslim leaders as interlocutors and representatives for the Muslim community. It does, however, not only

⁴⁹² See Hussain Zaidi, 2002, *Black Friday*, New Delhi: Penguin.

⁴⁹³ AMU is the abbreviation for the Aligarh Muslim University in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, which was founded as a school in 1875 by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1889), a Muslim reformer and critic of the British administration, with the intention of forming it into a Muslim university after the examples of Oxford and Cambridge. Sir Syed was one of the leading figures of the Muslim renaissance after the Indian Mutiny 1857 that avowed to engage Indian Muslims with modern thinking and education in order to secure the future of Muslims in British India. Even though Sir Syed is today often associated with the Two-Nations Theory, this was not quite formulated at his time but was first tabled in the 1940s, when it became increasingly clear that Muslims would not face a very safe existence in an independent India.

⁴⁹⁴ Website-comment (uncorrected) on: Sagarika Ghose, 2003, Minority Report, in: *Indian Express*, July 13.

presuppose that the ‘own’ (Hindu) representatives *are* moderate, it also juxtaposes not two countries, modes of government and state constitutions but merely two religious communities, following the logic of ‘If you are not giving this to us, how can you expect we give it to you?’ This focus on the religious Other, and the demand for ‘justice’ in these terms completely obfuscates the political factor that India is constitutionally secular, whereas Pakistan represents an Islamic republic, and thus the consideration that the very foundation of a state, including the own, on any religion or exclusivist cultural concept might be the problem. The demand put to Muslims to ‘prove themselves’ within the liberal guarantees that the Indian state provides collides directly with the simultaneous claim of a majoritarian rule legitimised by the perceived absence of this proof. These simultaneous demands create a situation of deadlock that I will look at in the next section and that inherently excludes the ‘liberal Muslim’ as he or she is always either perceived as Muslim (and thus as the dangerous Other) or as liberal (and thus as part of the ‘mainstream’, unauthorised to speak as a Muslim).

The absence of the political in the communicative and constitutional sense was underlined, in contrast to the Bombay riots, by the fact that there was no sense of triumph at having defied the state, as that had at the time basically meant a defiance of the Congress. As Hansen has argued, the “launch of various initiatives in Mumbai in order to create mechanisms for reconciliation, or at least cohabitation, between Muslims and Hindus after the riots [were to] reassert the state’s authority – partly by reorganizing techniques of governance but also by reconfiguring the state’s legitimacy and authority in order to retrieve a myth of the state without which a democratic state cannot govern.”⁴⁹⁵ After Gujarat it showed, as I will elaborate below, that the dissociation of the Congress from the state had shifted the focus onto antagonistic political parties, who supposedly used the same methods in fighting each other and behind which, apart, maybe, from the judiciary and the army, there was no state really visible – partly because it had been absorbed and systematically weakened by the Sangh Parivar and partly because the very interest even in the ‘myth of the state’, insofar as it relates to a democratic point of orientation, was lacking or at least not able to articulate itself. In contrast to Gujarat, where the state had started to re-invent itself in a basically a-political, economic manner, on the Indian national level could be observed the initial stage of this process in form of the obfuscation of the impartial liberal and social state and the foregrounding of a culturally framed nation, which went along with demands for a ‘strong state’ that regulates its security rather than builds upon citizens’ engagement.

⁴⁹⁵ Hansen, 2001, p. 130.

If there was an overwhelming sense, it was – defying those who pointed in shock and horror at Gujarat – that of relief and liberation, which indeed implied a cathartic feeling of finally ‘being honest’ about not liking Muslims and not having to care about minority rights and which was to me epitomised in the rather peaceful sigh heaved by a Doordarshan employee in Bombay, signifying accomplishment rather than struggle: “India is just not secular any more.”⁴⁹⁶ In this context, the lacking prominence of calls for ‘communal harmony’ was no surprise: as the meaning of prejudice had shifted from being ‘anti-Muslim’ when endorsing the situation towards being ‘anti-Hindu’ when criticising the situation, the very idea of ‘communal harmony’ seemed not only deprived of its appeal, but of being realistic at all.

6.2. *Democracy Deadlocked: The Sangh Parivar’s Dominant Discourse of Defense*

In Gujarat, at least the VHP and the Bajrang Dal and – as has been documented by Star News/NDTV – also Narendra Modi himself jumped the final barrier of a defense rhetoric and openly declared the righteousness of the pogrom.⁴⁹⁷ This stand was carried further particularly by the international general secretary of the VHP, Praveen Togadia, in the election campaigns in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in 2003, indicating the non-withstood freedom of parts of the Sangh Parivar to publicly pursue an aggressive Hindutva agenda.

An interview partner of mine, a Muslim actor, employed in this context a metaphor, which expresses the attraction that lies in defying hitherto observed taboos as well as its profound difference from a democratic process: “Suppose you went to Goa and you are wearing a bit of an objectionable bathing costume, and people tell you this is impossible, and so you agree and say, ok, I will wear my costume but I’ll wear a towel also. But suppose you become completely brazen, you will go without any clothes at all. And you will say, see, now I’m completely naked, so now what you want to do? In the same way, Modi and company, Togadia and the others, because they have so much of social and political patronage now, have come out and say: So, now we’re completely naked, so what you want to do?”⁴⁹⁸ Similarly was the metaphor of ‘Vajpayee’s fallen mask’, pointing at his RSS-background, used in the English language press. Vajpayee’s partisanship that he had betrayed (indeed!) in

⁴⁹⁶ Interview I/27.

⁴⁹⁷ *The Asian Age*, September 16, 2002: “TV tapes prove Modi attacked Muslims.”

⁴⁹⁸ Interview II/44.

Goa, the unabated and rather victorious public agency of different bodies of the Sangh Parivar as well as the inactivity of the Congress and a hardly visible, “tense, anxious and depressed Muslim community”⁴⁹⁹ certainly indicated that the ‘towel’s’ size did not exceed that of a fig leaf. However, as far as the wider national arena was concerned, it could still not be dropped completely, especially not by the BJP, which was eager to project an image of capable leadership and stability and to reach out to an electorate as large as possible. The lack of a public and largely also political opposition against the Gujarat pogrom, on the other hand, elevated the Sangh Parivar’s basic discourse of defense into a dominant position, thus creating a contradiction in terms.

As has become obvious by now, at the core of the Sangh Parivar’s agency and argument, like of other authoritarian and anti-democratic movements, lies the motif of necessary defense, which basically consists of establishing a naturalised, ontological and overpowering Other – be that a group of people like the Muslims, a political party like the Congress, a professional segment like the English language media (see below and 6.3.1.) or an incident such as ‘Godhra’. Deduced from this is a demand for ‘justice’ that involves an equalisation in terms of the own responsibility and a polarisation in terms of the maintenance of the respective Other. It legitimises the release of prejudices and discriminations, and it impedes the questioning and evaluation of the naturalised Other *as* an Other by labelling such endeavours as ‘biased’. The Other in itself can be seen as ‘untouchable’ in its ontological construction as representing ‘injustice’ and is permanently reified. While thus a discourse is taking place, its scope to actually discuss things is limited from the start. With regard to the minorities, and the Muslims in particular, the Sangh Parivar leads within this more general framework a culturally defined minority discourse despite claiming to represent a majority, which is turned into a minority with the argument that it is withheld the superior rights that supposedly befit a majority, thus creating the within a democratic set-up paradoxical narrative of a suppressed majority. Produced is a situation in which “right is declared wrong and wrong is declared right” that Hannah Arendt has defined as characterising totalitarian aspirations. For the actual minorities, this majority-as-minority discourse, which entails the turnaround of reality, is potentially even more lethal than is the situation for minorities in theocratic states, because it is part of a permanent mobilisation that needs continuous legitimating.

Generally, a discourse of defense loses its reason when it becomes the dominant discourse. Likewise does a dominant or hegemonic discourse, that exists in every society, democratic or

⁴⁹⁹ Ghose, 2003.

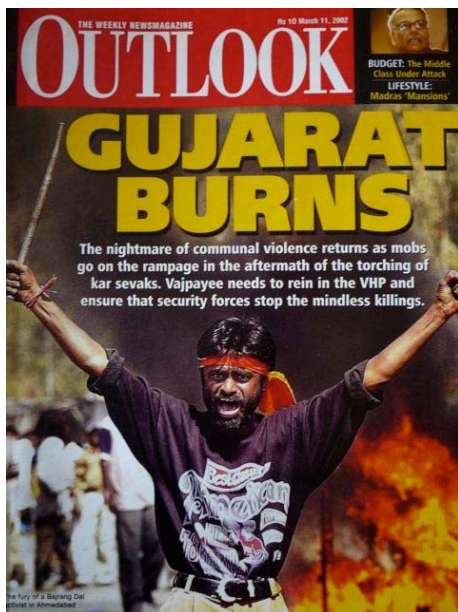
not, condition the opposition against it, even though not the respective form that this opposition may take. Within the national political arena, the Sangh Parivar had indeed historically been in ‘defense’, i.e. in opposition to a dominant discourse that for long and increasingly sympathised with many of the elements and themes of Hindu nationalism, but that maintained at least the outer appearance of a dominant space in which the Hindutva discourse was but one amongst others (and in which the dominant political elite felt safe). What, however, happens if a discourse of defense that, moreover, and in contrast to other anti-democratic movements, does not pursue the abolition of democracy itself (for instance, through a coup d’état)⁵⁰⁰, becomes the dominant one, i.e. when the still intrinsically needed powerful Other is clearly in the minority itself?

During and after Gujarat, what could be observed in this regard, I propose, was a situation of deadlocked democracy, in which, on the one hand, it almost seemed as if Pandora’s history box had been opened and out poured into the realm of public debate many topics that previously had mainly been scholarly discussed areas. This did not merely encompass Kashmir and Indo-Pakistani relations. The debate went partly back as far as to the Indian Mutiny against the British in 1857 and prominently included partition and the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984, which is the only one that in scope could be compared to Gujarat. What thus seemed to be set free was an atmosphere of acute democratisation, in which, moreover, every accusation against the Sangh Parivar could be voiced as well. However, it was largely the Sangh Parivar itself that opened the history box, thereby making immediate use of the historical neglect of two interconnected public discourses. One concerned the historical role and democratic faults of the Congress party, which had been eroded as a system through decreasing electoral success since the 1980s but had not been subject of a larger critical evaluation in Indian society (Stanley Wolpert’s first slightly critical biography of Nehru, for instance, provoked upon its publication in India in the middle of the 1990s still considerable indignation). The analogies with television itself were salient in this respect. Television had moved directly from state control into transnationalisation and privatisation (see 3.2. and 7.1.), without a ‘public’ phase during which the reasons for Doordarshan’s eroding (or never quite developed) appeal could have been assessed. Similarly – and largely simultaneously - had Indian society moved from an almost uninterrupted reign of the Congress for almost 50 years into a BJP-led governance with not even two years of an ‘alternative government’ under the United Front during which the past could hardly be approached. To continuously bring the

⁵⁰⁰ See Christophe Jaffrelot, 2001, “Hindu Nationalism and Democracy”, in: Gopal Jayal (ed.), pp. 509-534.

Congress into the debate now appeared to enable this overdue public debate on its faults and failures, but systematically aided the BJP's self-representation as a democratic agent and alternative and diverted attention from a sustained analysis of its own doing. It underlined how intrinsically dependent the Sangh Parivar is on the democratic gaps and deficits of others in order to usher in and validate an authoritarian politics that comes in the guise of democratic improvement.

The second neglect concerned a “detailed, elaborate and sufficient national discussion of what secularism might mean across both state and civil societies”⁵⁰¹, whose historical absence Chetan Bhatt sees as one of the catalytic factors in the rise of Hindu nationalism. With secularism having become, to a degree, “a dirty word”⁵⁰², its (foreseeable) introduction into



the debate through secularists now worked towards its appropriation through the Sangh Parivar, thus enabling the continuation of what Paul Brass has called “blame displacement”⁵⁰³ on a higher, more totalising level. Every utterance of critique against the BJP was put under the moral obligation to first consider what others had done wrong, thus somewhat establishing the party (and the Sangh Parivar as a whole) as the almost logical and necessary result (and even end) of history and its grave mistakes. The effect was that critique was not destabilising or de-legitimising the Sangh Parivar.

On the contrary, the louder and the more outraged the critique the more it seemed to work in favour of the BJP and to confirm and even shape its position, which enabled it to organise a discourse of polarisation and equalisation that had basically no ‘outside’ position.

Next to the Congress party (and the Muslims), it was the national English language media that played the lead role as an established and potentially powerful Other in this organised discourse and that were thus from the beginning de-legitimised in their claim as independent and documenting agents. They were resurrected and fixed in their traditional role as

Above: Cover of *Outlook*, March 11, 2002. The picture of the Bajrang Dal activist became, together with a kneeling Muslim begging for his life, the most-featured image in course of the pogrom. The text below the headline reads: “The nightmare of communal violence returns as mobs go on the rampage in the aftermath of the torching of kar sevaks. Vajpayee needs to rein in the VHP and ensure that security forces stop the mindless killings.”

⁵⁰¹ Bhatt, 2001, p. 9.

⁵⁰² Script writer and director, Interview I/18.

⁵⁰³ See Brass, 2003, pp. 305-328 and pp. 344-351.

representatives of the secular post-colonial elite, and they themselves seemed to only slowly recognise the altered relation of power within which they actually motioned. The national English language news media, i.e. the press and Star News/NDTV, were, apart from political and human rights activists - whose voices, however, would not disseminate that far - the main carriers of outrage and criticism at the unfolding violence in Gujarat, initially obviously in the endeavour and belief to rouse the public into the same shock over the events that they were displaying themselves (the above title “Gujarat Burns” inherently presumes a an agitated and concerned public). The Congress, on the other hand, apart from some representative figures such as Mani Shankar Aiyar⁵⁰⁴, who featured in nearly every political talk-show on the matter, and a few angry or silent appearances of Sonia Gandhi in parliament and – at a rather late date – in Gujarat, remained largely out of sight. The Congress itself thus mainly merely figured in the media that have traditionally been seen as its mouthpiece, indicating also a first-time primacy of the media over politics (see below).

The setting of the English language media as the ontological adversary within the Sangh Parivar’s discourse was not new. Arvind Rajagopal has pointed out that the English language press has played an immanent part in the BJP’s print media strategy from the very inception of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement onwards, which he has aptly described as a “hall of mirrors.”⁵⁰⁵ The English print media were since the 1980s built up as the necessary Other, which was neither entitled nor able to speak in the name of ‘India’s (Hindi language) people’. They served as the intrinsic counter-image, against which the Sangh Parivar worked out its agenda of a ‘culturally authentic’ representation. Significantly, Rajagopal notes already with regard to the beginning of the 1990s, when the BJP had been able to considerably increase its seats in the Lok Sabha, that “the alarm bells rung by the press [...] helped to create the storm in which the BJP hoped to sail into power, one in which terror and anticipation both had a role to play.”⁵⁰⁶ This strategy itself seemed to have come to a climax with Gujarat, when the outrage in the English language media - now including television - that was not representative of the larger public, created for a BJP *in* power an even strengthened moral position as well as testifying to its democratic ability and interest to expose itself even to fiercest critique.

To be sure, one would not have wanted to imagine the situation without the reporting and analysis of the English language media, even though this neglects those Hindi language and

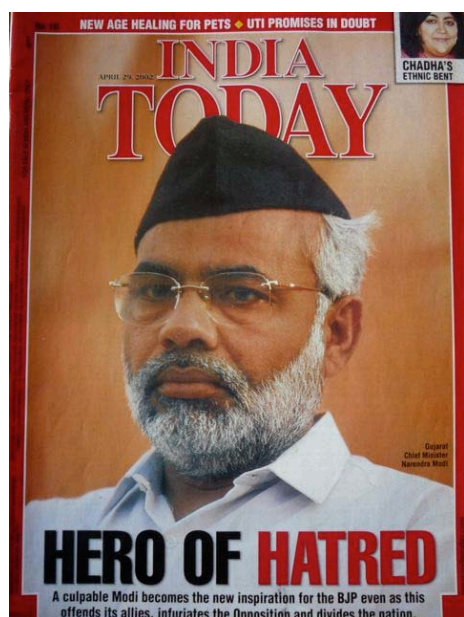
⁵⁰⁴ At the time MP, Lok Sabha, for the Congress; under the UPA-government since 2004 first Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, currently Minister of Panchayati Raj and Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports.

⁵⁰⁵ Rajagopal 2001, pp. 171-187.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 173.

vernacular papers that engaged in a critical – and partly far more observant – coverage (see 6.3.1.). The English language media were just not only, unwillingly, necessary players in an organised discourse, their alarm was also vital for this discourse to happen in the first place. It was, however, the unequivocal praise for their coverage (largely in the English language media themselves), which rather seemed to reproduce the antagonistic framework established by the Sangh Parivar and to conveniently overlook changes within the ‘own ranks’. That the old dichotomy between English-secular-Congress and Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan was not only breaking up but showed always to have been a projection to a degree could be made out by the coverage of *The Pioneer*, one of the oldest and highest-esteemed English language dailies, which generally took an open pro-BJP stand. More indirectly, and thus more effectually, this revealed, as indicated in chapter 4, especially in *India Today*, India’s most established and largest-selling newsmagazine.

As Subarno Chattarji has argued, *India Today* appeared on the outside to be part of the journalistic indignation over Gujarat, while its actual evaluation of the situation spoke another language. “Throughout its coverage there seemed to be a schizophrenic divide between the



cover photographs and the articles within. For instance, the issue with Modi in traditional RSS attire on the cover held out the possibility of a critical look at his politics and mode of governance, if one may call riot-mongering a mode of governance. In contrast to this expectation, the article actually bolstered the righteousness and iconic stature of the RSS man now fulfilling his avowed mission.”⁵⁰⁷ This interpretation itself, however, rather speaks of the interpretational openness that the double-faced coverage of the *India Today* basically allowed for. The mentioned cover featured the headline “Hero of Hatred” (with ‘hero’ in

black and ‘hatred’ in red letters), and the related article, whilst stressing the figure of a polarisation between equals, seemed to come down to nothing more than the statement that some loathed and others celebrated Narendra Modi, and the results remained to be seen. It

Above: Cover of *India Today*, April 29, 2002. The sub-headline reads: “A culpable Modi becomes the new inspiration for the BJP even as this offends its allies, infuriates the Opposition and divides the nation.”

⁵⁰⁷ Subarno Chattarji, 2004, “Media representations of the Kargil War and the Gujarat riots”, in: *Sarai Reader* 04, *Crisis/Media*, Delhi/Amsterdam: Sarai: The New Media Initiative/ Society for Old and New Media, p. 111.

was the representation of Modi as a matter of *opinion* rather than of researchable fact, the very absconding from an outright condemnation and the renouncement of supplying information and analysis of the Gujarat government's actual agency, which was amply available, that made discernable India Today's leanings, which Chattarji sees as "reflective of dominant middle class views."⁵⁰⁸ I will come back to this particular form of 'impartiality' and readability in the commercialised news media and their reporting in the context of the India Today-owned Hindi language channel Aaj Tak in 6.4.1.

6.2.1. Polarisation Organised and Equalisation Demanded

Altogether there was in the reporting on Gujarat on national TV news channels a clear dominance of mere newscasts that renounced of larger contextualisation and analysis, which was basically left to the English language press. This could be seen as being indicative of an unfolding trend. As a senior India Today-journalist put it: "Discussion should take place in the print media now, TV for hard news as it is."⁵⁰⁹ The press also had a far longer independent standing and greater experience with riot-reporting and could thus in many cases maintain a rather unimpressed attitude. Star News/NDTV was the only TV channel that tried to bridge this gap during the pogrom, thus attempting to invoke a 'public' representation in the conventional sense and unwittingly revealing its roots and allegiances with the English language press. It pursued next to a more analytical live reporting a more in-depth discussion and work up of the situation through the continuous invitation and interviewing of politicians (Sangh Parivar and other) and activists into their news programmes and particularly in the two weekly political debate programmes *The Big Fight* and *We the People*.

What was remarkable about these two shows was that they were not simply political talk shows. *The Big Fight*, then moderated by Rajdeep Sardesai, was formatted upon public representatives of opposing political, social or economic views, thus presuming basic ideological antagonisms.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Interview II/25.



Trailer of *The Big Fight* (2002): two boxing gloves encounter and set off a blaze

We the People, on the other hand, hosted by Barkha Dutt, followed the concept of a participant studio audience that was framed in the context of the Indian Constitution's Preamble, which reads: "We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote amongst them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation."



Trailer of *We the People* (2002), which was in its middle part adapted to the respective topic discussed (this trailer was preceding the episode "Gujarat: Secularism under Threat", aired on April 07, 2002). To the right the fade into the studio audience.

The two programmes were thus constructed upon a serious representation of fundamental ideological and programmatic differences within a guaranteed democratic set-up and a re-invocation of the 'myth of the state' through a valuation and enactment of the official relationship between citizenry and the democratic state respectively. They basically derived from and still took for granted the former dominant discourse, in which the Sangh Parivar, and not the Congress norm, was in defense and had to justify itself for its actions. This preliminary framework, however, showed itself precisely with these debates on the larger implications of the Gujarat violence and the dominant role of the Sangh Parivar as unravelling, supported not least by the format of the television debate itself.

Within the acute situation, both programmes were somewhat predicated upon an obvious political necessity and a demand for serious debate that assumed an enraged and oppositional public, which was empirically not given. Secondly, Sardesai and Dutt were considered the TV-stars of the “left-liberal establishment” – as they also themselves put it (see below and 6.3.1.) – and the most visible and exposed faces of the English language media, which vis-à-vis the less publicly exposed press journalists even enhanced their position as pre-defined targets within the Sangh Parivar’s organised discourse. A debate programme, moreover, lends itself inherently to the mere representation of opinions rather than the presentation of analysed facts and information, and it limits the role of the presenter to that of a moderator rather than an investigative interviewer. It virtually lives off the staging of polarised views, even if there exists a lopsided-ness in the larger acceptance of these views, thus helping to support the impression of a polarisation even where there is actual asymmetry. All these prerequisites made it almost attractive for Sangh Parivar members to appear on the panels, even though they were invited under the preliminary of facing merciless opposition. Before this rather disadvantageous background, both moderators tried, through the selection of the topics, of supposedly potent counter-speakers and their own moderation, to shape but to a considerable degree also to invent a running discourse, which in itself exposed itself to accusations of being ‘biased’. On the other hand, however, it was at the time also the still rather unacknowledged moment of their own marginalisation despite their ensured public presence – the contradiction of which only seemed to dawn on them then and was fully assessed only in retrospect a year later (see 6.3.1.) – that aided the conviction of the moderators to actually move in a polarised situation, in which equal partners encounter each other. The very imagination that the own, anti-Sangh Parivar position could be non-representative seemed itself too outrageous to believe, maybe not with regard to the general political development, but certainly with regard to Gujarat, which in their eyes clearly showed that “this time they [the Sangh Parivar, B.O.] have gone too far.”⁵¹⁰ What thus seemed to exist was a fundamentally different assessment and perception of polarisation, which in the one reading was based on the expectancy of a strong opposition and in the other was dependent on evoking a strong Other in order to defend the own agenda and agency – and which ultimately worked in favour of the latter. What in effect got systematically flattened this way were precisely the ideological differences between Congress and Sangh Parivar that these programmes were out to demonstrate.

⁵¹⁰ Star News/NDTV journalist, Interview I/31.

That not only the invited participants, including Congress representatives and Muslims (which ironically testified to their being, however voluntarily, part of the ‘national mainstream’ more than anything else), but also Sardesai and Dutt themselves had internalised some of the themes and presumptions of the Sangh Parivar or were, however unwittingly, compromising on the general public’s mood under the pressure of addressing an audience, showed in the basic acceptance of the ‘fact’ of ‘Godhra’ as a ‘heinous crime’, committed most probably by ‘Muslim criminals’. It is difficult to accuse Dutt and Sardesai, despite being journalists and having themselves extensively reported from Gujarat, of unwitting support through ignorance, because the thesis, or rather setting, of ‘Godhra’ in the emerging discourse was very powerful and, pungently backed by the global parole of the ‘war on terror’, somewhat disallowing even the thought of another possibility. The emotional blackmailing that this setting contained was predicated upon the construction of the attacked Hindu and the attacking Muslim, thus immanently criminalising the *supposed* assault on members of the majority community rather than the *evident* pogrom against the minority community. Being a researcher at the time, this setting also extended into my own work – or rather I allowed it to extend there -, as I myself did not, in my interviews with Dutt and Sardesai as well as with other journalists, pose the question why the very ‘fact’ of a (Muslim) crime was never doubted. I was quite sure that this had not been a pre-planned attack, at least not by Muslims, as there do not exist comparable instances of assaults by ‘Muslim criminals’ in the Indian record, particularly not where the attacked object was ‘merely’ set on fire. Muslim *criminals*, like other criminals, operate on a different level and, even though more communalised than earlier, not independent from economic considerations. However, upon entering interview situations the question was more in how far I could with the respective partner move – as it were, in protest to the dominant reading – onto the level of questioning that Muslims were responsible, which remained itself entangled in the established Hindu-Muslim logic. That the stating of a crime, as the very basic precondition for ‘retaliation’, does not only require the question of who did it, but first of all whether it was a crime at all (and not, as investigations would support three years later, an accident), got even more lost in the discourse than the question whether it had been Muslims, thus underlining the strength of the Sangh Parivar to organise and naturalise the discourse, but also the powerful backing that the general public was lending to it – be it out of sympathy, ignorance, insecurity, or fear -, including the media and scholarly research. It indeed seemed that one could not even *imagine* any more that the actual cause of the tragedy was – within the ongoing mobilisation of VHP and Bajrang Dal –

utterly banal, and to merely question 'Godhra' as a 'heinous crime' was bound to provoke precisely the protest and outrage that 'Gujarat' failed to generate.

A prominent argument, on the other hand, that resurfaced time and again within the – also in this respect pre-framed - televised discussion rounds of *We the People* and *The Big Fight* did very much concern a former taboo or blind spot, namely - in the face of the Gujarat government's obvious involvement in the pogrom - the question of the role of political parties and the state in communal violence. This, however, became the most prominent asset in the verbal dismantling of the Congress system rather than the base for an evaluation of the Sangh Parivar's responsibility for Gujarat. The topic of well-aimed and calculated state involvement, on the municipal, regional or national level, in the preparation of riots and their embeddedness in electoral competition had for long been dispersed, provoking Paul Brass' conclusion that political parties and media alike have historically been entangled in a game of superficial and repetitive "blame displacement" that was neither interested nor able to uncover the underlying structures of communal agitation and riots and that worked towards perpetuating the impression not only that the violence is spontaneous and 'cultural' and the state merely fails to control it but also that "it is always Muslims who start the riots and the Hindus who suffer most from them."⁵¹¹ While thus the move towards openly discussing state and government involvement marked a democratic breakthrough, the undigested politics of the Congress took in many cases precedence over the evaluation of the current liability of the Sangh Parivar and the qualitative difference in the organisation of the violence, facilitating a conduction of the debate in terms of the mentioned pattern of polarisation and equalisation and reifying the moment of a democratic deadlock. Similarly was the theme of votebank politics continuously tabled by members of the Sangh Parivar. The increase of votebank politics can be seen as a sign of the decreasing self-evidence that the state is protecting the rights of all its citizens – and inhabitants - in an equal or at least levelled lawful manner. One of the basic problems of the Indian state from its inception has been that the Congress had set itself as being largely congruent with the state, thus wielding more power than a mere political party and making the protection of Indian citizens, and particularly the minorities, dependent upon an electoral support for what had established itself as 'the Congress system'. While the foregrounding of this historical problem appeared as another democratic breakthrough, the branding even of the slightest advance in favour of Muslims could now be attacked as 'playing votebank politics'

⁵¹¹ Brass, 2003, p. 347.

by members of the Sangh Parivar, thus effectively diverting attention from the fact that the BJP's own votebank is the Hindu majority.

An episode of *We the People* with the title "BJP's Hindutva Campaign", aired on April 14, 2002 – two days after Vajpayee's speech in Goa and during running negotiations in the Telugu DSSM Party (Andhra Pradesh) whether it would remain in the NDA-coalition under the circumstances (it did) – may serve as a first example. For a start, the very set-up of the participating discussants showed the strategy of political parties to delegate representatives to the media (and to different formats within the media), who are deemed able to display the preferred image of the respective party at the time, as much as it indicated the media's readiness to comply with these delegations. While for the Congress the preferred and ubiquitous representative was the mentioned Mani Shankar Aiyar - a 'staunch Nehruvian secularist', as he was repeatedly announced - for the BJP it were the national secretary Muhtar Abbas Naqvi, one of the few Muslims in the BJP, a moderate and Modi-critic, as well as Uma Bharti, the only sanyasi in the party leadership, who obviously was to emphasise its spiritual and religious character and divert attention from its political foundations and objectives.

In this *We the People*-episode, which featured Aiyar and Naqvi amongst the studio audience, there was first of all a powerful example of how the moderation failed in walking the tightrope of actively enforcing democratic rules against the 'freedom of speech' and thus in reinforcing the formal relation between state and citizen. It had a male member of the studio audience raising his voice: "I am an ordinary citizen of this country. I'm fifty years old, it has taken me fifty years of living in this country, still I'm confused. All the political parties which are talking of secularism, they talk from the rooftop, they shout 'secularism, secularism!' I fail to understand, I have never seen, if Hindus are killed, the entire nation, all these parties get together and do it. One Christian doctor dies, the whole world was aflame.⁵¹² Few Muslims get killed, because of their own fault, they started it, they started, Godhra was done by them..." – at which point protests arose from the audience and Barkha Dutt first, in a move to indicate her disapproval, put her hand onto the speaker's shoulder to then retrieve the microphone from him. The last words we hear (off screen) from the man are "... if you don't want to listen...", while Dutt calmed down the shouting audience with "There is no point in shouting. Please. You have made your reactions to the point the gentleman made very clear, but he also has a right to ask his question, he's a citizen of this country." She then turns back to the now stone-faced former speaker with the words: "I'm gonna request you, sir, we are not

⁵¹² Referring probably to the killing of a missionary in the state of Orissa in 1999.

here into this kind of battle between Hindus and Muslims, our country does not need that right now. It just doesn't need that right now. You wanted to make a point about our double standards, you can ask that question, I see the point you're making. If I could paraphrase it for you, it is that parties which claim to be secular have not practised secular politics, and that's a double standard, alright?"



We the People, April 14, 2002 (to the right, in the small box, the score of an ongoing cricket match)

This incident illuminated a number of aspects. It showed that the invited studio audience was largely selected according to Star News/NDTV's underlying commitment and perception, amongst which an open Hindutva-utterance was an exception and not welcomed. The protest that arose, however, as Dutt's reaction made also clear, was directed less at accusing the Muslims for Godhra than at the adherence to righteous 'retaliation' as well as to the belittling of the violence. Dutt's retort, on the other hand, not only entailed a rather wilful re-interpretation of the speaker's equation of Hindu majority interests with secularism into a lack of practised secularism. It also, despite the conscious emphasis of democracy's validity for all, confirmed to the long-standing accusation against the secular elite of patronising behaviour, in doubt rather enhancing than diminishing the reprimanded speaker's aversion against it and lending credibility to the BJP's claim to 'speak for the people'. It were moments like these, which were abound in these televised discussion rounds, that made most transparent the deadlock of the democratic discourse, in which the concept of a politically majority was directly encountered by the concept of a cultural majority: had the speaker gotten the democratic right to talk to the end, would that have meant the creation of a platform for an undemocratic statement that in doubt was more representative of the general atmosphere than was Dutt's reprimand. To cut him off, however, was democratically

important, but undemocratic in itself and bound to provoke moral condemnation amongst viewers (and declining TRPs for the channel).

Muhtar Abbas Naqvi, on the other hand, was clearly performing the role of the living contradiction of being a Muslim and a leading BJP-member at the same time, thus representing for his party the desired equalisation and proof that the Sangh Parivar had nothing against Muslims ‘as such’ and signifying for the media the polarisation of apparently incompatible contrasts. Answering Barkha Dutt’s question how he as a Muslim dealt with Vajpayee’s statements in Goa, he pointed out the BJP’s ability – in contrast to the ‘secular establishment’ – to differ between the sensible and responsible Muslim and the terrorist, the proof of which, however, and thus the proof of the adequacy of the BJP’s ‘goodwill’ in this respect, would have to be delivered by the Muslims themselves: “Yes, I am a Muslim, and Islam has been hijacked by fundamentalists like Bin Laden and others. Islam is not the same as terrorism. And this is what Vajpayee has been saying. Islam is a tolerant and peaceful religion, but it is up to us to show this and to critique ourselves. This is our responsibility.”⁵¹³

While the reversal of the principle that a suspect’s guilt has to be proven into the demand that a suspect has to prove his innocence, that this ‘ability to differ’ entailed, was not further discussed, later in the debate, when the focus had shifted onto party politics and their strategies to get the Muslim vote, a woman from the studio audience held a rather upset speech, which attempted to shift the criminalisation from ‘Godhra’ to ‘Gujarat’: “Whichever party gets to power in Gujarat, whether Mr. Modi gets away with his design, and he should not, he should be criminally held calculable, Mr. Naqvi, and you should be ashamed of belonging to a party like this, frankly” – shot on a vaguely nodding Naqvi – “but whichever party comes to power in Gujarat has to give a guarantee and an undertaking that those who committed these heinous crimes, raping women on roads and shouting Jai Shri Ram, are put behind bars. This is the guarantee that the people of this country need. We are a completely morally decrepit nation today.”

To this, as well as to a statement by Aiyer on the BJP’s responsibility, Naqvi answered: “After all the merits that Mr. Ayer has attributed to its party concerning secularism, let me say that it is due to the Congress that we were partitioned. It has sacrificed everything for votebank politics, and in all states where Congress has been in power, the economic status of minorities, particularly the Muslims, has declined. They are creating the communal divide. If you look at political history, where the Congress was ruling you had major state-sponsored

⁵¹³ Translated from Hindi.

atrocities against Muslims, with support of the police. That was before an opposition of the BJP existed. That does not mean that I support Modi's politics, but those people who now demand his head and prefer to forget all the other killings which happened under the guise of secularism, are hypocrites. You have to condemn the whole history of state-sponsored violence against Muslims and not just focus on the present, because that's where you get into votebank politics by excusing one party in the name of secularism."⁵¹⁴ Applause from the studio audience.

As can be seen from these excerpts, the 'actual' topics at stake in the situation were touched, but not discussed and also not enforced through informed provocations by the moderation. With the moral pressure of putting an undigested past before the acute present and thus of emphasising 'larger truths' instead of detailed facts, Aiyar's excited assertions that a Congress government in Gujarat would hold Modi accountable sounded as hollow as did the outraged blame of the BJP pearl off Naqvi. What was aided through this was the self-representation of the BJP not merely as a 'party with a difference' that was reacting to existing grievances and that, as Hansen has argued, was built upon the image of 'virtuous men' re-entering the political arena in opposition to a Congress that had lost its credibility through its entanglement with votebank politics and corruption. It also bestowed upon the BJP the aura of being an 'honest' and 'courageous' party that did not shy away from naming uncomfortable truths even in difficult times, such as that Muslims also finally have to start critiquing themselves rather than pointing the finger at others and just claiming their rights. What this way remained out of the debate, on the other hand, were not merely the 'smaller' and more direct points that were hidden in the various statements, such as the question for legal accountability of politicians, the reasons for the deep disappointment amongst Muslims with the Congress and particularly their obvious own deadlocked situation, which Naqvi unwillingly represented as much as he did the BJP. What got systematically dispersed this way was a critical debate of the Congress' and the Sangh Parivar's historical intersections as much as of their divergent ideological dispositions and patterns of action.

As is well documented by now, the Congress system largely meant the "protection and extension of social privileges to the educated Hindu middle classes, and condescending paternalism vis-à-vis lower-caste groups and minorities."⁵¹⁵ The Congress and its activists have participated in and profited from communal violence in the wake of elections,

⁵¹⁴ Translated from Hindi.

⁵¹⁵ Hansen 1999, p. 8.

particularly with regard to the Muslim vote. The most blatant example is certainly the destruction of the Babri Masjid itself, which went largely unhindered by the Narasimha Rao-government (1991-1996) and which served the Congress also, while it actually showed the Congress' rapidly losing ground against the BJP, as a welcome (even though hardly successful) demonstration that the Sangh Parivar could never be a protector of the Muslims. Xenophobic and condescending tendencies in the Congress, the electoral focus on the Hindu vote since Indira Gandhi's Prime Ministership and the subsequent development of a 'soft Hindutva' in course of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement, the excesses of which could be witnessed, for instance, in the Congress anticipating 'arguments' that are genuinely Hindutva (like the accusation of hurting Hindu sentiments by offering a cake that could not be proved to be entirely vegetarian referred to above), have all helped to profoundly discredit the Congress. The instigation, orchestration and condoning of the anti-Sikh pogrom of high-ranking Congress-members, moreover, is beyond doubt and has provoked catch-phrases such as "What the Sangh Parivar does by day, the Congress does by night"⁵¹⁶ or, in the words of a Muslim serial director: "We know that half of them [Congress members, B.O.] wear khakis under their dhotis."⁵¹⁷

Implicated in this is a blurred and partly reversed calculability of the Congress and the Sangh Parivar that ultimately benefits the latter. It is not any more the Sangh Parivar that is incalculable in its culturalist agenda, but the Congress that has become non-assessable and non-reliable in its claim of standing for secularism and democracy, bringing about statements that the choice between the BJP and the Congress is to decide "which snake has the least poison"⁵¹⁸, which expresses the profound distrust in parliamentary and party politics as a whole. Yet it still makes an important difference that the politics and societal concept of the Congress were never in a fundamentally undemocratic way *based* on an enemy image, neither with regard to Sikhs or Christians nor with regard to Muslims, in contrast to those of the Sangh Parivar whose very idea of the 'Hindu Rashtra' is intrinsically dependent on the Muslim Other, or on any culturally or ethnically defined Other in any case. It makes a difference, because the Congress is potentially reformable along democratic principles, while for the Sangh Parivar this would entail a reform of its very foundations. And it makes a

⁵¹⁶ Arundhati Roy, 2002, Democracy: Who's She When She's at Home, in: *Outlook*, May 06.

⁵¹⁷ Interview II/36, referring to the uniform of the RSS, consisting of a white shirt, black cap and khaki shorts and the white cloth (dhoti) that is, predominantly in Bengal, worn by men as the lower part of everyday clothing, signifying here the encompassing 'Indian' claim of the Congress.

⁵¹⁸ Young participant in the political discussion programme *Muquabla*, the Hindi version of *The Big Fight*, screened on Star News/NDTV India on June 13, 2003, on the topic "The Changing Face of Indian Politicians".

difference, because it is still not the same if riots are used as a source of political profit or if they are actively pursued as part of a basic ideological agenda. As has been shown particularly by Brass, the decrease of communal violence in BJP-governed states has little to do with the party's ensuring harmony and peace between Hindus and Muslims but with tactical and electoral considerations and thus with the active choice to (temporarily) *renounce* of mobilisation.⁵¹⁹ While thus a BJP-government might be immediately and physically safer for potential victims, the safety comes at the price of being at the mercy of the next political move and of accepting the status of a second-class citizen in a Hindu majoritarian concept. The question of what good is a party that preaches one thing and does another is an important one. Yet it stops short, reifying the moment of a deadlock, at the equally important question what it actually means to endorse a party merely for the transparency of its actions when these are based on anti-democratic principles.

While the Congress's accusation of betrayal implied the demand for reliable secularism and democracy rather than a rejection of it, the same allegation also opened the space for a redefinition of secularism in terms of an equation with Hinduism, and with Hindutva respectively. This became particularly transparent in an episode of *The Big Fight* with the title "From Gujarat to Ayodhya: Is Secularism at Stake?" It was aired on March 09, 2002, after the first big wave of the violence in Gujarat, when it was commonly assumed that it was in the process of dying down and attention started to focus onto March 15, the date of the construction start of the Ram Mandir that was unabatedly proposed by the VHP. The debate had as discussants Uma Bharti (who was introduced by Rajdeep Sardesai, to her obvious dismay, as also being a member of the VHP in order to emphasise the personal overlap of the BJP with other organisations of the Sangh Parivar), Mani Shankar Aiyer and Javed Akhtar, Muslim lyricist of countless Bollywood films and political activist (who was introduced as "a member of the left-liberal establishment" but who was obviously also to underline Muslim allegiance to it). While one of the faded-in inserts read "Does secularism need to be redefined in the Indian context?" the prelude to the debate surprised with the assumption shared by all three speakers that "Hindus are inherently secular", which had first been advanced by Uma Bharti and which instantly took the steam out of the 'big fight'.

This was, however, refined by Aiyer with the reference that all other religious groups were equally secular and that the Sangh Parivar's great error consisted in limiting secularism to Hindus. Akhtar, on the other hand, underscored that "no party and no leader invented

⁵¹⁹ See Brass, 2003, pp. 132-148 and 296-304.

secularism in this country. India was secular well before this word secularism was coined. We were inhaling oxygen well before human beings came to know that there is a gas called oxygen. So we are inherently secular, there is no doubt about it. But not thanks to *you*, madam (excitedly pointing at Uma Bharti), and not thanks to people like *you*. Don't you tell us that India became a secular country after the partition and because of Hindus who are not like you. The fact is that the RSS tried their best to separate us, you want the Two-Nation preaching more than did Muslims. You have no moral right to talk about that." This preliminary setting, despite profound interpretational differences, of secularism as an expression of Hinduism or natural characteristic of India was pictured as an indigenous counter-concept to a Western secularism that remained non-withstood in Bharti's definition as a "civil concept outside religion" and that was even immanent in the concept of the debate itself. One of the inserts read "Can religion ever be divorced from politics in India?", which somewhat suggested that in India that was not at all the case while outside India it can.

The ground was thus unwittingly paved for Bharti's (and the Sangh Parivar's) definition, whose labelling of the Congress' and state form of secularism as 'pseudo-secular' entails that it is a 'fake' or a 'façade' in contrast to the 'true' and 'real' secularism that is enshrined in the inherent tolerance of Hinduism itself and that is represented by Hindutva. What was therewith inherently cut off even from even the possibility of discussing was the difficulty in any form of secularised society to completely dissociate it from religiously informed cultural practises and codes, which, for instance, Sumit Sarkar had for the Indian context noted in the middle of the 1990s: "The enormous overlap in personnel, assumptions, and symbols between mainstream Indian nationalism and Hindu communalism is too obvious to need much elaboration. One can think of the 'Bande Mataram' hymn-cum-slogan, central to much anti-British patriotism and at the same time a Hindu rallying cry, at least in Bengal, during confrontations with Muslims. (I can recall hearing it used in that way during a Calcutta riot in the winter of 1964-65.) A more dramatic example would be the murder of the Mahatma by Nathuram Godse: both these protagonists in that total confrontation of January 30, 1948, could in some senses be called nationalists and pious Hindus, and for both Rama was a central icon."⁵²⁰ Sarkar thus comes to the conclusion that "'Secular' in India, in other words, has

⁵²⁰ Sarkar, 1996, p. 271 (brackets in the original). 'Bande Mataram' (also 'Vande Mataram' – 'Bow to thee mother') was originally written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and was one of the most important songs particularly in the Bengali anti-British resistance and swadeshi-movement. Aurobindo Ghose (later Sri Aurobindo) founded in 1906 in Calcutta a nationalist liberation paper with the same title. The song was considered for the national anthem after Independence but rejected on the grounds that it equalled India with the body of a Hindu goddess, thus excluding and even violating the religious concept of the Muslims. It has turned

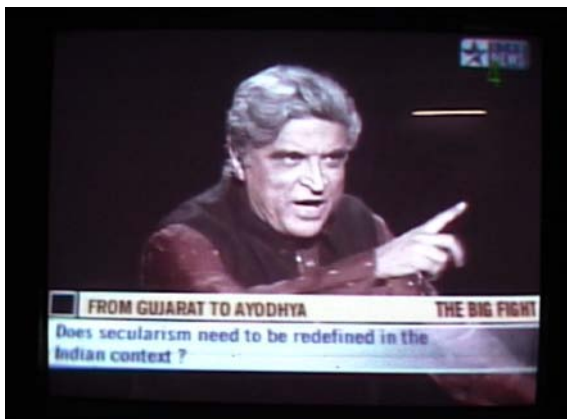
meant, principally, ‘anticommunal’.”⁵²¹ In the interpretation of the Sangh Parivar, on the other hand, secular is who is against Hindu majoritarian rule.



Uma Bharti



Mani Shankar Aiyar



Javed Akhtar, addressing Bharti



Rajdeep Sardesai, mediating

Even though the secularism of anti-communalism was discernable in Akhtar’s and particularly in Aiyar’s statements, the acceptance of the basic equation of religion and secularism marked its shift onto a different level altogether, which somewhat skipped the stage of a debate about secularism’s meaning for and in India, including the significant aspect that, next to modernity and democracy, secularism is one of the actual ‘untouchable’ key terms that both parties interpret differently but that neither of them, and particularly not the

into one of the leading slogans of the Sangh Parivar which has repeatedly tried to make it compulsory as a morning salute in schools. A more contemporary example, on the other hand, for the overlaps between Hindu communalism and Indian nationalism would be the 1988-founded, English-language public Shri Ram School in Delhi.

⁵²¹ Ibid, p. 273.

BJP, wants to seriously challenge. The unmediated and uninterrupted shift towards a Hindutva-interpretation of ‘real’ secularism virtually invited Bharti’s retort that “what is put into question is the secularism which is based on minorityism. [...] Mr. Aiyar is not answering my point on minorityism”, which could be easily extended into the standard complain in these debates that double standards were applied to communal violence and state involvement in the wake of Gujarat out of an anti-BJP and basically an anti-Hindu bias – rather than being based on ‘truth’: “There was never a condemnation of the Hindus being driven out of Kashmir, Nepal is a Hindu kingdom and a Hindu state, and there was never a Muslim forced to leave that state, whereas the Hindu minority was forced to leave Kashmir. During the Sikh-riots in ‘84 Sonia Gandhi did not get out of an air-conditioned room. The moment there is a retaliation in Godhra everybody condemns it. Now Modi is asked to step down, in ‘84 nobody asked the Congress to step down.”

These kinds of demands for an equal treatment and condemnation of communal violence, no matter whether it occurred under the BJP or the Congress, went together with the demand for an equal treatment and equal contribution of all communities. This was the next point of Uma Bharti, to which Sardesai delivered the suitable pass by voicing concern about the “polarisation of communities”, which was readily taken up by Bharti: “It’s absolutely right what you are saying that in many parts of the country the two communities live like in two countries, and we have to ensure that ‘katar panti’ (exclusionist orthodoxy) is not taking over on both sides, that they get absolutely no space anywhere. What the Congress supported, people like Haji Mastan⁵²², who represent the criminal elements of the Muslim community, and silenced Mohammad Arif Khan who spoke out against Shah Bano in order to secure the Muslim vote, has created the problem. There should be an equal respect from both communities, there should be common participation in festivals etc. It should be a mutual thing.”

While the subtextual ring to this description was again that the basic refusal to ‘mutuality’ has to be located with the Muslims, this statement in particular could well have been used by the opponent speakers as well as by Sardesai to expose the circular line of argument in the Sangh Parivar, which in the end always ends up in an ‘argument’ against Muslims unless they submit themselves to a Hindu majority rule. Mohammad Arif Khan was a Congress-politician who in 1986 resigned from Rajiv Gandhi’s government after it had turned over the Supreme Court verdict in the famous Shah Bano case, a turning point in the contemporary Hindu-

⁵²² A don in the 1980s Bombay underworld (‘Mastan’ meaning criminal).

Muslim relations.⁵²³ The verdict's rejection was to appease conservative Muslims who claimed the validity of the Muslim Personal Law and "argued that the (Hindu) Supreme Court judges had neither the competence nor the jurisdiction to try the Shah Bano case or to make adverse comments on women's position in Islam."⁵²⁴ The fact, however, that Mohammad Arif Khan supported with his protest against the Gandhi-government Shah Bano's appeal to the general Indian jurisdiction rather than the Muslim Personal Law did not, as Bharti seems to suggest, equal an automatic support for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) as advocated by the Sangh Parivar, which disguises as "the implementation of a Hindu code."⁵²⁵ An opposition of Khan's against the UCC, however, would equally have been interpreted by the Sangh Parivar as a proof of the basic unwillingness of Muslims to reform and support 'national causes'.⁵²⁶

6.3. *In Medias Res: The Power of Impotency*

The very format of a TV debate that was conceptualised as a democratic forum thus helped to represent the situation in terms of a polarisation and equalisation in favour of the Sangh Parivar, which was additionally supported – as an actual debate about secularism remained obfuscated - by an intensified level of insecurity amongst those "who thought they were secular themselves." While Rajagopal had already for the beginning of the 1990s stated a growing confusion in this regard, many seemed now to be even less clear "about how the boundaries [between 'communal' and 'secular', B.O.] were to be constituted."⁵²⁷

⁵²³ In 1985 Shah Bano, an elderly, just divorced woman from Indore, Madhya Pradesh, had appealed for maintenance from her former husband beyond the limited time of *iddah*, the three-months period during which a divorcee is entitled to maintenance according to Muslim Personal Law. The Supreme Court decided in favour of Shah Bano under provision of the Criminal Procedure Code. After turning over the judgement, the government enacted in 1986 the *Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill* that minimised Muslim women's claims for maintenance under the general jurisdiction.

⁵²⁴ Patricia Jeffery, 2003, "A 'Uniform Customary Code'? Marital Breakdown and Women's Economic Entitlements in Rural Bijnor", in: Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.), *Divorce and Remarriage among Muslims in India*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 102.

⁵²⁵ Geetanjali Gangoli, 2003, "Muslim Divorce and the Discourse around Muslim Personal Law", in: Ahmad (ed.), p. 385.

⁵²⁶ See an interview with Khan, after he joined the BJP in 2004, in: *MG-The Milli Gazette*, 16-31 March at: www.milligazette.com/Archives/2004/16-31Mar04-Print-Edition/1603200438.htm. The interview makes very explicit the cornered feeling amongst Muslims and their pre-defined function for the Congress as well as for the BJP that also Naqvi more indirectly displayed in his statements. A open protest-letter from Khan to Vajpayee after his Goa speech can be read at: www.milligazette.com/Archives/01052002/0105200224.htm.

⁵²⁷ Rajagopal 2001, p. 20.

In the context of television attempting to re-invent itself (see 2.5.2.), the blurring rather than clarification that these debate programmes carried spoke of an acute crisis of conventional public media representation that was on another level equally valid for the reporting itself which occupied a far larger percentage of the programming in news channels. What the large absence of information that was not pre-framed and rejected as ‘biased’ or, at best, a mere opinion, seemed to generate was, on the one hand, as a freelance journalist put it, the necessity but also ability “to read between the lines. You cannot take any story or news any more for what it says. It’s become like a puzzle. You have to collect pieces from different sources and put together your own story.”⁵²⁸ On the other hand, given the gravity of the situation, the absence of differentiations and reliability of information promoted totalising suspicions of the political as well as the religious, ethnicised Other. While the Sangh Parivar’s non-withstood assertion of a Muslim crime in Godhra fed into existing anti-Muslim prejudices, in case of Muslims the religious Other was largely replaced by the political traitor (the Congress) rather than the political enemy (the BJP), the latter of which seemed also for them to have become more calculable than the former. Both these suspicions, however, spoke of a remarkable overall perception of the possibility of absolute manufacturing and non-identifiable manipulation. Power had not vanished but had merely become less transparent, in the case of Muslims behind a veil of undeclared allegiances and hidden plans for attacks, in case of the Congress behind a pretext of democracy and secularism.

Whereas after the Bombay riots Muslims’ “vision of the upper echelons of the state bureaucracy and the Congress Party as sites of justice and protection had given way to a radical sense of isolation and betrayal”⁵²⁹, during the Gujarat pogrom visions went as far as seeing the Congress behind the current violence. They expressed the abundance of power over their lives that was ascribed to the Congress rather than the BJP. As a Muslim shopkeeper in Delhi put it: “The BJP might take the opportunity and catch some fish in the water, but the real problem is the Congress. They wanted to make it compulsory for us to vote for them. Each time riots broke out after the Congress lost an election. The riots in Bombay, what did Sharad Pawar do?⁵³⁰ What did Rao during Ayodhya? After Muslims had voted for V.P. Singh

⁵²⁸ Interview II/16.

⁵²⁹ Hansen 2001, p. 127.

⁵³⁰ Sharad Pawar, since 1999 leader of the NCP (Nationalist Congress Party), a split-off of the Congress, took over as Chief Minister of Maharashtra for a second time in 1993, after the former Congress Chief Minister Naik had miserably failed to restore law and order during the riots. While the Congress had not lost any election (as there were none in Maharashtra at the time), the accusation voiced here refers to the direct political gain that Pawar drew out of Naik’s failure and the violence against the Muslims.

and not Rajiv Gandhi? Riots were always a punishment for the Muslims for not staying with them. And these riots are the same, they are a manoeuvre of the Congress to get back to power, it's all the Congress, that's the main problem."⁵³¹ Ironically, the encompassing power ascribed to the Congress here, expressing the feeling of a total lack of choice and fitted into a coherent narrative, resembles almost completely the impenetrable and monolithic power that is ascribed to Muslims by the Sangh Parivar.

With investigated evidences failing to make their impact on the larger public, holistic and extreme scenarios like these were met by suspicions amongst the much smaller circle of activists and friends of mine, which I found myself to share to a degree, that 'the Godhra incident' was so essential for the Sangh Parivar in order to get the pogrom going that it was not impossible to think that parts of it had staged the fire itself, sacrificing a small number of its active supporters for the maximum gain of establishing the first 'Hindu Rashtra' in Gujarat. The vision was extended by the notion that the Sangh Parivar might also have been behind the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 in order to create a comparable feeling of being helplessly exposed to Islamist attack to the 09/11-picture in the US and to produce a perfect preparation for the Gujarat pogrom. Ideas like the latter are backed by reports on attacks and blasts, which are likely to have been framed-up by the Sangh Parivar – like the assault on the RSS headquarters in Nagpur in June 2006 –, involving the dressing up of Hindus as Muslim aggressors or Islamist terrorists in order to provoke violence.⁵³²

However, even these reports, or quotes by politicians in them, are not free any more of the suspicion of being mere rumours or conscious constructions, disseminated in order to lash out at the political enemy and to score in a public that somewhat undergoes a crash-course in the relativity of mediated messages and in the basic readability of the commercial image in particular. Instances of wilful misreporting have commonly been ascribed to the vernacular press, but such acts have, particularly since the Gujarat pogrom, also been claimed for the English language media.⁵³³ Even though such accusations can often be made out to come

⁵³¹ Irregular interview, April 2002.

⁵³² See *The Indian Express*, July 14, 2006: "Pak hand, says NSA; Arjun, Antulay have a different take." A similar case were the bomb blasts in the Maharashtrian and Muslim-majority town of Malegaon on the 08th of September 2006. The media showed considerable confusion in the face of the fact that here bombs had been unmistakably directed at Muslims (they detonated directly in front of a mosque). While first speculations went towards growing tensions between Sunnis and Shias in India – about which very little is known – the incident also suggested that the bomb is not exclusively a symbol of Islamist terrorism but has also been appropriated by the Bajrang Dal (*The Hindu*, September 09, 2006: "Malegaon – the road to perdition").

⁵³³ Balbir K. Punj, for instance, has claimed that Arundhati Roy's account of the torching of a Muslim woman in Baroda/Gujarat (Democracy: Who's She When She's at Home, in: *Outlook*, May 06, 2002) was "a piece of

from Sangh Parivar-supporters, they underline that liberal and conventional political media are in a re-active rather than defining position. This also indicates, however, that the media in general have become an integral rather than a distinguishable and re-representative factor in Indian society. They are increasingly seen by their readers and viewers as an answerable rather than an informing institution, thus showing their direct relation to the decreasing accountability of state and government and the immensely increasing significance of the judiciary over the past decade (which has, for instance, in the absence of a coherent media legislation, become entangled in a swelling number of anti-defamation cases from various sides that serve partly as a substitute for political censorship). The de-politising of representative institutions, which has reached a new height with the NDA-government, and the transfer of their duties onto the administrative or judicial level goes hand in hand with the unravelling and privatisation of the public sphere. This alludes to a rapidly developing media-maturity and individualisation amongst Indian media consumers as well as to a growing appropriation of the media. They are increasingly understood as having to serve the personal interest or opinion rather than ‘the greater common good’, which is also a development in which the personalised and participative logic of the new media is making itself felt (see 7.2.). Its flip side, however, is a growing cynicism with regard to conventional representative media, which proves highly problematic in situations of acute political calamity or even more permanent political crisis (see below). It is not merely the hegemonic position of the English language media that has come under scrutiny, but the very reference framework of ‘objective reporting’ and the profession of political journalism itself. It becomes entangled in the process of an unravelling public sphere and loses not only its privileged point of view, but also a professional distance, which is, as I will elaborate in the coming chapters, closely linked to the speedy commercialisation of the media. Like the dissolving trust in the state and political parties has given way to a disproportionate (and often not quite warranted) reliance on the judiciary, a quickly developing mistrust particularly in the conventional mass media seems in this context to explain a growing instalment of fact-finding missions and teams, as ‘facts’, despite claimed more than ever, seem to be ever harder to make out. Even, or especially, in globalised times, the state in crisis thus seems inseparable from a crisis of the media.⁵³⁴

fiction”, which is well possible, even though his own arguments, published in the same magazine, read like a Sangh Parivar-pamphlet (Dissimulation In Words and In Images, in: *Outlook*, July 08, 2002).

⁵³⁴ As far as the national media were concerned, their lack of support became evident from comments on articles on the Internet as well as from letters to the editor in magazines. As NDTV did not keep a published record of comments, some letters to the editor of India Today and Outlook may serve here to illustrate the responses to the reporting on Gujarat. While there were repeatedly appraisals of the coverage’s fearlessness and excellence,

In the field of the national media itself, within which I mostly moved, the crumbling impact and unambiguity of the own disseminated information and imagery, and thus of the own power-position, was obviously felt most clearly. The media themselves became, and were made into, not merely an intrinsic part of this process through their representing and framing of the debate around the Gujarat pogrom, they also, because of their overall critical news coverage, got profoundly shaken in their foundations and self-perception as an institution, which, as far as television was concerned, had – after decades of state control - hardly established itself in the first place.

6.3.1. *Impartial Media in a Partial State*

In the actual reporting and documentation of the pogrom the moment of deadlocked democracy seemed reified on two levels.

For one, Gujarat represents certainly the best-documented and most extensively reported communal violence ever in India, not merely by Indian human and civil rights initiatives and organisations and the press. In contrast to the Bombay riots, which had been covered by

comments that expressed disenchantment rather than concern were more frequent, like the following, quite touching one: “I have a son studying medicine in America. Ever since he was a child, my husband and I have taught him to always respect and love this country. When he went to study a year back, I had told him that he must come back to India and work here. God knows this country needs people like him. However, the events of Gujarat have completely disillusioned me. Especially the report of the rumour that a pregnant woman’s womb was split open and the unborn child brandished like a prize on a trishul. A country which can even breed such rumour is not fit to live in. And this is what I’ve conveyed to my son now” (*Outlook*, April 29, 2002). Comments like these, however, were quite clearly outnumbered by statements such as the following: “For your innumerable readers, the accused is not Narendra Modi but the shameless bunch of secular terrorists whose political and intellectual dishonesty is plumbing such horrendous depths that the Hindus see the VHP and Bajrang Dal as their saviours. Hindu blood is boiling and Gujarat was just a trailer” (*Outlook*, April 01, 2002). In the same issue, somebody comments: “I don’t care if the mandir in Ayodhya is built or not. The only thing I care about is whether I can live with dignity in my country and not be ashamed of being called a Hindu. As a thinking, unbiased, non-political and non-religious Indian, I feel it’s the reporting of the kind one reads in the so-called secular media that would push the likes of me into supporting the VHP.” Commenting on the *India Today*’s cover story “Is Secularism Dead?” (April 08, 2002) a reader wrote: “The sort of secularism practised in India should have died a long time ago. The Nehruvian policy of secularism distorted the word to mean a state that is partisan to the minority religions at the cost of the majority religion. It is due to these interpretations that there is so much discontent in society today and an otherwise peace-loving Hindu is turning militant. It’s time Indians were treated as just that and not as minorities and majorities.” In the same issue a reader rose the question of representation and made it quite plain that the larger public could be critical of the BJP-politics and figures such as Praveen Togadia and still feel justified in minimising its tolerance level: “If your article wanted us to believe that the Gujarat riots exposed the true face of India, the genesis cannot be explained away with adjectives of selective indignation at the failings of the Congress party. The anger also has to be directed at the current Government. The BJP chief minister in Gujarat formed bands of thugs to riot and murder. But just as Praveen Togadia does not represent Hindus and the Imam does not speak for all Muslims, these thugs too do not represent the face of a majority whose tolerance has snapped” (*India Today*, April 22, 2002).

similar organisations as well as by a censored Doordarshan⁵³⁵, Gujarat was the first communal violence that was, to the dismay of the central government, investigated by international teams of human rights bodies⁵³⁶ and broadcast live by competing and unregulated television stations. Moreover, it saw considerable numbers of researchers, filmmakers and engaged students travelling to Gujarat and documenting the events, generally on digital video, thus for the first time advancing new dimensions of what McLagan has called “technologies of witnessing.”⁵³⁷ The resulting material of the latter was partly even made available in a footage pool, creating a veritable counterforce to the digitalised and networked form of organising the violence through mobile phone and e-mail and to the rioters’ own employment of visual media. The simultaneity of vast uncensored – even though at times massively impeded and attacked (see below) – documentation and reporting and the organisation of an attempted genocide symbolised in a most precarious way the strength of Indian democracy and democratising process and their synchronous interruption and decay. As one of my interview partners put it, at the time a journalist for the Indian Express: “India has never been so open and so closed at the same time.”⁵³⁸

Secondly, the Gujarat pogrom was also the best-documented communal violence that provoked the least opposition in terms of a resistance against the *violence*. Rather were journalists, and especially television journalists, confronted with massive opposition against their *reporting* and thus with a hitherto unparalleled sense of impotency. This did not merely concern the contents of the reporting, but also its sheer amount and was within the media business referred to as a concerted and unprecedented form of ‘media-bashing’. There were non-public threats to media organisations, to Aaj Tak, but particularly to the local headquarters of Star TV, by the Sangh Parivar: “We got lots of letters from Hindutva outfits who claimed that our news coverage was extremely anti-Hindu and who warned us that we should not get too smart with our so-called impartial reporting.”⁵³⁹ Publicly, on the national level as well as in Gujarat, opposition was voiced by members of the Sangh Parivar in and outside government, aided by associated institutions that were conducting their own

⁵³⁵ The only independent reporting by visual media was provided by Newstrack, a video-magazine that could be ordered on VHS-cassettes and was played by cable operators. Newstrack was a predecessor of Aaj Tak.

⁵³⁶ See *The Indian Express*, April 26, 2002: PM’s message to foreign missions: don’t lecture us.

⁵³⁷ Meg McLagan, 2006, Introduction: Making Human Rights Claims Public, Section of Visual Anthropology, Technologies of Witnessing: The Visual Culture of Human Rights, in: *American Anthropologist* 108 (1), pp. 191-195.

⁵³⁸ Interview II/18.

⁵³⁹ Star Plus-executive, Interview I/15.

evaluations of the coverage, such as the India First Foundation.⁵⁴⁰ Prominent critics were Prime Minister Vajpayee and Home Minister Advani themselves, who directly appealed to the media⁵⁴¹ and otherwise applied to them the same logic of a totalised blame displacement that was otherwise applied to Pakistan, to the minorities and to the Congress (as an index of the ‘secular elite’).

As mentioned above, the English language press has been manoeuvred by the Sangh Parivar into the role of the unauthorised, post-colonial Other since the inception of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Now, however, in the state-leading position, the BJP could accuse the English language media not merely as being ‘anti-Hindu’, but also as being ‘anti-national’, suggesting that they were putting the (Hindu) nation’s interests behind their own and practising British ‘Divide-and Rule’ politics. The basic accusation consisted in a lack of impartiality, i.e. a lack of representing an ‘equal’ participation of both communities in the violence: “The English media failed to adopt an impartial and constructive approach and it seems that they perpetuated the legacy of the colonial administration of playing minority against majority community on the pretext of secularism and liberalism.”⁵⁴² In many ways, this allegation, and its appropriation through the Sangh Parivar, can be seen as lying at the core of the media’s confounded situation. It was the partiality of the government – and hence to a degree the state - which Vajpayee had made unmistakable through his Goa speech, that made the media’s impartial coverage appear partial. The moment the government becomes perceptibly partial, however, an impartial media necessarily acts to the advantage of the partisan, as, for instance, India Today’s and also Aaj Tak’s coverage showed (see 7.1. and 7.2.). The allegation of a partial media in the face of an ever-growing congruence of the Sangh Parivar and the government thus underlined not merely the intrinsic interdependence of the state and the media. It also implied the macabre and skilful fashion in which the state’s lack of impartiality was naturalised and transferred *onto* the media, thereby systematically limiting and de-legitimising the media’s space of critical or even ‘objective’ reporting. This realisation not of a change in the own work but of the parameters within which it operated

⁵⁴⁰ The India First Foundation, Delhi, is a BJP-outfit that was also active in setting up the BJP’s so-called ‘media cell’ at the time, which was to monitor different media and their representations of the government and the BJP in particular. During the Gujarat pogrom, on April 06, 2002, the foundation held a “National Seminar on Godhra and After. The Role of Media”, tellingly held in the premises of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Delhi. It produced a report with the same title and an accompanying VCD, on which clippings almost exclusively of NDTV/Star News were to demonstrate the ‘pseudo-secularist, pro-minority bias’ of the channel.

⁵⁴¹ *The Hindu*, March 03, 2002: “Govt. requests TV channels to observe restraint.”

⁵⁴² India First Foundation report, 2002, p. 2.

was actually fairly widespread within the news media: “You are increasingly pigeon-holed as a secular media. [...] There is a tendency also to become activist in this set-up, but a) one doesn’t want to be activist, b) one doesn’t want to be part of this government set-up, one wants to work on the independent middle ground, and that is shrinking rapidly.”⁵⁴³ Similarly was the consciousness of an absent noteworthy political opposition quite strong, which in 2003 prompted the proposal of ‘the media as opposition’ with the argument that the media should use its new salience, which was equivalent to that of Hindutva itself, in order to directly counter the Sangh Parivar. The proposal was ultimately dismissed as indeed compromising every effort at being impartial and ultimately taking on the role the Sangh Parivar had reserved for them.⁵⁴⁴

In addition to the traditional indictment against the English language press of a post-colonial bias, which gained a new dimension under an impartial state, moreover, the relatively recent emergence particularly of the television news channels and their commercial nature served as a plausible reason to point out – with a gesture of compassion - their lack of experience and the economic pressure they performed under and thus to suggest deficiencies in their reporting. Vajpayee and Advani repeatedly argued not only that the coverage of ‘Gujarat’ was ‘unbalanced’ by accounts of the ‘Godhra carnage’ and the suffering of Hindus, implying the media’s ‘bias’ in favour of Muslims. They also linked this ‘lack of balance’ precisely to the overwhelming presence of different media and their largely critical reporting. What thus could, and by all application of logic *should* have been the effect of rather massive expository reporting, namely a legitimacy crisis of the BJP, did not arise. Rather did the repeated allusion to the number of media, their apparent unequivocal position as well as their economic and professional constraints support the argument that ‘Gujarat’ was in its scale and dimension an invention of the media. The logical assumption that ‘they cannot all be wrong’ was turned into the – particularly under democratic conditions even more plausible – postulation that ‘they cannot all be right’. Vajpayee called the coverage of the ‘post-Godhra violence’ “exaggerated.”⁵⁴⁵ This was elaborated in the India First Foundation’s report, which significantly replaced – re-invoking the BJP’s demand of ‘normative moral code’ in the media

⁵⁴³ Star News/NDTV journalist, Interview I/31. See also A.J. Philip, 2002, Eye of the media, in: *Indian Express*, March 13, where s/he argues that “reasonable restrictions on the coverage of any sensitive issue are welcome but if they serve the purpose of the guilty, they need to be reassessed.”

⁵⁴⁴ See Sagarika Ghose (2003, From House to Studio. The rise of the Media-As-Opposition, in: *The Indian Express*, March 25), who argues that “which institution is just as sexy as Hindutva? The media. The stars of the media are almost as much in the public eye as the stars of Hindutva.”

⁵⁴⁵ *Times of India*, March 05, 2002: Media not playing a constructive role: PM.

(see 3.2.) - the earlier ‘political responsibility’ with a ‘social responsibility’ of the media: “The fierce competition to grab more eyeballs to get maximum TRPs also led to unrestrained coverage that sometimes added fuel to the fire. Media became an active participant rather than an independent observer. Media seems to have relinquished its social responsibility in order to be ‘first with the News’. For most of the young TV journalists like the channels they represent, this probably was the first time that they were covering such an enormous tragedy. So there were no set standards, no examples to follow and no benchmarks either. And probably this was the reason that sometimes very strong words/visuals were chosen to the extent that it looked biased. Channels and journalists got carried away.”⁵⁴⁶ While many “young TV journalists” were the first to admit to the pressure ascribed to them here, it is curious that all the examples of ‘irresponsible reporting’ that the report (and its accompanying VCD) present refer to Star News/NDTV, and here particularly to Barkha Dutt and Rajdeep Sardesai, who could be considered to be amongst the most experienced journalists in their field. Yet the plausibility of the BJP line of argument was mirrored in perceptions in the public that “Gujarat basically is a big story for the media”, which were “blowing the thing out of proportion”, underlining that precisely a growing scepticism of the media’s representative claim was working in the Sangh Parivar’s favour.

Advani on his part particularly criticised the breaking of a taboo on the part of the national media, namely the naming of communities. The preliminary voluntary practise had been to only speak of ‘members of particular communities’, ‘mobs’, ‘attackers’ or ‘victims’, which had kept the journalistic representation of communal violence at an abstract, generalised level and concealed that people had generally always been attacked *for belonging* to a ‘particular community’. This practise had in many cases been dropped in the reporting on the Gujarat violence, when Muslims were for the first time openly named as the targeted victims. Advani demanded in this context to “take lessons from the American coverage of 11 September and suggested that ‘sometimes, speaking the truth may not be an act of responsibility.’”⁵⁴⁷ This demand entailed not merely an equation of the New Yorkers and the Gujaratis as having been exposed to the same form of Islamist terrorism. It also implied that it was the reporting that was aggravating the violence and was responsible for the growing number of victims, which engendered a debate within the media on the systematic ‘shooting of the messenger’.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ India First Foundation report, p. 35.

⁵⁴⁷ *The Telegraph*, April 07, 2002: BJP builds Bush shield for Modi.

⁵⁴⁸ See Rajdeep Sardesai, 2002, The Media did not Ransack Shops, take Lives, Mr. Modi, in: *Indian Express*, March 07; *The Sunday Times*, May 05, 2002: Don’t shoot the messenger if he brings bad news; Shekhar Gupta,

In fact, the request for a restraint of the media and the censoring of news in communally sensitive situations has been an integral part of India's media policy from the start and had traditionally legitimised Doordarshan's undemocratic inception of information on riots. This form of censorship seems to make ethical sense on the surface of it, because it appears to avoid pouring oil into the fire. Yet it rests on the presumption that information itself – rather than the spread of rumours and the agitation of communal groups and Hindutva outfits – would 'inflare' people's sentiments, suggesting some natural wild and unkempt temper that has to be kept at bay. The Gujarat violence itself, however, serves as the best example that an unprecedented amount of information did not lead to the spread of violence at all, as the bloodshed remained confined to the state where the regional media's open manipulation through Narendra Modi and the Sangh Parivar was most evident. This demand of Advani's for a self-restraint of the national media made particularly obvious how directly dependent the Sangh Parivar was on the Congress' and Doordarshan's democratic deficiencies and how easily they could now make use of them by dwelling on an argument that was pretty ingrained in people's perception and understanding, leading to a situation where it was just the greater precision in the national media's reporting and the democratising of its coverage that worked against it and lent plausibility to the Sangh Parivar's demand. The consequence of this form of blame displacement, which also provoked an occupation of the English language media with themselves rather than with the situation to be reported (see below), was that the real scale of the Gujarat violence - appearing either as exaggerated or as somewhat neutralised – and its implications for India's political future seemed to vanish behind much of the media's engaged and taboo-breaking coverage rather than being effectively exposed by it.

2002, Press and Prejudice, in: *Indian Express*, May 11; Manoj Joshi, 2002, Gujarat & the Media. Don't Shoot the Messenger, in: *Times of India*, May 07.



Muslims in Ahmedabad being interviewed on Star News' main news programme on March 02, 2002: "We're tired of continually asking the police for help because we've got none so far"



Rajdeep Sardesai reporting from Ahmedabad on March 02, 2002, stating the lack of police presence and the absence of the army



Smouldering houses in a Muslim neighbourhood in Ahmedabad on Star News/NDTV, March 03, 2002



Rajdeep Sardesai reporting from Ahmedabad on March 02, 2002, stating that "this is the state where the VHP and the Bajrang Dal have been at their most powerful, this has been a laboratory for Hindutva"



Burning house in a Muslim neighbourhood in Ahmedabad (Star News/NDTV, March 01, 2002)



Muslim refugee camp in Ahmedabad (Star News/NDTV, March 03, 2002)



Smouldering shops in a Muslim area in Ahmedabad News/NDTV, March 02, 2002)



Barkha Dutt reporting in Star News' Hindi bulletin from Ahmedabad. The insert reads: "Violence in Gujarat – In Ahmedabad more than 100 people died, in nearby Naroda 50 people lost their lives" (Star News/NDTV, March 01, 2002)

In a very physical sense, the impossibility to retain a position of 'objective reporting' became most obvious in Gujarat itself, where opposition against the coverage went as far as bodily attacks. Even though Aaj Tak could on the national level be seen as clearly being least opposed by members of the Sangh Parivar, in Gujarat an outright rejection became manifest basically against all national media. While even this happened for different reasons with regard to Aaj Tak and Star News/NDTV (see 6.4.1.), they tended to be generalised in toto as 'outsiders', thus stressing the ambivalent establishment of a separate Gujarati nation as well as confirming the pattern that crimes against humanity tend to be sheltered off against outside investigation.⁵⁴⁹

A reporter from Aaj Tak, who had meanwhile changed to NDTV, was even a year later still in disbelief not only about what he had witnessed but also over the dismantling of his profession: "You almost get killed. You have mobs throwing stones at you. It's very amazing because when we landed there, people shook our hands, even took pictures, wanted autographs, because they had seen Aaj Tak or knew about Aaj Tak, and then we went into this place and they said, yaya, come and shoot this, come and shoot this, but suddenly it started that they were taking pictures which could be, you know, which may harm us [in the sense of documenting that they were filming in an 'anti-Hindu'/'pro-minority' way, B.O.]. And then suddenly they turned round, you know, and those very people started throwing stones at us,

⁵⁴⁹ See "Attacks on the Media", in: Patel/Padgaonkar/Verghese, pp. 22/23.

beating up the cameraperson, beating me up, taking away our wallets and...chasing us, they were like looters, you know. [...] It were the very same people. And one of them came and took me into a house, and I just thought, no, I thought maybe...I've had it now. Then he took me to the roof and I thought, my God, then we crossed the roofs, came down to one more house, got into somebody's car [...] Then we went to the police station. And my cameraman already reached there with this army guy who was coming to rescue us. But till we reached it was a terrible time, because they were storming the house. And you could hear that their number was growing. And you know, we just didn't know how to react, I mean, when you were in the room, you wondered, why should I be in the room? Why should I run away from them? You know? I'm a reporter. Why am I behaving like a coward?"⁵⁵⁰

The description of this incident, which was in similar forms recounted by other journalists from Aaj Tak and Star News/NDTV for the time of the pogrom itself as much as for the Gujarat Assembly elections in December 2002, shows that the news media were not only recognised as a crucial factor in Gujarat, but were violently appropriated in order to serve the perspective of the rioters. They could only hope to do their job unmolested when submitting their focus to a pre-framed agenda of representation that was defined by their projected consumers. But it also makes particularly plain the arbitrariness and speed with which a certain act of supported documentation ("shoot this") could in the very same moment be identified as a potential danger for that very cause, transforming the journalist from a projected tool in advancing the rioters' perspective into a possible traitor and a threat, which indicates an almost frenetic belief in the power particularly of visual media, but also a momentous realisation of the potential working and character of images. The firm idea that they can be bent in any wilful way, which characterised the initial welcoming, is directly juxtaposed here with the acute insight that that might not be the case.

6.3.2. Variations of Distance: Cultural Reproduction and Political Exposure

Considering the unprecedented risks that journalists had to take during the pogrom as well as during the successive coverage of Modi's election campaign, opposition against the broadcast reports not so much by the government and members of the Sangh Parivar but particularly by viewers even stressed the impotency experienced by them: "I was flooded with hate-mails

⁵⁵⁰ Interview II/22.

abusing me as being anti-Hindu. Some were even suspecting I was a Muslim in disguise. It was absurd.”⁵⁵¹ What seemed to press home the own powerlessness to this reporter from Star News/NDTV even more, though, were not open verbal attacks but rather the basic lack of an impact of the extensive coverage onto the larger Indian public. This was particularly felt by the English language media and threw up the question, in the face of the BJP’s allegation of their ‘partiality’, with whom they actually *were* partial: “In this country the English language media used to have a potency record we were proud of, and suddenly it saw that a campaign it did not lead consciously but how our conscience made us see the story, made no difference. It absolutely made no difference. If your aim was to try and shock your reader, your viewer, you had failed, you had essentially failed.”⁵⁵²

I have in the previous section referred to the shortage of critical and evidential questions and insertions in the televised debates on Gujarat, which could partly be ascribed to television-inherent factors as well as the skilful organisation of the discourse through the Sangh Parivar. This statement, however, also gave an idea about how the insecurity amongst journalists - and especially journalists of Star TV/NDTV - got translated into a self-searching and the motion towards an emotionally motivated ‘realism’ that I have already discussed in chapter 4 but that was in the acute situation even more aiding the process they turned out to be and feel trapped in. Basically, the perception of failure expressed here the growing consciousness that the viewers and readers denied the allegiance that the English language media were used to, deduced from which was the conclusion that the English language media had not done their job well enough. This insight entailed a changing understanding of the media as being at the service of the reader and viewer as opposed to the idea of an authoritative role, which in itself implied a democratisation. Significantly, though, the detected deficiency was here interpreted in cultural and social terms rather than in terms of political reporting. The virtuous compulsion towards ‘getting realistic’ and ‘stopping to dream’ that resonated with the BJP’s call for the media’s ‘social responsibility’, was in the case of this interviewee expressed in the necessity of the English language journalist elite to approach ‘the people out there’: “When people ask me was the media out of sink with people, even there I would say yes, clearly it was. [...] I think there were a lot of us who suddenly woke up and sort of realised, you know what, we’re preaching to the converted. [...] I would have done the same stories. But as a person who is clearly located in this St. Stephens, English speaking, slightly removed from

⁵⁵¹ Interview II/09.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

the entire subtext-subculture that runs through it, am I learning that there are gulfs between me, my organisation, and an entire mass of people and beliefs out there.” The avenue to fill this communication- and credibility gap, which resembled Doordarshan’s earlier described communication gap and equally resonated with Star Plus’ ‘cultural turn’, was seen in a stronger consideration of the cultural and the religious, which also implied that Gujarat represented a religious rather than a political problem: “I think we reached a point where we have understood that in this country religion is so inextricably linked to the everyday cultural existence of people that we have to find to make all religions equal should be our focus rather than the distance. We created ... we *sought* perhaps too much distance.”⁵⁵³

Significantly, this almost intuitive anthropological and social framing of the projected viewer as much as of the political situation did not even consider any more the possibility that the actual failure of the English language news channels to serve their viewers might have had to do precisely with the political. The feeling of isolation and inefficiency generated an urge to get closer to ‘the people out there’ that instinctively blamed the own signifiers of privilege, language and class, rather than evaluating the actual work done. However, the diagnosed ‘distance’ was interpreted quite differently by another Star News/NDTV journalist, who emphasised less the symbolic factor of the English language than the contingencies that particularly (commercialising) television holds. Answering my question how it could be that ‘Gujarat’ appeared as a sudden explosion on television even though the agency of the Sangh Parivar in the state had been continuous for years, he conceded: “We showed, for example, when the attacks on churches took place in the Dang District of Gujarat, we have been there when in Gujarat there was a circular issue which was saying that government employees could join the RSS or the Sangh Parivar, we’d covered that, so we have covered it, but I think, as you indicate, what television fails to do sometimes is understand the underlying factors, which result in what happened post-February 27. So there you could argue that we have failed, in the sense that on a day-to-day or month-to-month basis you don’t document how the government is actually making sure that the society becomes communalised or turns into the communalised polarisation which has taken place in Gujarat and which didn’t even start with the BJP, I mean, [...] it’s been a sustained process in which every political party has been involved. [...] Much of that has not been documented in television at all.”⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵³ Ibid (italics according to pronunciation).

⁵⁵⁴ Interview I/31.

It was the first interviewee's assessment, though, that a closer consideration of the viewers' cultural and religious life reality was needed, which worked quite clearly towards the maintenance of this shortcoming. On the one hand the deadlock that showed in the identification with the own work and reporting – "I would have reported exactly the same things, I wouldn't have changed a damn thing in what I reported" – and its immediate juxtaposition with its failing impact was resolved through proposing a less alarmed and more composite posture for the future covering of calamities, and thus with the restoration of professional distance: "I would have reported all the same issues, but I may have changed style, just because whenever I look back on any story I find myself to shrill in it. But I think that applies to any over the top-event, a war, a violence, you have to learn over the years you have to be calm in those situations and that's the only thing I would change."⁵⁵⁵ When I asked, on the other hand, why Gujarat had vanished again nearly completely from the headlines and, more importantly, from the daily schedule in 2003, it was less the (well-founded) fear of repeated molesting of 'outside' journalists, and particularly of nationally known TV reporters, in Gujarat than the idea that the English media first had to find ways of a different approach to people's cultural and social reality which was overruling the task to document the ongoing political process in Gujarat under Modi's confirmed governance: "There were some stories on one year later. But I think within the media there is a very subterranean desire to just not go there. And I think it's a combination of reasons, I don't think it's something as black and white as 'oh, the government put bashes on the media.' But I think, and I've said that to you before, we as journalists did learn some lessons. We learned that as an English-speaking journalist who had been brought up in a certain way, and therefore you were horrified at certain things you saw, you may continue to be horrified at them, [...] but I think it made the media weary of treating the story the same way."⁵⁵⁶

It is in the context of these conflicting assessments of a cultural and a political primacy in course of the Gujarat coverage within NDTV that the new appearance of the India 24x7 (English) and NDTV India (Hindi) channels after the end of contract with Murdoch's News Corporation and Star TV in 2003 has to be located. In contrast to entertainment channels, which are the money-spinners of every broadcasting enterprise, because they still attract the bulk of advertising money, news channels have at least until recently been a losing business, a pattern that in India changed with the success of Aaj Tak. Star News/NDTV, in contrast to

⁵⁵⁵ Interview II/09.

⁵⁵⁶ Interview II/23.

Star Plus, had thus enjoyed an almost protected existence under Murdoch's patronage and continuous financial input. This was even enhanced by the fact that NDTV as a self-sufficient production house had an elaborate contract with News Corporation and was not merely a local/national branch that was directly, like Star TV, answerable to Murdoch (which doubtlessly influenced his decision – apart from the new legislation coming into force (see 3.2.) - not to extend the contract and to set up his own Star News in Hindi instead that he could directly feed with footage from Fox News, as far as the then unfolding Iraq war was concerned).⁵⁵⁷ NDTV 24x7 and NDTV India as separate language channels (complemented by a business channel, NDTV Profit) were thus launched - in April 2003, during the time of my interviews and coinciding with the post-Gujarat overall boom of news channels in India – as now truly independent broadcasters in an economic sense and thus as for the first time directly dependent on recruiting viewership. Not coincidentally was this move described by one of the journalists as a “jump into reality”.⁵⁵⁸

The launch of the channels was accompanied by a set of promotion-trailers that were aired during the first few weeks of their being on air (equally on both news channels) in order to convey the new image of the broadcaster. They were very interesting insofar as they manoeuvred the tightrope between political firmness and ‘social responsibility’ on different levels by ostentatiously referring to the nation rather than to the constitution and thus implying a definite rejection of the accusation of being ‘anti-national’. While all trailers suggested through the employment of hectic hand-camera that NDTV was ‘in the middle of things’, there was, on the one hand, a set of them under the theme of “When you are tested – So are we”. They referred in the same style to the violence in Gujarat (in which Muslims – and, here in a physical sense, also Rajdeep Sardesai - were clearly shown as the attacked) and the assault on the Indian parliament (in which a bearded man was shown as the – gunned down – attacker). The parliament was thus employed less as an index of political representation than of the vulnerability of the nation. The two trailers addressed once the nation and once the minorities in emphasising an identification with both and an equal commitment to truthful reporting on Islamic terrorism as much as on anti-minority violence (as an act of defending the same nation).

⁵⁵⁷ See *The Asian Age*, April 08, 2003: War shows exceptional power Murdoch wields.

⁵⁵⁸ NDTV-journalist, Interview II/23.



Trailer on Gujarat

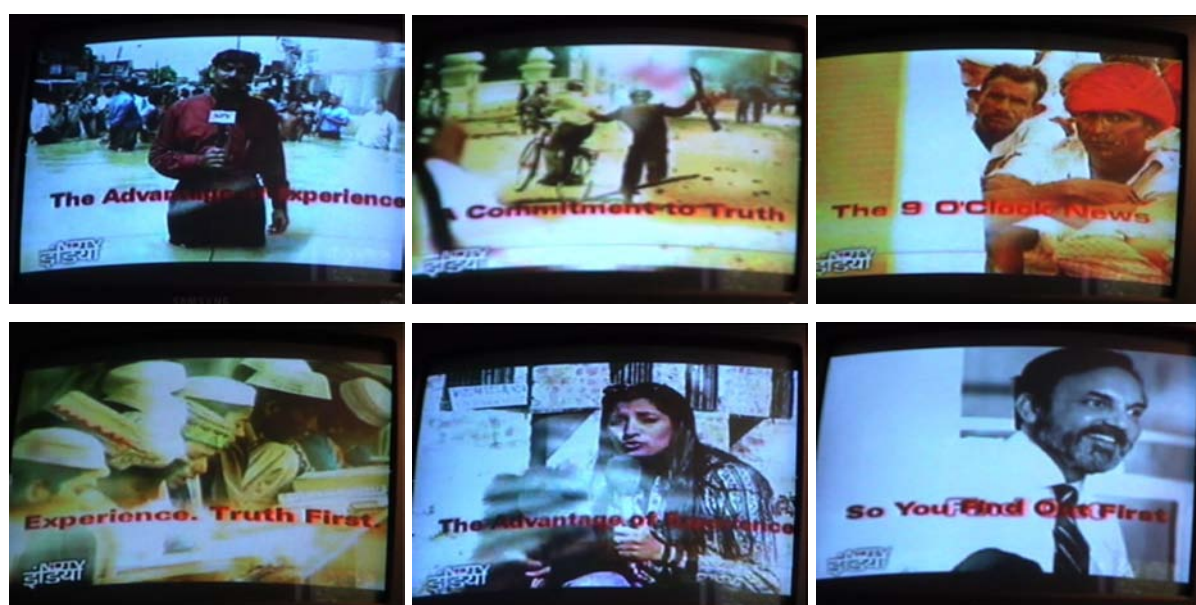


Trailer on the parliament attack

Two other trailers paid explicitly tribute to the nation. One did so in the form of a “Salute to Kalpana Chawla”, the first Indian - and first Indian woman – in space that had in February 2003 died aboard the US space shuttle Columbia. Chawla had instantly become a national icon, representing, as she did, the long-standing Indian dream of astronautics as part of the aspiration of being amongst the world-leading nations (that had generated the founding of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) already in 1960, leading middle of the 1970s to

first satellite experiments with television). Another trailer saluted the Indian soldier. It implied an honouring of their victory at Kargil against Pakistan in 1999 - which Star News/NDTV had reported with exceptional patriotic vigour - as much as their (belated) role in ending the Gujarat pogrom, thus linking nationalist fervour with an appreciation of their secular constitutional role. The theme extended into an irregularly aired programme called *Jai Jawan* (Hail to the Indian trooper) that follows celebrities (mostly film stars) visiting or shooting with troops stationed at the Indo-Pakistan border, which obviously complicates a critical reporting on their conduct, for instance in Kashmir.

A trailer for the new 9 o'clock news, the main news hour, finally, anchored by NDTV's president Prannoy Roy, a long-standing journalist and election analyst, could be read as a direct answer to allegations of the electronic news media's lack of experience, stressing with Roy's distinguished face and sketches of engaged journalists in national and international context a firm grip on the ethics and demands of reporting.



However, coming back to my above-mentioned interview-partners, the factors inherent particularly to television and the specific pressures it operates under in commercialised conditions (like time pressure, event-fixation etc., see 7.2.), which the second of the two identified as partly responsible for the lack of continuous political reporting rather seemed to be enhanced with the re-launch of NDTV. Next to the rejection of political and professional allegations against NDTV, that was hidden in the trailers, what they tried to defy and –

signalled by the vivid, action-oriented imagery – to actively overcome was yet another aspect of distance. By ‘turning visual’, in the sense of imitating latest mobile visual technology, the English language media’s traditional occupation with ‘big politics’, official statements and talking (studio) heads were meant to change. This focus on ‘big politics’ had translated from the press into Star News/NDTV and had historically been preconditioned by the impulse to directly counter Doordarshan’s authoritative officialdom and government censorship. Star News/NDTV had, for instance, reported the VHP’s Ayodhya-campaign in 2001/2002, but had in its usual manner tended to critically focus on singular public statements and carried-out events and measures, involving numerous studio-interviews with different representatives, rather than on the ongoing mobilisation and its effects on the local level. It was no coincidence that in nearly all the fact-finding reports and evaluations of the Gujarat pogrom there prominently figured the earlier quoted reporting of the Hindi language paper *Jan Morcha* (‘People’s Front’, see 5.2.), which had followed the aggression and violence in course of the Ayodhya-campaign in Uttar Pradesh *preceding* ‘Godhra’, thus pointing to its systematic rather than eruptive character.

The circumstance that one local paper turned out to be the single source of this information virtually exposed that the ‘big media’ and particularly television had not covered these events, despite having far greater funding and more staff at their disposal. In criticising particularly the Hindi channels, Anil Chamaria, for instance, has hence suggested a silent cooperation between television channels and Hindutva forces: “No channel felt the need to find out whether prior to the burning of the train in Godhra any other violent incident took place. We have now reliable information to the effect that the RSS workers and sympathisers going to Ayodhya behaved on the train and the stations at various places on the way in the same manner as they do when, at Ram Navmi, a procession goes past a mosque and sparks off riots. The accounts of what happened at Bhalesar in Faizabad on 24 February would make anyone shiver. But this news was not carried by the channels [...]. *Jan Morcha*, a Faizabad newspaper, carried this news. It said that Muslims were identified when made to divulge their names and then beaten up badly. Despite this, local Muslim leaders and intellectuals made an appeal to maintain peace. No Hindutva leader or group felt the need to respond to this. No channel saw fit to carry what happened in Bhalesar as part of its reports on such events.

Godhra might have been avoided if such reports had come in. There would have been no excuse for Gujarat.”⁵⁵⁹

Even though Chamaria points out that Star News/NDTV’s reporting – in contrast to Aaj Tak and Zee News - was essential during and after the violence in continuously emphasising that the Modi-government and the Sangh Parivar played a leading role in the pogrom, that the Muslims were openly attacked and that there was no evidence of an Islamist conspiracy, the failure of ‘pre-emptive’ evidential reporting that could have disclosed the continuous organisation of the violence could not really be made up for, thus also feeding into the degree of journalistic outrage over the pogrom itself and facilitating the own cornering through the Sangh Parivar and the dismissal of subsequent reporting as biased and opinionated. Nevertheless, Chamaria’s praise for Star News/NDTV’s reporting on the violence itself also shows that a generalising verdict about a lack of its impact underestimates the important difference that much of the English language reporting, and notably that of Star News/NDTV, really made to ‘the people out there’, if we think, for instance, of the complaints from Gujarati citizens about the partisan ‘reporting’ of the local channels (see 5.3.2.). To these citizens Star News/NDTV’s coverage must have been a necessary confirmation of the reality they actually witnessed.

What this episode makes most unmistakable, though, is the danger that lies in the proposal of a ‘cultural turn’ in the name of the proposed viewers’ interests and ‘reality of life’ particularly in the news sector. It entails in the case of NDTV, whose audience is, despite the move towards Hindi on one of their channels, likely to remain within the middle classes, not only the enhancement and confirmation of a middle class culture that seems particularly ill-equipped to prevent future communal violence. It also means the immediate let-down of a politically alert Hindi language journalism of the kind that Jan Morcha tries to defend amongst the very ‘people out there’ and which has withstood over years direct pressure and threats from Hindutva forces to embrace a more ‘positive’ approach towards the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the ‘Hindu awakening’.

The self-propelled tendency towards reproduction instead of exposure in the English language media, however, is not merely a recent development. Rajagopal has pointed out that the English language press had from the inception of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement in the 1980s tended to reproduce the representations of the movement that were offered through its leading figures rather than questioning and investigating them, and this tendency seems, if not

⁵⁵⁹ Anil Chamaria, 2002, “Hindi TV and the Gujarat Violence”, in: Varadarajan (ed.), p. 301.

become intensified, at least not been altered with the advent of transnational and private television. The unabated impulse of remaining in a position of alarm, reminiscent of the rabbit's transfixation at the sight of the snake, continuously limited a sustained documentation and analysis, thus also helping to produce the image of a singular and determined Hindutva force. The media renounced, so to speak, of the 'Divide-and-Rule' option (rather than re-employing it), thus leaving it to the Sangh Parivar itself: "The English language press in a sense created the movement as it would become – closed, implacable, and impervious to reason, and challenging the existing bounds of legality by embracing religious fanaticism rather than the principles of constitutional democracy. Yet the Ram temple movement was simply not a monolithic entity. [...] As the BJP and its allies found their campaign being shaped in the "national," i.e., English press, in Parliament and in the courts, as a singular and unified entity dangerous to the polity, the distance of this understanding from the picture available in the Hindi language press actually helped the movement, lending it notoriety and power while masking the variety and the incoherence of its constituent parts."⁵⁶⁰ During and after Gujarat, when the Sangh Parivar had great difficulties in presenting a picture of unity – which, however, also worked to its advantage (see chapter 7) – it was the absence of earlier investigative reporting 'off the beaten track' and the development of a veritable counter-image first through Doordarshan and then through the (belated) emergence of television news channels that left Star News/NDTV in the same, now more precarious situation of reproduction.

At the same time, there could also be observed a striking parallel with the earlier discussed development of Star Plus in the area of entertainment channels. As I have elaborated in chapter 4, in Star Plus it had been the absence of a conscious and more continuous evaluation of the emerging consumers of an Indianised entertainment fare and thus the lack of reliable information about what such Indianisation could look like that somewhat facilitated and supported the focus on the cultural and religious as the easiest (and last) way towards ensuring profit (see chapter 8). The news channels certainly have to be credited their late emergence as they were basically absent till after the middle of the 1990s and were in their majority actually launched at the very peak of Hindutva's power in 2002/2003. This testified not only to the common pattern that news media grow on incidences of conflict, as Gujarat had also made clear for the first time that there was money to be made with news television in India. But the launch at this time also made them particularly vulnerable, and there is an

⁵⁶⁰ Rajagopal, 2001, pp. 170/171.

ironic historical analogy here with the founding of Doordarshan, which was not coincidentally established by Indira Gandhi during the time of the Emergency, in 1976 - a most undemocratic start from which the broadcaster never really recovered. Yet there was also a lack of continuous documentation and critical reporting on the Sangh Parivar's actions and discourse on the local level amongst the pioneers in the field, notably Zee News and Star News/NDTV, the former of which had focussed on more rural matters whilst the latter had engaged in representing big politics.

The new image of NDTV that suggested a new dedication to the nation – instead of the earlier taken-for-granted relation between citizen and state -, implied in which was the attempt of a reconciliation between the social/cultural and the political, did in this sense not quite spell a reconsidered appreciation for political monitoring and investigation - not merely with regard to the Sangh Parivar but also other parties and political agents and particularly the alleged activity of Islamist groups in India. Rather does, for instance, the latest development amongst news channels – spearheaded by NDTV - to entertain, in the face of India's vast territory, whole armadas of helicopters in order to be 'on the spot when something happens' instead of employing long-term correspondents who could tie up with local media, seem to entail an in-built and enhanced logic of 'always coming too late' rather than following up long-term developments that will hardly work towards altering ingrained patterns of perception. It replaces the genealogical with an abundance of the momentary, which implies a social/cultural and technological connectivity with the viewers that is quite clearly inspired by the success of Aaj Tak and that has at least the potential to wholly substitute political reporting and analysis. As an NDTV-reporter said after the launch of the new channels: "The media are increasingly and unnecessarily being asked to reflect people's insecurities and anxieties and pander to them. If you don't pander to them, if you question them, if you sort of label them ... it's a tough one, it's a tough tough one. [...] Even in this organisation the scope for investigative reporting is becoming less and less."⁵⁶¹

In the revamped avatar of NDTV the trailers, for instance, of *The Big Fight* and *We the People* renounce of the reference to ideological antagonism and the Indian constitution and thus of an attempt at political representation. In both cases the logo of the programme now materialises out of a colourful blur, suggesting a rather playful neutrality, within which various topics can be discussed, and the topics themselves are now exclusively framed as open questions instead of the earlier more frequent form of a (provocative) statement.

⁵⁶¹ Interview II/06.

Considerable space is given to features and documentaries in different weekly programmes, in which a whole world seems uncovered that had been hidden by ‘big politics’ and which include some outstanding documentaries on controversial matters (like caste politics, urban poverty, youth criminality, farmers’ suicides or liquor abuse). Yet even though many of the covered themes have direct political, and also party-political, implications they tend to be represented with a focus on social and cultural relevance and clearly give far greater attention to success stories in which people (or institutions) take action into their own hands (like “Young Girls box their Way to Glory” – in the series *24 hours* -, “Making a Difference: Extraordinary Individuals show the Way” – in the series *India Matters* -, or “Jharkhand villagers oppose mega steel projects” – in the series *Special Report*), while violence is back to being reported in terms of spontaneous emotional action (for instance “Mob fury: Violence rocks Meerut, Bangalore” in the series *Special Report*, April 14, 2006).⁵⁶² One will still look in vain for an in-depth analysis on the situation in Gujarat under Modi’s continuing government or an investigative report on the meanwhile growing communalisation in the state of Karnataka under the current BJP/Janata Dal coalition government.

The personalised approach of NDTV is expressed in new categories such as *My News*, which is complemented by a greatly increased focus on business matters, entertainment (Bollywood and music) and media themselves (for instance in a weekly programme called *Cell Guru* that combines in its title the religious with the technological and is dedicated to latest developments in mobile phone technology). The latest move of NDTV is the cooperation with Dharma Productions, one of the leading Bollywood film productions, in order to launch its own entertainment channel. What can be observed in NDTV’s post-Gujarat development, I argue, is a de-ideologising and privatisation of the news in the sense of a retreat from defending and representing political values, which takes precedence over a ‘staying firm’ that was advocated in course of Gujarat. It was propelled by the broadcaster’s acute interest to rid itself from accusations of being ‘anti-national’ – which unwittingly vindicated such allegations – and from its image of being upmarket, ‘detached’ and, as a Star Plus-executive put it, “brown-sahib”⁵⁶³ that is closely tied to the commercial process in the entertainment channels (see 6.4.2. and chapter 7) and the success of Hindi news channels in creating a new national mainstream. The question, to be sure, that arises from these developments is not simply whether they are good or bad, but at the cost of what (and whom) they are taking

⁵⁶² See www.ndtv.com, video gallery (November 2006).

⁵⁶³ Star Plus-executive, Interview I/15.

place. A series provocatively titled “The Missing Muslim”, which has lately been initiated by The Indian Express upon the realisation of the (long known) fact that Muslims are nowhere in public life and institutions, including private ones, represented according to their percentage of the Indian population and have over the past few years become even more invisible (which has sparked off a controversial debate on reservations for Muslims), is not likely to find space on television channels which increasingly set the priority not to upset and question viewers’ personal preferences and attitudes. Moreover, the retreat from an active decision to monitor state (and) politics reflects, on the one hand, the grown mistrust amongst the population into state functions, while it at the same time underestimates – and thus sidelines – the actual influence of party politics and state actions.

As a final and related example of the tendency towards reproduction instead of exposure during the Gujarat violence itself may serve here a debate that Star News/NDTV in its old ‘ideological’ avatar aired in *The Big Fight* series on March 17, 2002. The episode ventured into an introspection of the media themselves under the binary title “Is the media biased against the Sangh Parivar, or is it being manipulated by it?” It featured leading journalists from The Asian Age (Political Editor Seema Mustafa), The Indian Express (Editor-in-Chief Shekhar Gupta), and India Today (Managing Editor Swapan Dasgupta, author of the earlier mentioned article on Narendra Modi) as well as Jaya Jaitly, leader of the Samata Party (in the NDA-coalition) and Sheshadri Chari, editor of The Organizer, the official RSS-gazette, as discussants. Like the later development of NDTV basically affirmed allegations of its being ‘anti-national’ (and ‘anti-Hindu’), the very set-up of the debate re-staged the dichotomy between vernacular and English language media so essential to the Sangh Parivar’s basic media strategy. The latter of them were, moreover, qualitatively labelled with inserts such as “Is the Indian media dominated by the left-liberal establishment?” These preliminaries missed out on the option of including a critical Hindi language paper (whose representative might well have been able to speak in English as well, even if maybe not in its most polished form) and thus to challenge this binary construction already through the very composition of the participants. While such an option was additionally complicated through the growing push towards Hindi in the commercial channels that became manifest in the near-total segregation between Hindi and English news channels from 2003 onwards, the re-affirmation of the old dichotomy ended up including the India Today in the “left-liberal establishment” despite its obvious trajectory towards a BJP-friendly reporting since the 1990s (see 7.1.). The problem of

a differing merely along lines of language rather than political affiliation and avowal of commercial interests became most obvious in this constellation.

The debate itself started off rather promisingly with Seema Mustafa describing the RSS as “this shadowy organisation about which the media has not written enough to project either a for or against riots. We know that the RSS is the mentor of the government, we know the RSS is behind the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, we have Mr. Chari here, representing a RSS magazine, which we as the media don’t monitor as closely as we should. And we know that the Prime Minister when he went to the US said ‘I’m a swayamsevak’. But somehow, where the RSS is concerned, we have not done enough investigation or enough of reports to really understand what this whole organisation is about, what Nagpur⁵⁶⁴ represents, how it controls its various affiliates. [...] So I don’t think it is about a bias at this stage, but I think we have not written enough about this particular organisation which seems to be controlling the destiny of this country.” In his reply, India Today’s Swapan Dasguta managed to “totally agree with Seema”, yet give his agreement quite a different direction:



Seema Mustafa (The Asian Age)



Swapan Dasguta (India Today)

“If the media hasn’t done its homework I think it’s a terrible tragedy, because [the RSS] is there to be studied, it has to be studied. Too much emphasis has been put on labels like ‘are you pro-Sangh Parivar’, ‘are you anti-Sangh Parivar’ without coming to the crux of the issue: to understand it.” There was introduced here a crucial shift from Mustafa’s demand for an ‘understanding’ in terms of monitoring and investigation and thus in terms of disclosing – rather than merely branding - the organisation as a possible danger to India’s democracy towards a more neutral framing of ‘understanding’, which potentially also neutralises the

⁵⁶⁴ City in Maharashtra where the RSS Headquarters are situated (see 8.1.).

danger itself. The same problem, which not coincidentally remained out of this debate – and the general discourse - altogether, accounted for a monitoring and investigation of the alleged activity of Islamist groups in India, whose supposed presence and organised doings are with predictable frequency brought up in the media, generally with reference to ‘official’ (state) sources, with every incident of violence – whose numbers are growing – without ever providing even an attempt at disclosing their actual scope and relevance for Indian Muslims (in fact, there is only one organised group, SIMI (Students’ Islamic Movement of India), with a mere 400 registered members (as compared to the RSS with more than a million members alone) which can be seen as engaging in violent action, even though evidences are scarce). We were back here at the problem of impartial media in a partial state. While the slight shift from Mustafa’s to Dasgupta’s interpretation, moreover, showed how extremely fine the parameters of distinction had become, it remained the somewhat unnoticed underlying tenor of the ensuing discussion, supported by rather unhelpful suggestive questions from Rajdeep Sardesai like “Is the media, as the RSS or the Sangh Parivar says, anti-Hindu?”, which threw Mustafa off her point. Dasgupta’s subsequently stressed argument that in Gujarat the media were in a “lose-lose situation: if you wrote one thing, you were attacked by the one side, if you wrote another thing, you were attacked by the other side” seemed on the surface to sum up the dilemma of the media, but hinted quite clearly at India Today’s primacy to be liked and wanted by – and thus to be sellable amongst – its readers, which did not escape Shekhar Gupta. He maintained an almost ostentatiously unimpressed stand by asking back: “How is it a losing situation? If you speak the truth, how does it matter who attacks you?” Despite such important attempts to re-set to basic questions, the debate remained somewhat stuck with the first part of the title-question, namely if the media were biased against the Sangh Parivar.



Shekhar Gupta (The Indian Express)



Sardesai with Sheshadri Chari (The Organizer)

The only evidential moment was when Chari claimed that The Organizer, in contrast to the “left-liberal” media, had covered both sides of Godhra and Gujarat, and Sardesai was prepared enough to hold up two consecutive issues of the paper, which had exclusively focussed on the families of the Godhra-victims. The question, however, in how far the media were manipulated by the Sangh Parivar remained non-addressed and was dropped even by Sardesai towards the end of the debate.

Part III

7. *From the Society of Discipline Towards the Society of Control*

It is this question that will occupy much of the remaining part of this study, particularly with regard to the BJP’s (also by the media) thoroughly unexpected failure in the 2004 general elections, the subsequent crisis of the Sangh Parivar and the ‘triumph’ of private commercial television.

As the previous chapters have shown, the question of manipulation in the conventional sense of the word is – as far as the national media were concerned – somewhat ill-posed, as the Sangh Parivar was basically profiting from an environment, which it was itself in the continuous (and largely non-withstood) process of creating. The main components of this environment were the above-described organised discourse and a near-complete appropriation and re-invention of a religiously defined visual sphere (through the staging of yatras, rallies, pujas, aartis, jagrans and other demonstrations and the vast public employment of religious symbolism). These two components were in course of Gujarat increasingly extended by a partly antagonistic discourse within the Sangh Parivar and between its different organisations and affiliates (on questions, for instance, of the authority of the RSS to interfere with BJP-

politics or the adequacy of VHP-agitation in particular circumstances). This inner discourse, complemented by the equal occupation of the Sangh Parivar of otherwise apparently contradicting themes (like the promotion of national – cultural – ‘swadeshi’ and the simultaneous enforcement of neo-liberalist politics), had the effect of a thoroughly encompassing field of discourse, in which there was hardly a topic or attitude that was not already covered by the Sangh Parivar. In its absorbing quality, this encompassing and decentralised general discourse had itself a de-ideologising impact as it, like all ideologies, created and naturalised its own and inherently varied ‘reality’. Whilst foregrounding its own institutional inventions, like the ‘Dharam Sansad’, it was interacting with previously existing discourses and institutions in close observation of formal democracy and at the same time put up against a (continuously re-invented) centralised and authoritarian historical discourse of the Congress-state (in order to divert attention from its own authoritarian claims).

There thus existed a three-fold basic compliance between the agency of the Sangh Parivar and the compulsions and thrusts of private and transnational television that greatly complicated and limited the options for television to design and promote alternative and opposing views and that generated, as already shown with regard to NDTV above, amongst executives and journalists a feeling of powerlessness on different levels. For one does not only an intrinsically ‘image-hungry’ private television interact with a continuously image-producing Hindutva movement. A growing visualisation of the media as whole also particularly intersected with what may be called a fully developed “symbolic capital” or “visual regime”⁵⁶⁵ at the height of Hindu nationalist spectacular public agitation during my fieldwork (see 7.1.). Secondly, the (in relation to the Congress) de-ideologising effect and impression of the Hindu nationalist discourse resonated directly with the earlier-described de-ideologising motions of television’s de-westernisation and commercialisation. Moreover, they shared the need to continuously expand in order to retain their positions, and this expansion was in both cases, in contrast to more openly ideological forms of recruitment and indoctrination, immanently predicated upon a ‘nation of numbers’ by suggesting a primacy of choice, empowerment and participation that systematically discredits positions of (interpretational) privilege (see 7.2.). The point that Hindu nationalism claims “to represent a majority which in actual fact it is [for instance through elections, B.O.] trying to create”⁵⁶⁶ thus equally

⁵⁶⁵ Rajagopal, 2001.

⁵⁶⁶ Shalini Randeria, 1995, Hindu Fundamentalismus: Zum Verhältnis von Religion, Politik und Geschichte im modernen Indien, in: *Sozialanthropologische Arbeitspapiere* 67, Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, p. 3 (translation by Julia Eckert, unedited Dissertation manuscript).

accounted for the privatised television landscape: while it claims to cater to a (national) ‘Indian’ audience, it can actually not any more presuppose such an audience but has to continuously woo and construct it, in news as much as in entertainment. As one leading Zee-executive put it: “Media in our country, and especially television media discovered that ok, politics works on the religion card, let me work my channel and get my viewership also on the religion card”⁵⁶⁷ (see 7.3.).

7.1. *The Visual and the Commercial*

However, as I have elaborated in the previous section (and before in chapter 4), while the compulsions of this combined thrust were basically inescapable, the thrust itself also intrinsically rested on being accepted in its (outwardly egalitarian) claims, and the English-language holders of privileged positions showed themselves – within the historical logic of what Chakravarty has called “the call to an emphatic identification with the underprivileged”⁵⁶⁸ - to be particularly receptive to such claims. There was thus no automatism or ‘naturalness’ inscribed in the unfolding of a ‘televised’ and ‘Hinduised’ nation of numbers. Similarly, while open manipulation of the regional media was clearly executed in Gujarat, it was also not absent in the national media, and particularly not in the news media. The news media were of immediate importance to the BJP, as the above-mentioned direct threats of Hindutva organisations to news channels, their long-standing organised influence onto the Hindi language press and the news channel-oriented legal initiative of the NDA-government in 2003 showed (see 3.2.), and the presence of Sangh Parivar-members and/or sympathisers in nearly all national media is quite likely.

The topic of open manipulation itself being a taboo within the promoted logic of an unfolding ‘free’ and independent television (against a censorship-ridden Doordarshan), the question was more in how far such political leanings within the channels translated into the actual output of the medium. Generally manipulation was, where it could be made out to happen (see 7.2.), couched in arguments of technological necessity or business requirements rather than being explicitly executed in a political interest, which also goes to underline that it was in the

⁵⁶⁷ Interview I/09.

⁵⁶⁸ Chakravarty, 1993, p. 81.

national media equally a still unbroken taboo to openly adhere to the Sangh Parivar or to disclose membership in one of their organisations, including the BJP. This taboo generated on the one hand almost frenetic attempts at representing a coherent, loyal and secular professional sector of journalism that was unimpressed by political influences (“I don’t see any differences between us and Aaj Tak, we’re all trying to do our job as well as we can”).⁵⁶⁹ On the other hand were thus the rumours that characterised the public atmosphere to quite a degree transferred into the field of the national media itself. I hardly went to any interview in the news channels without having been briefed beforehand by friends and acquaintances (‘he’s an RSS-man’, they are totally pro-Sangh’), but especially by interview partners themselves about the political inclination of the competing channel (“Look at the amount of high-ranking guys of the combine [the Sangh Parivar, B.O.] that appear day after day on their channel [Star News/NDTV, B.O.], all the big names from Singhal to Dalmia, from Bharti to Modi, and you want to tell me they are not somewhere cosy with them?”⁵⁷⁰ – “The problem is that Aaj Tak is close to the government. They get the best seats in press conferences; when journalists wait outside some official place to get a statement it is first given to Aaj Tak etc . Both [government and Aaj Tak, B.O.] make sure by that that they reach the utmost amount of people, and of course it biases Aaj Tak.”⁵⁷¹ Particularly this last statement, which points at the growing importance of the ‘nation of numbers’ in the news business, illuminates that the mutual imputation of political bias was closely linked to the second earlier mentioned facet of Gujarat marking an index for an extreme intensity of Hindutva’s interaction with economic liberalism and commercialisation, which materialised on different levels on both channels as much as in television’s relation with other media.

Most basically, the massive public performance of different bodies of the Sangh Parivar, which at times – like in 2003 – could reach the quality and impression of a veritable seizure of the public sphere - confronted the news media in their daily practise with “the dilemma, now more than ever, in how far you create a space for them [the Sangh Parivar, B.O.], in how far you cover them without becoming untruthful.”⁵⁷² This accounted in different ways for television and the press. As Siddarth Varadarajan from the Times of India pointed out: “There has been a shift in public discourse without much possibility of interference. It has become extremely difficult to dissociate from the ease with which the VHP is able to stage media

⁵⁶⁹ Star News/NDTV journalist, Interview II/09.

⁵⁷⁰ Aaj Tak-executive, Interview II/14 (Ashok Singhal is the international working president of the VHP, Vishnu Hari Dalmia is the organisation’s vice president).

⁵⁷¹ Star News/NDTV journalist, Interview I/30.

⁵⁷² Aaj Tak-executive, Interview II/14.

events and portray them as completely normal proceedings. Only some weeks ago 50 000 trade unionists held a demonstration in Delhi, and their protest got reported as a traffic jam, not a word about what they were demanding. When 800 sadhus march to parliament – and cause as much as a traffic jam – that gets on the front page, and all their demands get reported as news. The Dharam Sansad, which has no legal standing but is a self-invented forum, is increasingly quoted as a source of eminence or a legitimate body.”⁵⁷³ Television, however, faced in this regard different difficulties than the press: “We cannot put them [the Dharam Sansad] in inverted commas, like the press can. But we try and point out that they are not legal and institutional bodies. But fact is that they enjoy social prestige.”⁵⁷⁴ This factor also became more salient with the increasing entry of Hindi language journalists into the newly launching channels after 2003, for some of whom the Sangh Parivar did not automatically connect to an ethical decision regarding their representation: “The other day there was somebody from the Hindi channel who wanted to cover the big annual RSS meeting in a thorough way and argued that people want that, the RSS has a constituency and we also have to reach out to that constituency. How to argue that?”⁵⁷⁵

For the press, on the other hand, growing commercial considerations and dependencies generated other constraints which left questions for responsibility or even manipulation up in the air: “Suppose you have written something that includes the Dharam Sansad, and at 9.30 pm a big ad comes in from the advertising department and the newsdesk has to quickly reduce two columns of space. So your 450-word story in which you have all these nuances is knocked off and you suddenly have a condensed 200-word story which you don’t recognise yourself the next day.”⁵⁷⁶ More generally, though, the acceptance of Hindutva- and/or religious outfits by state institutions was seen as constituting the basic problem of limited scope for the media: “What can we really do if governments – be it the Rao-government or the present one – increasingly seek cooperation with these bodies? We always ask ‘Whom do they represent?’ If they represent the sadhus and swamis of India, fine. But this is the political arena and even the courts themselves are lending legitimacy to them by consulting them.

⁵⁷³ Siddharth Varadarajan, speaking at the workshop “Crisis/Media. The Uncertain States of Reportage”, held at Sarai/CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies), Delhi, March 03-05, 2003, transcript of the Sarai-recording.

⁵⁷⁴ Interview II/14.

⁵⁷⁵ NDTV-journalist, Interview II/06.

⁵⁷⁶ Varadarajan, transcript.

They have become very powerful social and political players, that's a problem, but it is difficult to draw the line."⁵⁷⁷

At first sight at least, the print media, looking back on long experience, seemed to have not only a greater self-assurance in approaching the acute situation of Gujarat as well as the larger political discourse and Hindutva's prominence in it. Being able to rely on the written word rather than the image also appeared to save them from the "contamination of the visual sphere"⁵⁷⁸ in the wake of the highly image-based and spectacular public agency of the Sangh Parivar, particularly the VHP, and their successive and successful appropriation and re-definition of the area of religious symbolism, semiotics and ritual, for instance, through long-running, media-oriented campaigns like the VHP's gear-up for Ayodhya or the staging of a 'satyagraha'. The immediate problem that arose from this far-reaching appropriation was "how do you show that not everybody who breaks a coconut at a rally is Hindutva?"⁵⁷⁹ A colleague of mine, who has conducted research amongst filmmakers trying to document the events in Gujarat told me about similar hesitations and discussions between them. They stood in an almost ironic contrast to the manifold increase in availability and mobility of visual media equipment, particularly through Mini-DV, as compared to the limited technical facilities still available during the Bombay riots: "The Bombay riots in 1993 seemed to have provoked a very immediate reaction, a need to record and document the violence that happened as quick as possible. Within a few weeks there existed already at least three films."⁵⁸⁰ This time the discussions about what and how one could document seemed to have a different urgency, and while by now many films and art works have been made relating to the violence in Gujarat, there was a remarkable initial reluctance and foremost discussions about what to show, how to show it, and also how to make a critical difference to what was reported on TV news. There were also conversations on e.g. the possibility to use the colour of saffron within animation parts of a documentary film, or reflections on which aspects of Hindu aesthetic traditions could still be related to or how these could be re-appropriated."⁵⁸¹ This description underlines that visuality and the readability of the image was for the first time a

⁵⁷⁷ Interview II/14.

⁵⁷⁸ Star News/NDTV-journalist, Interview II/09.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ One of them was Madhusree Dutta's *I Live in Behrampada* that won the Filmfare-award for the best documentary already in 1993 (the script of the film as well as a brief description of the film's motivations is published in Mc Guire/Reeves/Brasted (eds.), pp. 31-48). The others were Teesta Setalvad's *Bombay: A Myth Shattered* and Suma Jossom's *Bombay's Blood Yatra*.

⁵⁸¹ Private conversation, related to: Nicole Wolf, *Make it Real. Documentary and other cinematic experiments by women filmmakers in India*, unpublished manuscript.

central issue during the Gujarat pogrom. The problem that the very same image, unless clearly commented, could potentially be read in a pro- as well as in an anti-Sangh Parivar way accounted, as mentioned before, for the rioters in Gujarat as much as for those trying to document their doing, thus subscribing to the grown influence of the Sangh Parivar to gain acceptance for a different reading of formerly unambiguous images and contexts and to the ensuing impossibility of a mere documenting, and also for the creation of an art piece, that ‘speaks for itself’ (see 7.2.).

However, the problem of the readability of the image was not confined to the visual media, which have over the past decade multiplied proportionally to the visually based and spectacular public agency of the Sangh Parivar (and vice versa). Rather could an increasing trend towards visualisation be observed for the media in general. This was intrinsically linked to the proposed or likely reach of the respective medium and put particularly commercial television in a salient role, not merely because of its actual reach (in 2002, there were an estimated 40 million homes with a cable connection, coming to roughly 200 million viewers)⁵⁸², but because of the heightened simultaneity it was able to create. Moreover, commercial television represented the latest, and probably last, invention of inherent national significance that had a direct effect on the other media, particularly on the press itself, as much as digital media were increasingly making their impact on television and other media felt, for instance through the growing invitations to communicate with news channels through SMS and e-mail and the booming development of newspapers online. The visualisation of the Indian press in terms of its increasing reliance on images and a visually attractive appearance since the growing relevance of commercial television is obvious and has not least come about with the new, domineering role of advertising.⁵⁸³ The ‘pictorial turn’ thus means not merely a turn towards visual media or towards ‘more images’ as such, but also seems to be closely linked to commercialisation itself.

With regard to the reporting on Gujarat, there could be made out something like a hierarchy with regard to different media and their likely recipients, inscribed in which was an increasing degree of visualisation and the transformation of recipients from citizens into consumers (or ‘people’) the larger the targeted numbers grew in the realm of the mass media. The larger the

⁵⁸² National Readership Survey 2005 at: www.allindiannewspapers.com/newspaper-advertising/NRS-key-findings.htm.

⁵⁸³ On the growth and change of the press see Robin Jeffrey, 2000, *India's Newspaper Revolution. Capitalism, Politics and the Indian Language Press*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, and on its growing tendencies towards convergence Nadja-Christina Schneider, 2005, Die “revolutionäre” Expansion des indischen Zeitungssektors, *Südasiens Informationen* 9, Berlin (www.suedasien.net).

addressed numbers and the more commercial the medium, the more blurred became the framing of Hindutva and the more 'readable' or 'impartial' – in the sense of being open to diverse interpretations - became the representation. Non-commercial reports by civil and human rights organisations, which were in parts distributed relatively widely but could not realistically be expected to reach the larger Indian public, as well as articles in scientific magazines and surprisingly quickly released compilations, often by low-budget publishing houses, were not only very text-based but also most unambiguous in their language and in critically presenting and framing their findings on the violence. Visual documentaries that were semi-commercial and partly artistically inclined and that emerged from private or organised initiatives could already be seen as having greater problems in maintaining this certainty. Finally, clearly consumer-oriented and increasingly image-based media like the press and, most evidently, news television, with Star News/NDTV still trying to stem the tide at the time, showed either a – sometimes unwitting or unintended - insecurity and vagueness or a considerable openness for the interpretation of their content that played with different or antagonistic readings and ensured space for the consumer's individual judgement.

This became most salient in the case of India Today, whose ambivalent coverage has been mentioned before. One could here probably speak of a visualisation of language in the sense that a cover title such as "Ayodhya – BJP's Temple of Doom" (March 25, 2002) could be read as a critical intervention as much as a regret for the growing complications in erecting the mandir. This was enhanced through the assortment of related articles in the issue, which positioned, for instance, three uncommented columns of different viewpoints into the form of a debate, one written by G.M. Banatwalla ("Let Law Prevail"), one by Tarun Vijay ("Stop Secular Talibanism"), and a third by Prakash Karat ("No More Trusting"). Significantly, in the case of Banatwalla and Karat, their political position was clearly marked by presenting them as the president of the Indian Muslim League and a politburo member of the CPI(M), respectively. Tarun Vinay, however, featured rather innocently as "editor, Panchjanya", without mentioning that the weekly is an official RSS publication. In the same issue, an analytical essay on the "passion play of religion" argued that "the angry Hindu is a legitimate child of the times" and recapitulated: "Today he is out there on the street, enraged and unforgiving. Once again, he is arguing with history as well as mythology, and arguments in religion have always been violent. The enemy has to earn his tolerance" - which pandered to the understandable fear of violence as much as to the legitimacy of the claim.

An article on the historical failure of the judiciary to settle the Ayodhya-issue in time (the original suits are pending since 1950) seemed on the surface of it to comply with secularist and leftist demands to finally speak a verdict in favour of the neutrality of the - in the terminology of the Sangh Parivar – “undisputed land” after the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The subtext, however, was that the issue could have been solved since long if the judiciary had accepted earlier that “this is claimed by many Hindus to be the exact birthplace of Ram – an unverifiable claim based on faith”, which is a long-standing and recurring argument of the VHP, applied in combination with the pursuit of the ‘scientific proof’ of a Hindu temple lying at the foundations of the Babri Masjid. The arbitrary combination of faith and science, used by the VHP alternately according to the requirements of the respective situation, and their increasing merger in public opinion has been differentiated, for instance, by the historian K.N. Panikkar: “It is argued that the site of the Babri Masjid being the Janmabhumi of Rama is a matter of faith. Just as the Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and the Muslims believe that Mohammad was the Prophet of Allah, the Hindus believe that Rama was the *avatara* of Vishnu. These are matters of faith. But not so the birth of Mohammad at Mecca or of Ram at Ayodhya. They are questions of fact. The known history of Ayodhya does not indicate that what is claimed as the Janmasthan was in fact the birthplace of Rama or that a temple existed at the site of the Babri Mosque.”⁵⁸⁴ The India Today-article did not only renounce of introducing such differentiations. It also left unmentioned that the problem was less one of faith and religion but that their valorisation through the judiciary would inevitably involve at this stage a legitimisation of the Hindu majoritarian claim that would substantially alter India’s political structure.

Yet another article in the same issue, finally, titled “Frozen Pain”, that was reporting on the precarious economic situation amongst the Muslims of Gujarat under the ongoing violence was, on the one hand, criticizing the Modi-government for the lacking signs of solace and compensation for the community, while it on the other hand located a good share of the responsibility for the violence with the Muslims (and highlighted their acceptance of the problem): “A moderate Muslim leader from the Congress says that activities of the fundamentalist groups, both at the national and state level, are partially responsible for the

⁵⁸⁴ K.N. Panikkar, 1991, “A Historical Overview”, in: Sarvepalli Gopal (ed.), *Anatomy of a Confrontation. The Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhumi Issue*, New Delhi: Penguin, p. 33. See in this context also Sheldon Pollock, 1993, Ramayana and Political Imagination in India, in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52 (2), pp. 261-297, who shows that the Ram cult was virtually non-existent in South Asia before the 12th century, thus making it highly unlikely that the birthplace of Ram, whose birth is timed according to legend at around 3000 B.C., could even then have been clearly located.

intense and widespread reaction.” Without seeking proof or presenting examples of these alleged (Muslim) fundamentalist groups’ activities in India and Gujarat, the article goes on to present an “expert on the Hindu-Muslim problem” with the quote: “There is a strong belief among the Hindus that Muslims want secularism to be a one-way traffic. They feel Muslims want to benefit from secularism without making an effort to strengthen it. A stage has come when the Hindus are just not prepared to be at the receiving end.” This ‘expert’s’ reported belief that the rioting was a spontaneous Hindu upsurge, in which the VHP’s role was incidental, remained non-contrasted with other opinions, let alone evidences.

7.2. *The Battle of Images and People’s Television*

A basic openness of India Today’s journalism to different or even battling readings and appropriations - prominently including the former norm of a ‘secularist interpretation’ which was used to identifying certain terms like “passion play of religion” or “frozen pain” as clear indexes of a critical coverage – thus created the space for harsh statements and the impression of ‘bold’ or ‘cutting edge’-journalism, while basically avoiding groundwork and investigation and hence inherently providing a platform for the Sangh Parivar’s basic themes.

India Today’s televisual offshoot, Aaj Tak, can be seen as having refined this pattern over the years of its operation and with increasing reach and success, which became particularly salient during the Sangh Parivar’s peak of popularity and influence in 2002/2003. Significantly, there were a number of very dedicated journalists and reporters in the channel, also on the executive and management level, who had, as elaborated in chapter 4, seriously engaged in defining a new form of professional, viewer-oriented and broadly understandable reporting in Hindi that provided an alternative first to the old ‘protocol news’ of Doordarshan as well as to the later ‘elite journalism’ that was associated with Star News/NDTV. Like basically all long-standing television journalists in India, Aaj Tak’s founding members had still been trained in print journalism and made their first TV experiences on Doordarshan, which was till middle of the 1990s the only national broadcaster offering news at all. When Doordarshan, then still the monopolist, had started to integrate commissioned and privately

produced programming in the 1980s, this at the time translated into “a wind of glasnost”⁵⁸⁵ for TV journalism and attracted a number of experienced print journalists and reporters. Prannoy Roy, before founding NDTV and entering into a contract with Murdoch, had produced with his own team *The World this Week* on Doordarshan from 1987, which brought for the first time coverage of political developments outside India onto Indian screens. Journalists later joining Aaj Tak, which had from 1995 till 1999 an increasingly popular 20 min. bulletin on Doordarshan’s Metro channel, started at the same time in a programme called *Focus* to probe into areas and topics of Indian politics that had so far been under government censorship. The competition between NDTV and Aaj Tak - with one representing the internationally oriented, English language and upmarket segment and one representing the Hindi language ‘home front’ - thus started long before they actually materialised as separate channels: “*World this Week* had different values, you know, it was a very classy show, but cutting edge is when you’re talking about your own country and your own politicians, they are criticizing you. That’s when it hits you. In *World this Week* everything was happening outside India, that’s easy. [...] We had Jyoti Basu [former Chief Minister of West Bengal (CPI-M), B.O.] criticizing the then Prime Minister on his policy, there was the separatist movement going on in the Darjeeling hills, which was unheard of before that. It used to be a half-an-hour slot which we did, so he [Rajiv Gandhi, B.O.] opened up for a while, then the elections [1989] came and like in all elections, all the commissions [for private programming] closed down because they were too worried about their image, so *Focus* closed down. But there was a bit of opening up.”⁵⁸⁶

When Aaj Tak, building upon its success on Doordarshan, was set up as an independent channel in 2000, it thus also happened in the spirit of being ‘anti-government’ in a sense that had developed under state ownership and the censorship mainly of Congress-governments, even though by the time there was already a BJP-led government in power. “DD was very conventional, almost an agency that propagated the government point of view, propaganda machinery some people called it, and it just didn’t have the philosophy of TV news. Aaj Tak came in and changed that because the people who were behind Aaj Tak were all people who felt that news has to be challenging the order, you know, if it did not challenge the existing order, if it did not raise questions on behalf of people, it wasn’t news.”⁵⁸⁷ The basic problem of the direct encounter between the state and the corporative private sector, the repercussions

⁵⁸⁵ Former Aaj Tak-journalist, Interview II/22.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Aaj Tak-executive, Interview II/14.

of which, as I have tried to show so far, became tangible on many different levels – legal, political, and economical – materialised in the case of Aaj Tak in the sense that, while underestimating the dynamics of corporative power and commercialisation, state, government and party politics were seen as a monolithic block, against which privatisation appeared as being necessarily commensurate with creating a new public, more democratic sphere by bringing people’s voices in. Ideological differences between parties and different forms of running a state thus did not play a role from the beginning: “You are only genuinely anti-establishment when you go after whoever is in power. We ask all the questions. We do not take position there, that this one is right and this one is not right. First of all, you know, personally, I believe it’s just a difference of shades. All political parties and all politicians are alike. [...] However, here as a channel we are very conscious of one thing that both sides of the story must be brought in. Both points of view must be given equal representation on the channel.”⁵⁸⁸

An impartial journalism, however, does not necessarily mean to stay aloof from any judgement, particularly not if evidences are damning. (An example for impartial reporting the way it is proposed above would be the journalism of the Indian Express, which had under Congress rule the reputation of a ‘saffron touch’, but was absolutely uncompromising in reporting on Gujarat and the politics of the Sangh Parivar under the NDA-government). The approach of Aaj Tak, which was very open to integrating different viewpoints, but at the same time very closed in locating antagonist (the state) and protagonist (the people), did thus not quite account for situations where state and a majority of the people are not really in an antagonistic situation (like in Gujarat). At the same time, it can be said to have ushered in in the Indian context an increasingly global trend of ‘just covering the news’ – or, in the words of another leading Aaj Tak-executive “giving the news as it happens and the way people want it”⁵⁸⁹ - that absconds from contextualisation and explanation and that Philip Meyer has, for the US, called “the disappearance of journalism.”⁵⁹⁰ An example was the reporting of the Assembly election campaigns and VHP-international secretary Praveen Togadia’s ‘trishul diksha’ in 2003, which was in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh directed at incumbent Congress governments.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Interview II/01.

⁵⁹⁰ Philip Meyer, 2003, “The Proper Role of the News Media in a Democratic Society. Is It Enough to Simply Cover the News?” in: Joseph Harper/Thom Yantek (eds), *Media, Profit, and Politics. Competing Priorities in an Open Society*, Ohio: Kent State University Press, p. 11.

A report on the 16th of April, 2003, for instance, relates a Congress meeting in Delhi under Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, which was convened in order to pursue a legal injunction on the Sangh Parivar, with the temporary detainment (he was later released on bail) of Praveen Togadia in Ajmer/Rajasthan by the then-Congress government under Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on the same day. This report was particularly interesting as it made plain that the question of ‘equality’ or ‘impartiality’ is less answered with a levelled amount of statements by different political representatives but is strongly influenced by the divergent aesthetics and visual capital of the VHP/Bajrang Dal and the Congress and their respective televisual appeal. Even though both ‘parties’ – with the VHP/Bajrang Dal not representing democratically eligible parties in the first place – are represented with three speakers each (with Togadia, however, getting two frames), the VHP/Bajrang Dal occupies twice as much visual space than does the Congress, which underlines not necessarily yet a political leaning of Aaj Tak, but the fact that the Sangh Parivar is consciously and continuously producing imagery (like the trishul itself, see below) and action that is naturally attractive for the visual media and particularly for those that are ‘anti-ideological’ and in favour of ‘the people’s interests’. The report unwittingly documents how much the word – and thus ‘ideology’ - is the domain of the Congress and visuals are the domain of the Sangh Parivar. The almost honourable attempt to find images that could balance the spectacular presence of the VHP/Bajrang Dal resulted here in showing, next to the pictures of the disciplined and action-free (‘boring’) Congress meeting in Delhi, and a comment from Congress Rajya Sabha-member Natwar Singh, the car escort in which Ashok Gehlot arrived in Ajmer. This, however, even stressed not merely the lack of the Congress’ visual and action capital, but also the Congress’ lack of ‘touch with the people’ by hitting the scene with sheltered entourage. While, moreover, the strong visual presence of saffron activism and statements in this report could theoretically be read as a documentation of their dangerous potential (and proven destructive power), neither of the two live-reporting journalists even hinted in that direction. There was not a word about the appropriation of the ‘trishul’ (actually one of the main emblems of Shiva) for a clearly militarised campaign (apart from Sheila Dikshit’s comment in that direction), or about the feelings of Rajasthani Muslims or other oppositional groups towards this campaign. The reporting was thus probably affirming that such an evaluation would not only re-introduce ideological patterns of pre-defined, authoritarian interpretation but also risk to be ‘biased’ in the eyes of the majority of the viewers. I present in the following the visuals and the slightly shortened reporting in two

successive sections in order to convey a better impression of the visual impact – as far as this is possible in its restricted form on paper.



Congress meeting in Delhi, April 16, 2003



Sheila Dikshit

Bajrang Dal activists during the Assembly election campaigns



Sanjay Baragata, reporting live from Delhi

“Special: Togadia’s trishul”



Vijay Vidrohi, holding a trishul, reporting live from Jaipur, Rajasthan

Praveen Togadia before his arrest

Togadia holding upon his arrest two trishuls in victory- (and ‘anti-Christ’-)-pose against police and reporters



Togadia being escorted to the police van



Last statement by Togadia



Giriraj Kishore, international vice-president, VHP



Bajrang Dalis at a congregation in Rajasthan



VHP-gallery



At the same congregation



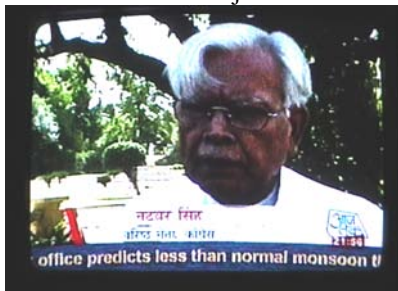
Omkar Singh Lakhavat, vice president of the BJP in Rajasthan



Ashok Gehlot's escort



Ashok Gehlot



Natwar Singh, then Congress-member of the Rajya Sabha



Togadia reaching the jail in Ajmer



Vijay Vidrohi

Sanjay Baragata (voice-over): “The Congress is meeting today under Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit in the capital. It is trying to get injunctions put on the Sangh Parivar, and the more elections are approaching the more of this will there be.”

Sheila Dikshit: “What they are doing is using a religious symbol which has been given a particular shape to create civil disturbance. This is clearly a case for the judiciary.”

Baragata (Delhi): “Sheila Dikshit came to power in '98 when the BJP's rise of the onion prices brought tears to the voters' eyes. Now, five years later, by making the trishul a weapon in the election campaigns

in three states, they are trying to get to power. We will now go over to see what the trishul is doing in Rajasthan.”

Vijay Vidrohi (Jaipur/Rajasthan): “As you have seen, in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh the trishul has become a major issue in the state elections, and this is even more the case here in Rajasthan.”

Togadia: “We will distribute the trishuls in every village, and if they arrest me we will democratically start a campaign.”

Vidrohi (voice-over): “The trishul has become a major factor in the upcoming elections of all four Hindi states. The BJP and VHP are carrying out a major campaign. The Rajasthani government might have put an injunction and has arrested Togadia, but legal experts feel that this has contributed to a national debate.”

Togadia: “The trishul will be everywhere, on T-shirts, on caps, on walls, even in Gehlot’s house! There is no way of stopping us.”

Giriraj Kishore: “Our trishuls are under 6 inches, you cannot classify that as a weapon. But we will respect all the laws, we will make it in plastic, we will make it smaller, there are thousands of ways of doing it, but we will do our trishul campaign.”

Omkar Singh Lakhavat: “In arresting Togadia the Congress committed a huge blunder and will have to pay the price. The ‘jagran’ [devotional chanting, B.O.] will start soon, and what can they do? Maybe the people will like us and vote for us, but in any case the clean-out of Congress has come. The hand of the Congress will come down [referring to the Congress’ symbol, the erected hand, B.O.].

Vidrohi: “The Congress, obviously feeling they burned their fingers, is returning to bread-and-butter politics.”

Gehlot: “There are so many problems in the state, we should not waste precious time with this topic any longer.”

Natwar Singh: “Sometimes they are giving milk to Ganesh, sometimes they are giving milk to Shivji, sometimes they are collecting bricks, now this, they basically have no political idea, nobody will agree to them.”

Vidrohi: “The irony is that Gehlot himself is seen as a devout Hindu, and this issue has started to poke the Congress even before the elections started. And the Sangh Parivar keeps the trishul close to its chest.”⁵⁹¹

While this report underpinned that a powerful and ‘people-based’ action against an incumbent government was prone to getting more visual coverage (and that the Congress – or any secular party⁵⁹² - despite an ever growing consciousness of the importance of media-oriented

⁵⁹¹ Translated from Hindi (shortened).

⁵⁹² An exception was the former Chief Minister of Bihar, Laloo Prasad Yadav, leader of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the loudest anti-Sangh Parivar proponent in the political arena, who quickly understood the impact of image-based action and initiated at the same time a massive ‘lathi rally’ with the ‘lathi’ (bamboo stick, also worn by Indian police officers) symbolising people’s self-defense against the BJP, which could itself be read as an ironical comment or as a serious political endeavour, but was in the press largely seen as a somewhat helpless or clowny undertaking.

campaigning, would never be able to wield the same visual and action power), another leading executive also stressed Aaj Tak's experiences under government control, deducing a natural position of neutrality of the channel: "We went through censorship days, through non-censorship days. From the time we were on Doordarshan I was on Aaj Tak. So I have nurtured this brand, and for me to be told that I'm close to the establishment or not close to the establishment really is a bit sad." Looking back on the monopolist days, however, he pointed out that "the present government as a coalition government had to work harder to ensure better and more transparent governance, which does not necessarily make it easier for us, but there has been progress towards a far greater freedom of the press." In his assessment the policy of 'not taking a stand' was, moreover, not only more clearly infused with an affirmation of television's affinity with a visually attractive performance rather than the necessity of investigation and questioning appearances. It was also underpinned by the endorsement of an 'economic turn' that does away with ideological differences between political parties and that openly orientates itself towards the US-American model of electioneering: "If Modi talks more colourfully better than the opposition, what do you do? It is not my job to judge on this. They have to improve themselves; at the end of the day both have big money. The big thing about the American elections is that they really dramatise it extremely well. They [the candidates, B.O.] wear the right clothes, they articulate themselves well. [...] India can do this very well if they want to and communicate their messages correctly. And also stand by what they communicate. Because there is an audience waiting to buy them. You have to correctly communicate to them and then deliver what you promised to deliver them. This is a country where people want result-orientated politicians which is all market-driven. It won't be any more colour-driven [in the sense of political colour, B.O.]. It will be market-driven, it will be economic. It has to make economic sense." While this assessment unwittingly seemed to anticipate the new economic logic that would ultimately account for the BJP's debacle in the 2004 general elections (see chapter 8 and Conclusion), this executive answered the immanent question what options political opponents actually had in a visual sphere whose coordinates tended to be already defined by the agency of the Sangh Parivar by pointing to the, in his eyes, convincing performance of the NDA-government: "To some extent I think this government has moved quite a few things and therefore people look at the changes that are happening."⁵⁹³

⁵⁹³ Interview II/01.

What facilitated Aaj Tak's 'impartial' priority of the economics of the visual and of politics (and thus of the viewer) even more than in the printed form of India Today was the component of production speed ("People want news, news, news, and they want it now and they want visuals and action").⁵⁹⁴ This speed was greatly accelerated by relying more than any other channel at the time on satellite-supported live coverage through OB-vans (Outside Broadcasting-vans). Aaj Tak's meanwhile famous slogan "Sabse Tez" (Always First) related to a hitherto unknown form of reporting in India that circumvented lengthy editorial processing and went directly live on air: "We brought in dynamism in coverage of news, we dumped the idea that news was something that happened at place x, got collected at time y, and was brought to the studio, packaged and then played out at time z. We for the first time told TV-viewers in this country that you could be transported, or the location could be transported into your living room while it was happening. So whether it is a Musharraf-summit in Agra, or whether it is the earthquake in Bhuj, or whether it is the terrorist attack on Indian parliament, our guys were there, and before anybody realised, we were showing those pictures from location. [...] Similarly, for weeks and weeks we were doing live broadcast from Gujarat. NDTV does a few packages, makes a few stories, puts them together and gets a few experts, with whom they discuss. Now this discussion-led strategy is something that we do not buy."⁵⁹⁵

The imagery was thus available and on people's screens before the story behind it could actually be researched, and what was left for the reporter to do was basically to comment on what he or she was witnessing simultaneously with the viewers, thus empowering them in their own judgement. Moreover, while the imagery suggests participation in real-time events, their immediacy and visuality virtually replaces any 'alarmed activism' by the journalist. The event, and in this sense 'reality', seems to take over from its representation, and it is reality itself that is sensational and not the way it is conveyed (it is in this context that Star News/NDTV was frequently accused of being 'sensationalising', while Aaj Tak was seen as exercising restraint and modesty). Such an in-built impossibility of deeper exploration and unedited reliance on mere happenings and action obviously appeals to all parties that have generally little interest in revelations or speculations about their non-represented practises (whereas the leaking of information to the media by parties about other parties' wrong-doings and irregularities has become a frequent occurrence, which cannot be discussed here).

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Interview II/14.

Particularly, though, it appeals to a party like the BJP and organisations of the Sangh Parivar, whose public appearance and performance is based on spectacular campaigning just *not* to evoke the impression that all this was a grandiose theatre but the adequate form of connecting to people's 'real' life and representing their legitimate interests.

An executive producer in Zee News and one of the few in the business who openly declared membership in the BJP and her uncompromising support for the 'Hindu cause', made quite clear the model-function that Aaj Tak's 'impartiality' had for other Hindi news channels at the time and the direct way in which it served the Sangh Parivar: "We are trying to do the same thing, just giving the news as quickly as possible. What I get on the table I treat as news. I don't add anything, I don't interpret it. No editorial comment. [...] That's the first step: you neutralise, by which you take out pseudo-secularist interpretation. The neutralisation itself is an inroad for us, and Aaj Tak does it best." She also pointed out that "no channel can really survive without some protection by the government, you saw what happened to NDTV after their anti-Hindu Gujarat reporting [the termination of contract with News Corporation under the new law, B.O. –see 3.2.]"⁵⁹⁶, and was readily listing the forms of government influence, when I asked her how this materialises under an absent coherent legislation: "First thing is government files case under the Anti-Defamation Act. That can knock out a channel for a while. Other thing is you hold back information or only give it to certain media. Then, of course, you put your people in important positions in the media. And also, if some minister wants his campaign covered or something he does, you do it, because otherwise you will get problems when you apply for things like uplinking facilities, digitalisation licences and such things."⁵⁹⁷

Another Zee News-executive and former Aaj Tak-journalist, however, emphasised the fine balancing act that broadcasters have to keep in mind with regard to elections: "Aaj Tak has developed too pro-government over the past few years, and they will have difficulties to prove their credibility in case another government comes in. They are feeling too safe with their success."⁵⁹⁸ The frequently heard assertion that "Advani has his investments in Aaj

⁵⁹⁶ Interview II//11.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Interview II/12. Zee News can be seen as a 'burnt child' in this respect. The channel, itself not exactly 'anti-Sangh Parivar', had been the first to run the tapes in the Tehelka sting operation – which exposed in 2001 with hidden cameras BJP-leaders as accepting generous bribes in a fake arms deal– for days on end, as it presumed the government would fall and was eager to recommend itself to an expected Congress government as the channel that helped in the change. However, the NDA remained in power, resulting for Zee News in marginalisation from the side of the government and disinterest on the part of the Congress. The internet-

Tak”⁵⁹⁹ is difficult to prove, but seems not far-fetched considering that Advani’s politics is till today more than any other politician’s predicated upon the ‘yatra-concept’ (see 8.1.) that is most interested in a ‘neutral’ and event-oriented coverage which renounces of discussing its implications. At the same time might Aaj Tak’s slow descent from the height of its appeal after the 2004 elections not merely be explicable with the market development and the growing competition by other news channels and formats, but precisely with the government change (see below and Conclusion).

On the other hand does an event-oriented ‘always first’-approach also inherently divert attention from those whose means of capturing public attention are more limited or whose agency does not comply with the concept of basic antagonism or polarisation that a ‘neutral’ position immanently requires. While one of these preliminary antagonisms was the mentioned relation between ‘state’ and ‘people’ – or ‘the Congress’ and ‘the BJP’ - another was the one between Hindus and Muslims, which left little space for representing Muslims antagonising Muslims or Hindus antagonising Hindus (the less media-attractive protests against the Gujarat violence, for instance, saw hardly any coverage by Aaj Tak) : “This is a common complaint of Muslim intellectuals and leaders in this country that their protest [against Islamist violence, B.O.] is not publicised by the media, and then they accuse us of not condemning it, and especially the Sangh Parivar. They would always repeat this that Muslims did not do this, Muslims did not do that, and when some obscure mullah from a mosque in Ahmedabad issues an appeal to Muslims to come out and go to war, that is like an advertisement in all Gujarati papers to tell Hindus that look here, all Muslims are going to war, fatwa has been issued, now you should also come out in large numbers immediately. An obscure mullah who is not known outside his mosque that is overblown in the press for communal purposes. [...] This problem is old, like when Shah Bano-movement was going on, thousands of us were in support of the Supreme Court judgement, we were edging upon the government not to change the law. But the government had its own calculations and it bowed down. But media never projected this viewpoint, only those who were opposing the Supreme Court judgement. And that created powerful prejudices even amongst secular Hindus, that Muslims have gone crazy and they don’t have any respect for the secular law of this country and BJP benefited to the maximum from this and enforced it. [...] So that way media have always acted like this with some exception, also when there was only press, but with this new television reporting it

newspaper Tehelka, on the other hand, was virtually flattened by a row of Anti-Defamation cases unleashed upon it by the NDA-government. It was meanwhile re-launched as a print newspaper (www.tehelka.com).

⁵⁹⁹ Activist, irregular interview, May 2002.

seems that things have become even more hopeless. [...] In many cases it is intention, but a lot is simply indifference.”⁶⁰⁰

It would be unfair to accuse Aaj Tak merely of the paradox of an ‘impartial bias’, as some reporters have gone out of their way, particularly during Gujarat, to document atrocities committed by members of the Sangh Parivar and corruption in their organisations (a report showed, for instance, that compensation money meant to reach the families of the Godhra-victims was pocketed by the VHP and its sympathisers). As reports, however, tend to go on air on Aaj Tak without editorial filtering, these stories also point to the heightened significance of the area of reporting itself. While executives on the management level are separate and ‘invisible’ behind the active and largely live journalistic work (“We like to portray ourselves more as a fieldnews-channel. Spot-news, location, fieldnews, and if they are complicated we do believe it’s good”)⁶⁰¹, reporters enjoy on the one hand a considerable degree of independence in conducting their work. On the other hand, they are directly subject to greater pressure in case their reporting is not approved by viewers. Moreover, journalists who see the Sangh Parivar as a political problem bring their coverage on air as much as those who consider it like any other party or those who sympathise with it. It is thus also in the area of reporting that direct manipulation is most prone to be executed. Not coincidentally, during Gujarat this concerned mainly reporters of the first category.

A journalist, who had been the first to document the swelling, and officially not necessary or even existing Muslim refugee camps in Gujarat, interviewed Narendra Modi in the studio shortly after the first wave of the violence and approached him in a way that was unusual for the general coverage. He did not dwell on the permanently emphasised point that the Modi-government failed to control the violence – swinging with which was the mere imputation that it did not want to - and particularly in the 72 hours that were claimed by Modi. Instead, he focussed on the time span *before* the violence and previous statements made by Modi himself – for instance on the foreseeable trouble to be created by Muslims - in order to directly probe into Modi’s complicity in its organising, including the burning of the Sabarmati Express-coach itself. This clearly went a step too far. “He [Modi] said, I stopped the riots, but he did not. I said, because I knew what he would say, I said, you knew that there were people in the train, they were devoted to Ram, you knew that they were passing by Gujarat, why didn’t you take precautions? You are the one who is responsible for it that this [coach] was

⁶⁰⁰ Scholar and activist, Interview II/31.

⁶⁰¹ Interview II/14.

burnt. [...] And that plastered him, so I went on and on on this, and he said, no, it [the violence] came under check, and it's an absolute lie, because it's not that the whole thing stopped after 72 hrs, it didn't even stop after 72 days! But he said it stopped after 72 hrs. I said, you knew that the Muslims are here, you knew the Muslims created a problem the previous year also, this is what *you* say, so you knew that they might create problems again, then why didn't you put extra intelligence men there? And you said that 5000 Muslims had gathered petrol there ready, why didn't you know about this before and only after? Which was a different route to take. And he said, but I got it under control, I said, by your own admission in 72 hrs. [...] Then he suddenly stopped. You know, he became very pompous, and he said, I'm not going to reply."⁶⁰²

The interview was led together with a senior executive of Aaj Tak (and India Today), who "under the table held my hand [...] not to grill him [Modi] too much. On air! And I had actually people calling me up who said that we could see that that guy wasn't letting you ask the questions. And there was silence on air. And Modi told me after the interview, so you have also become a secular journalist."⁶⁰³ While thus in contrast to Star News/NDTV acute powerlessness was experienced rather on the reporters' (and hence the employers') than the editorial level (which caused this journalist to quit his job with Aaj Tak), the direct manipulation executed in favour of Modi was justified in terms of commercial considerations and TRPs: "Till I left I was told that our viewership is down, Gujarat was the only state that Aaj Tak viewership was below Zee News, and that happened after the riots, and they thought it was my fault, and so they would always tell me this."⁶⁰⁴

Apart from – and with the help of – such outright political manipulation 'in the name of the viewer' and at the cost of investigative reporting, Aaj Tak can overall be said to have introduced into the just unfolding Indian news television landscape a form of unprecedented commercial news coverage that has become coining for successive formats and channels. It re-defined and employed television in order to establish a proximity to and intimacy with the viewer that transformed him or her from a citizen receiving publicly represented information into a participating consumer, who does not absorb but is constructed as judging for him- or herself, and even more – as the one who actually *is* the one represented, infusing the imagery with the energy it just beams back. As a senior Aaj Tak-executive put it: "We only reflect the pulse of the people. Their own mind. So we always have our finger on the pulse. We are

⁶⁰² Interview II/22 (italics according to pronunciation).

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

speaking a language which they understand, without distortion. We reflect the view of the people which is the majority view, we feel the people and when they see Aaj Tak they feel that this is what they want to feel.”⁶⁰⁵ By giving primacy to the visual rather than the text and to speed rather than to investigation or after-thought – and thus to the ‘majority view’ rather than the ‘minority view’ - translating into elements such as live reporting and real-time experience, Aaj Tak was the first news channel in India to develop television news within the 24 hour-mode into a constant flow that is only partially divided into discernable programmes but is basically designed to permanently and simultaneously accompany everyday life. It is thus erasing past and future by focussing on the present – or rather the moment -, and is based on an endless seriality which, by merging elements of entertainment and spectacle with the political, the everyday and the feeling of belonging, incorporates the logic of the soap opera.⁶⁰⁶ Political interest, which does not have to be made transparent, and culturalist performance thus directly combine with market interests.

While Aaj Tak can be seen as the pioneer in this field, however, successively launched Hindi news channels, which came into being with the wave of the Gujarat reporting and the NDA-government’s protective legislation of Indian resident owners, seem to have pushed the new formula even further, not least Rupert Murdoch’s new Star News in Hindi, which appears to slowly get the start of Aaj Tak. It has meanwhile, amongst other channels, attracted a number of former Aaj Tak reporters and executives and while it started out in 2003 with a stronger focus on ‘human interest stories, it apparently takes meanwhile people’s participation literally: “When we cover elections, we don’t cover politicians’ rallies, we give the mike to the local people and allow them to take over.”⁶⁰⁷ The new salience of the reporter might thus be just an intermezzo on the short way from the news administrator under state control via the editing journalist towards ‘people’s television’ in India. As all those before it, prominently including Aaj Tak, this new form also carries the promise and the potential of bringing out democratic views and further breaking down hierarchies in representation. Moreover, it directly competes with and inserts itself even more into modes of the new digital media, which are still far less wide-spread than in Western countries, imitating their individualised and participative options which suggest on Internet-portals that “every citizen is a reporter” (for instance on ohmynews.com). Television, whose growth has been tremendous since the

⁶⁰⁵ Interview II/25.

⁶⁰⁶ See James H. Wittebols, 2003, “Media Conglomeration and Campaign News Coverage. Politics as Soap Opera”, in: Harper/Yantek (eds.), pp. 91-108.

⁶⁰⁷ The CEO of Star News, a former Aaj Tak-executive in: “For News Channels It’s Breaking News, Always !!!!!!!” at: www.televisionpoint.com/news/newsfullstory.php?id=1135989865 (December 31, 2005).

beginning of the new century, thus also becomes a temporary substitute for the new media in India as long as these cannot be afforded or operated by substantial parts of the society, underlining the intensifying of a particular form of time compression in which older or younger media have to stand in for other media's functions (Doordarshan, for instance, was in the face of low literacy rates made to stand in for the book) and in which the idea of a 'public' has turned but into a short interval.

News television thus seems to motion into a direction in which direct responsibility is systematically transferred away from the medium's ownership structure. The owner's and even producer's 'neutrality' is promoted and ensured by advancing the subjectivity of the participants, and television tends to mimic the role of a mere service provider that negates its logic of a representative medium which is in some way or the other tied to collective, and particularly to national reception. Television is, however, factually not part of the new, more self-representing media – encapsulated in the fact, for instance, that the microphone is still *given* to the 'local people' or, if viewer-generated material is played out, that this material is still *chosen* by an authoritative instance. There thus arise a number of questions that should be subject to further study. For instance, what does thus this form of personalised and individualised televised participation mean for situations of communal or caste violence - who will get the mike then/whose material will be chosen? Judging by the employment of visual media through rioters and the e-mails discharged against the reporting of news channels during Gujarat, which mostly came from agitated males – claiming their legitimate right to define the situation – the scenario looks not particularly promising, and even if Muslims and minorities are increasingly discovered as market segments, the fact remains that an 80% Hindu population is for the time being basically large enough as a profitable target audience. Equally arises the question what this development of a 'people's television' might mean for the coverage of political and culturalist mobilisation that the Sangh Parivar continues to engage in and for the representation of state and party politics. While it is at least possible that such a television enforces, in the wake of moves towards re-politisation, new ways of making governments and state institutions answerable, it is equally possible that it, by concentrating on 'people's concerns', leaves the political even less monitored – which might well be in the commercial interest of the channels' owners. Political manipulation might thus be profitably replaced by political indifference, as indicates, for instance, a statement given by the head of another recently launched channel, Channel 7: "You can't do

stories for the Press Club anymore, to hear other journalists say, kya story thi [what a story this was, B.O.]. ‘RSS should not control the BJP’, says Advani. Who cares?’⁶⁰⁸

It thus seems obvious that an authoritarian style of neo-liberal ‘good governance’ of the kind that Narendra Modi has (for the time being) established in Gujarat is likely to profit from a ‘people’s television’, in which ‘breaking news’ focus on a majoritarian personal everyday rather than the political sphere. Equally will the long-term documentation and investigation of building up processes in terms of communalisation, militarization, deprivation, impoverishment etc. suffer, thus pre-disposing the impression of their sudden ‘eruption’ in an otherwise peaceful, prospering and vibrant Indian society. On the other hand, as I will elaborate in the last part of this study with regard to the entertainment channels – and notably Star Plus’ K-formula –, it seems to have been precisely the primacy of the economic, the commercial and the accompanying ‘cult of the subject’ (in the form of the ‘own judgement’ and the personal experience) that ultimately showed its strength to marginalise not only the political, but also the anti-democratic and to pave the ground for the Congress’ return to power in the 2004 general elections. Pradip Kumar Datta has pointed to an asymmetry between the logic of commercialisation and the objectives of Hindutva insofar as consumerism inherently involves “a series of actions that individuate the consumer”, which stands in conflict with Hindutva’s strategy to provide “signs of a commonality that ranges across different national and international spaces.”⁶⁰⁹ Commercialisation, whilst lending itself to de-politicisation, is dependent on the creation of masses and numbers (and in this context of nations) and on active participation (through consumption), but it is equally predicated upon suggesting that it is just the individual consumer that stands out of this numbered mass. Commercialisation conceals the submission and standardisation it pursues by celebrating the subject. Hindutva, however, in its de-politicising endeavour of setting the nation before the state and the concept of a naturalised community before political negotiation, is dependent on active participation in this project but has to see a threat in individualisation, which ultimately runs counter to the Sangh Parivar’s inherent need of collective identification.⁶¹⁰ To carry the employment of commercial strategies too far thus entailed the danger for the Sangh Parivar to become their victim. However, while participation, as Eckert has pointed out with regard to

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Datta, 2003, p. 195.

⁶¹⁰ See Venkaiah Naidu (then BJP President), 2004, The Virus of Individualism... (Speech at the BJP National Executive Meeting), in: *Outlook*, June 22.

the Shiv Sena's politics of direct action in Bombay, is not the same as democracy, neither is individualism.⁶¹¹

7.3. *Entertaining Hindutva*

It is at this point – of a growing visualisation and participation-orientation of the media - that the national entertainment channels, Star Plus, Sony and Zee, and thus the level of fiction, re-entered the picture at the time of my fieldwork.

In contrast to news channels, despite their constantly growing significance and popularity, it is so far still the entertainment channels that are aimed at the utmost possible amount of viewers and that draw the highest amount of advertising money, which explains to a degree also the long absence of news channels in India. It was entertainment that money was thought to be made with quicker, and Gujarat itself was the catalyst for the fast emergence of a profit-oriented, 24-hour news television.⁶¹² While the entertainment channels and their contents were obviously, in contrast to the media forms listed above, not at all directly referring to Gujarat, they seemed to extend the earlier described hierarchy from a marginalised critical textual analysis of the Gujarat violence down towards a consumer-oriented 'readability' of the events in the mass-mediated news on the level of the fictitious. When I approached my field during the height of the pogrom at the beginning of March, 2002, with a temporal lopsidedness onto interviews with partners in the entertainment channels, as I started off in Bombay, the television reporting on Star News/NDTV, Aaj Tak and Zee News on the ongoing violence was on Star Plus, Sony and Zee TV complemented by a visually lavish yet surprisingly uniform imagery that looked at first sight like a most unambiguous fictitious representation of Hindutva's religious spectacular performance. It was the peak of the hype around what was referred to as the 'K-formula', the 'K-phenomenon', the 'K-word' or the 'K-women'.

⁶¹¹ Eckert, 2003, p. 281. See Barbara Cochran, 2003, "New Technologies of Communication. Can We/Will We/Should We Achieve Participatory Democracy?", in: Harper/Yantek (eds.), pp. 197-201.

⁶¹² Even Aaj Tak, then the most popular news channel, had in 2002 a share in the overall advertising market of a mere 0,8% as opposed to the entertainment market leader amongst the private channels, Star Plus, which booked 7,0%. The lion's share still went to Doordarshan, because of its unmatched terrestrial reach, with 16,2%. Star News/NDTV, because of its 'upmarket' viewership, only came to 0,2% (Kohli-Khandekar, p. 78).

Essentially representing the result of Star Plus' enforced endeavour to speedily Indianise its programming after 1999 (see 4.2.), the 'K-formula' had most obviously created a powerful, indeed almost inescapable, general trend. On all entertainment channels, even though clearly led by Star Plus, there dominated soap operas that represented Hindu joint families who led a most baroque lifestyle. Clad in opulent saris and designer kurta pyjamas and residing in spacious mansions in which house deities occupied a prominent place, their life was revolving around family matters – which prominently included business matters - and religious ritual. Star Plus' prime time-soaps *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Because Every Mother-in-Law once was a Daughter-in-Law) and *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii* (The Story of Every House), featuring the sagas of a Gujarati and a Marwari⁶¹³ family respectively, were not only surrounded by a number of similar soaps on the same channel (like *Kaahin Kissii Rooz* (Once Upon a Time), *Kasautii Zindagi Kay* (Touchstone of Life), *Kalash*⁶¹⁴, *Bhabhi* (female name), *Kundali* (Horoscope/Prediction), *Kehta Hai Dil* (Thus Speaks the Heart), *Kabhii Sautan*, *Kabhii Saheli* (Sometimes Second Wife, Sometimes Friend), *Shagun* (The Omen)⁶¹⁵, *Kavita* (female name), *Sanjivani* (name of a hospital)⁶¹⁶. They also set the tone for similar productions on Sony (*Kkusum*, *Kkutumb* – female names) and Zee TV (*Kohi Apna Sa* (Each to his/her Own), *Chhoti Ma...Ek Anokha Bandhan* (The Young Mother ... A Curious Bonding), *Gharana* (The Dynasty) and appeared, moreover, also in respectively adapted forms on the regional channels.

Many of these soaps and serials were still running during my second stay in 2003 and my follow up-visit in 2004. *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (in the following *Kyunki*) and *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii* (in the following *Kahaani*) as well as a number of others are still on air as I am writing this, registering continuously the highest TRPs and securing "Star Plus' monopoly in C&S [cable and satellite, B.O.] homes."⁶¹⁷ Other soaps had been replaced by similar productions, or, in (fateful) exceptions, by attempts to try something different. There did exist variations between the different productions as well as between the channels, yet they were indeed variations of the same theme rather than mounting to discernable

⁶¹³ Trading community of northern India, originally from the ancient state of Mewar in Rajasthan, today very influential in the economy, holding key-positions in various businesses.

⁶¹⁴ Meaning an urn or bulgy pot, with which (holy) water is fetched. Referring here to the lives of three generations of a joint family that gain their strength from the same source.

⁶¹⁵ Particularly the appointing of an auspicious day for marriage.

⁶¹⁶ Literally 'elixir of life'.

⁶¹⁷ www.indiantelevision.com/tvr/indextam.php4; in the week between January 07 and January 11, randomly chosen, all first ten ranks in the rating for cabled homes were taken up by Star Plus, with eight of the places occupied by *Kyunki* and *Kahaani*.

divergence. This main theme consisted in the life of the joint family, which sometimes lived under the same roof and was sometimes more scattered but always around, and particularly of the woman's life in or in relation to these families. What was most striking about these soaps was the way in which the represented families were ostentatiously yet self-evidently Hindu and completely separate particularly from Muslim families or protagonists, who had 'their own' serial (see 8.3.2.), which was instantly reminiscent of the white, upper middle class norm in 1980s American soaps like *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* that were kept separate from 'black' serials like *The Cosby Show*.

One of the first things that went through my mind while spending the first week of my stay in front of my landlady's sparkling new TV-set in her otherwise modest Bombay flat was that the 'Indian' television-character on Doordarshan but also on the private channels during the 1990s, who had not at first sight been discernable as Hindu or Muslim (yet had been, in fact, generally Hindu), had vanished. Mankekar has observed for the end of the 1980s that in Doordarshan's serials, especially those produced after the Shah Bano case, "Hindu identity was naturalized and presented as normative"⁶¹⁸ and "minority women were conspicuously absent from the women-oriented narratives."⁶¹⁹ This had changed insofar as minority protagonists were, to a limited degree, back on screen, but where instantly identifiable as Muslim or – rarely – as Sikh (while music was overall strongly influenced by bhangra-tunes from Punjab) and opposed to an opulent majority Hindu, thus resonating with the tropes of becoming 'realistic' and 'honest' (about insurmountable differences) that were part of the wider public discourse. The second thing that struck me was the radical change in the underlying economic conditions. Had the subtext particularly in Doordarshan-serials of the 1980s been 'We don't have enough money, how do we make some?', this had radically changed into a 'We have already all the money in the world, how do we get more?' Finally, all the conventional activities that especially women had engaged in in earlier serials, like cooking, washing, shopping, cleaning, repairing and child-care, which had often been supplemented by following a professional occupation or engaging in social and political work had apparently been taken over by an ever invisible armada of servants or social activists (and, as far as income-earning was concerned, by the males, generally equally invisible). The female protagonists themselves were almost exclusively busy with talking, preferably on the

⁶¹⁸ Mankekar, 2000, p. 162.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, p. 161.

mobile phone, and religious ritual like aarti, puja, lightning of the lamp, drawing mandalas etc.



Stills from an episode of *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (aired on April 29, 2003)



Stills from the trailer of *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii*

Pioneers and motors of this trend were *Kyunki* and *Kahaani*, which displayed the wealthy Hindu joint family-theme in its most comprised form. Starting with the letter ‘K’, they were produced by Balaji Telefilms (named after a South Indian goddess and owned by Ekta Kapoor, daughter of South Indian actor Jitender Kapoor). So were all other soaps and serials whose titles started with a ‘K’. Their large number indicated the firm grip that the production house had developed on the entertainment channels and gave – together with the earlier-running game show *Kaun Banega Crorepati (KBC)* - the ‘K-formula’ its name.⁶²⁰ Some of the serials were weeklies, but most were dailies, aired in 30 min.-slots, ten minutes of which went to advertising. As the episode of the previous evening was generally repeated in the early afternoon, before a new episode would be aired in the prime time-slot between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m., a mere look at the television schedule in the newspaper evoked a rather

⁶²⁰ Kapoor’s infatuation with the letter ‘K’ is said to have its roots in an advice from famous tarot card reader Sunita Menon, to whom Kapoor is a regular customer (see *Outlook*, November 22, 2004: Astrology. The Tomorrow Business (cover story). In contrast to average production houses, which produce anywhere between 5 and 500 hours of television hours per year, Balaji had in 2003/2004 an output of nearly 1500 hours of programming, including productions for regional channels (Kohli-Khadekar, p. 90).

monolithic picture that resembled the trend in the news channels of a basically uninterrupted flow of rather spectacular imagery, merged with advertising, that accompanies the day.

This apparent and overwhelming success of Star Plus' Indianisation efforts after the opportunity to go Hindi had arisen, however, was not, as indicated in chapter 4, amongst my informants in the channels accompanied by enthusiasm. On the contrary, the overall atmosphere turned out to be one of doom that was even more coined by feelings of impotency than were parts of the news media which I was to encounter in Delhi. There were, of course, exceptions, mainly in Star Plus, where leading executives and creative heads, particularly those immediately responsible for the new programming, did, with differing arguments, their best to portray the soap-mania as an important step forward in India's television history. They were quite aware, though, that they had to put up their narrative against biting critique that was not only detectable in the English language press – the Times of India called the K-soaps “the most conservative, some would say regressive, fare ever dished out on Indian television”⁶²¹ - but that was quite strong in the competing channels and even within Star Plus itself.

In relation to the news channels analysed above there could be made out a pattern, in which English-language producers now basically had to choose between an identification with their work and a response from large audiences. While in NDTV identification with the own work was high and feelings of impotency were at the time of the pogrom evoked by the lack of impact that their reports had on viewers, identification in Aaj Tak was equally high, was met with an equivalence in response, and powerlessness was mainly experienced at manipulation by seniors in the organisation. In the entertainment channels, by contrast, the notion of impotency was now evoked by an overwhelming response of audiences to productions that the producers themselves were basically incapable of identifying with. The feeling was thus not merely that of powerlessness but of alienation. As one Sony-executive put it: “It is very hard to survive right now and to go with things, with a representation of women which is obviously extremely regressive, which opposes everything you know and you have worked for, to commission these sort of serials. We have to work under extreme outside pressure, and it is sometimes repulsive to see what you yourself are doing.”⁶²² The concerted effect of the otherwise differing development in the news and the entertainment channels was that, while

⁶²¹ *Times of India*, January 11, 2002: Bye Bye KBC.

⁶²² Interview II/35.

particularly Aaj Tak had, consciously, made “watching Hindi news fashionable”⁶²³, the entertainment channels were, largely unwillingly, promoting “that it is hip to be Hindu.”⁶²⁴

The alienation in the entertainment channels was informed and intensified, as the quote above indicates, by a powerlessness that had started to unfold on different levels and that was, in contrast to the news channels, characteristic particularly of the transnational channels (Star Plus and Sony). A basic feeling of impotency was here paradoxically evoked precisely through the absence of ideological pressure from the respective headquarters. The discontinuity of programming decisions on the transnational level and their transfer onto the supposedly representative ‘Indians’ was now a source not only of increased responsibility and ‘autonomy’ but also of a more essential (and existential) form of pressure. If now a programme flopped or even the TRPs decreased, and thus the advertising revenues declined, the weight of the headquarters would make itself rather immediately felt. The run for or the maintenance of a TRP-hit was thus amplified, and what we saw as a continuous and homogenous ‘Indian culture’ on the screens was the direct result of these higher calculations rather than the outcome of a production process one could actually design and identify with.

In this context, a second dimension of powerlessness and lack of relation had to do with the inability, despite various attempts in my interviews, to actually explain and appropriate the ‘K-phenomenon’, thus somewhat subscribing to its very character as a phenomenon that had developed its own dynamics. As one scriptwriter observed in the fourth year of the K-soap’s unabated triumph: “The successful claim the success for themselves and think they can explain it. But they cannot really understand it, otherwise they would be able to alter it or to repeat it with something else. But they are only dragging on with the same thing, because they actually haven’t got a clue what’s going on.”⁶²⁵ So what might have looked on the outside like a carefully crafted and orchestrated plan of Star Plus to absorb audiences – and was partly also seen as such by interview partners in Sony and Zee TV, who felt involuntarily drawn into its inescapable dynamics – actually was a rather unforeseen success, whose occurrence had doubtlessly been pursued by Star Plus with great effort in order to finally catch up with the competition and manoeuvre the channel into the profit-making zone, but was in its dimension an unexpected surprise that now nobody dared to touch upon. The inexplicable ‘success’ had thus not merely already achieved the level of monotony but rather of a stranglehold that resonated with the deadlock in the political arena and the news reporting. Significantly, this

⁶²³ Aaj Tak-executive, Interview II/14.

⁶²⁴ Independent producer, Interview I/01.

⁶²⁵ Interview III/02.

deadlock entailed a transfer of the usual ascription of habit and lack of alternative to glued-to-the-screen audiences onto the level of production itself, where, despite utterances of bitter disappointment and critique, producers and executives also displayed a decreasing amount of creative ideas of what a programming other than the endless extension of the story around the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law could actually look like. This might explain the virtual nostalgia that poured out with regard to the 1980s Doordarshan serials like *Hum Log* (We people), *Buniyaad* (Foundation) or *Nukkad* (Corner)⁶²⁶ that were now re-valued as ‘real quality productions’ (even though Ravi Vasudevan had at the time seen *Nukkad*’s message as “coloured with propaganda” and already “indistinguishable from that of the world of moralizing commercial representation”).⁶²⁷ The earlier mentioned tendency of the Indian media to have become an integral and appropriated part of society showed in this nostalgia and the feeling of impotency in the entertainment production in yet another variant. Peter Elliott had for the British media of the early 1970s diagnosed a “picture of ‘the media culture as a largely separate and self-contained system’”⁶²⁸, which seemed in the Indian context reflected in the situation before 1999 that I have described in chapter 4. While Indian news channels have started to change this relation through increasing interaction with and participation of the viewers, in the entertainment channels of the early 2000s this separation translated into the reversed scenario of the producers’ isolation from an unfolding self-contained media culture amongst the consumers, equally indicating that the conventional relation between representatives and represented has been broken.

By far the strongest feeling of powerlessness, however, was evoked by the widespread inability of executives to connect to the K-soaps’ contents and depictions. The insight of having to approach the viewer that was recounted when looking back on the development in the late 1990s was confronted with acute disenchantment about what this approach had led to. It was here that a ‘lose-lose situation’ was most palpable. Lost (or rather non-achieved) was not only the relation with the viewers, who remained as enigmatic as before (even if they clearly had become more powerful), but the identification with the own production as well. The above-mentioned allegation of the ‘K-soaps’ as being ‘regressive’ was in one or the other way a standard in nearly every interview, complemented by ‘superstitious’, ‘only aspirational’

⁶²⁶ Referring to a street corner.

⁶²⁷ Ravi Vasudevan, 1987, “Nukkad: Another Serial Reproducing Staid Ideological Messages”, in: Ayesha Kagal/Ashish Rajadhyaksha/Shyla Boga/John D’Souza (eds.), *Nukkad: Hope for the Indian Serial?*, Bombay: Centre For Education and Documentation (CED), pp. 60/61.

⁶²⁸ Peter Elliott (1972), quoted in: John Corner, 1999, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (Oxford Television Studies), p. 74.

and ‘totally false’ or ‘unrealistic’. An assessment, however, that was voiced very often as well was that ‘nobody wants to be preached’ or ‘people don’t want to be taught’, which resonated with the primacy of ‘letting people judge for themselves’ in the news channels. While it seemed curious how such a concentrated amount of Hindu joint family life could be considered the opposite of ‘preaching’ (or propaganda), it was equally remarkable that - despite the outright danger that was by some detected in these soaps and their obvious perfect fictitious merger of the economical and the ideological - hardly anybody in the business, unless I asked directly, connected the soaps’ lavish representation of upper class, upper caste, Hindu religious life, in which the characters of *Kyunki* greeted each other with “Jai Shri Krishna” (Hail to Lord Krishna), to the BJP-led government and to the political prominence of the Sangh Parivar. This was largely supported by reports and references to the soaps in the press, where they tended to be dismissed, criticised, or ridiculed but not be put into a political context either. An article in *Screen*, which appeared pretty late (in September 2003) and which pointed to the danger of TV characters’ saffronisation, remained a single exception.⁶²⁹

The main reason for this was a near-total dissociation of the soaps from the political, which is generally ascribed to entertainment programming but was here also the outcome of a historical process (see chapter 8). Moreover, this dissociation concerned not merely the soaps’ contents but also their producers, particularly their executive producers in the channels. In the news business, where the direct linkage with the political is naturally far more immanent, rumours and suspicions, as mentioned in 7.1., were quite ubiquitous. In the entertainment channels such suspicions of political affiliations and manipulation were not only absent, supported through the characteristic pride of the Bombay entertainment machinery’s traditional independence that had partly been affirmed by the television industry: “Entertainment in this country has always worked independently from the government.”⁶³⁰ The condemnation of the current political scenario was also far more outspoken. Star Plus’ Head of Content, who in his direct responsibility for commissioning the leading K-soaps would have been most prone to an imputation of ideological flirtation, made quite transparent his impatience and satiety of Hindutva: “Definitely in the circles of people that I move around, some undercurrent is building up, saying that this is really going nuts. BJP is really doing a plot, you know, they got out to some crazy theory of taking the ashes of those people on the train onto a what is it called? Some yatra or what, cruising the country

⁶²⁹ A.L. Chougule, 2003, Television Characters: Danger of Saffronisation, in: *Screen*, September 5 (www.screenindia.com).

⁶³⁰ Star-executive, Interview I/15.

with the ashes, that is really, that is like a time bomb, that's a recipe for disaster."⁶³¹ The CEO of Balaji Telefilms went, a year later, even a step further: "[Narendra Modi] is the guy who should have been killed, seriously, I'm afraid saying so, but he is the guy who has the direct responsibility for I don't know how many dead. It's not funny. And how can you get elected after that! It speaks of the minds of people there [in Gujarat, B.O.], it kind of shocks us. [But] even here [in Bombay, B.O.] Muslims are more and more moving in with each other, in Bhendi Bazaar, or Masjid, or Kalba. You won't find Muslims in Dadar or other parts of the city, they don't want to go there, because they fear they might be burned to death. It's terrible. [...] This country will go down the drain completely if things go on like this."⁶³²

There was a quite exceptional case where one of the younger, himself rather aspirational leading executives in Star Plus had seen it fit to internalise the Indianised programming line of Star Plus to the degree of wearing a 'tilak' on a daily basis and attempting to represent an altered attitude of Star Plus as a whole: "Our path was going wrong. You had television like *Tara*⁶³³ with fancy women who would drink, who would throw things at each other, who would abuse each other and things like that, what was it doing to the society? What has it projected for the society? [...] We believe that living in their joint family system is far better for them [the viewers, B.O.] than anything else. Indian kids grow up with a lot of moral values, with the right kind of culture, because they are brought up by their grandparents and their aunts and uncles, and even till today if you have a problem your extended family comes to your help much more easily than anywhere else in the world." In this context, he also indicated that he associated now morally questionable serials like *Tara* not with American but with European influences: "I don't think American television is regressive at all, I think it's correct, socially correct, and if television was not going to make an attempt to make people socially correct, I don't know which way the society will head."⁶³⁴ While there was a noteworthy shift here from 'politically correct' to 'socially correct', which resonated with the Sangh Parivar's demand for a 'social responsibility' – rather than political alertness - of the media, this interview partner became quite annoyed when I pointed to this distinction and related it to the larger public discourse: "Are you one of those who take some sinister joy in painting India all saffron?"⁶³⁵ Another leading Star Plus executive I spoke to a few days later broke into a grin upon me mentioning the conversation and explained: "He just cannot bear

⁶³¹ Interview I/15.

⁶³² Interview II/38.

⁶³³ Referring to the serial *Tara*, from 1994-1997 on Zee TV (see 4.1.).

⁶³⁴ Interview I/04.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

the discrepancy. He thinks he has to identify completely with what he is doing. Last year I went to a temple with him, and he didn't have a clue what to do. Since then he is going every week, or sometimes every day, I don't know, and is becoming some sort of an expert on Hindu religion. It's kind of bizarre, but you shouldn't take it too seriously.”⁶³⁶

This was certainly one side of the story, telling about the efforts to reconcile an inner confusion and schism that had come about with the commercial demand to represent an 'Indian culture' that most of the executives knew little about. On the other hand was this confusion not quite personal but professionally evoked, evidencing that 'turning religious' was considered to support the own professional position and even the likeliness of a career move, not least because it is “people who believe in what they are doing, who come across stronger and who will be more convincing in the long run.”⁶³⁷ As a former writer and serial director for Star Plus commented, not without spitefulness: “All that these guys want is to see James Murdoch smile.”⁶³⁸ Moreover, this individual professional 'cultural turn' was not restricted to the personal level but had consequences for the immediate work surrounding, particularly for lower-ranking executives who could not so easily dismiss a superior's moralistic reincarnation as a temporary spleen. For one female executive producer, known to be a smoker, frequent remarks in passing “like ‘Learn something from Parvati [main character of *Kahaani*], don't smoke so much, why don't you go home and cook something for your husband, where is your mangalsutra”⁶³⁹ amounted to a feeling of harassment that in the end contributed to her quitting her job.

The aspect of opportunism in the wake of personal career considerations and more immediate profit-pressure, and thus of emotional and cultural blackmailing rather than manipulation, played in the entertainment channels a far more explicit role than political leaning. When I asked where all the experimental spirit of the 1990s had gone, however, a leading Zee-executive also drew a more direct connection to government politics, thus re-connecting the entertainment sector to the news channels: “Only thing that happened was that the government became a BJP government. And everyone had to, including the media, draw the line.” When I pressed her to get more concrete, she, reluctantly, advanced: “There *was* nothing concrete, nothing written, no orders or something. But there weren't any buyers [of progressive or experimental serials, B.O.]. No media can afford to work against the

⁶³⁶ Interview I/08.

⁶³⁷ Writer and director, Interview I/21.

⁶³⁸ Interview I/10.

⁶³⁹ Interview I/16. A mangalsutra is a long necklace indicating a Hindu woman's married status and devotion to her husband.

government. BJP government had come into power, and the channels' whole profiles changed all over. [...] It was sudden and it was overnight. It was a delude. You just change. It was not just me, there are hundreds of writers and directors and producers who have no business. Unless they go out of this country and do it.”⁶⁴⁰

While the amount of under- or non-occupied writers and directors was indeed obvious in my interviews (see 8.3.2.), a rather dramatic assessment like this could, at least to a small degree, also be ascribed to the increasingly ruthless competition between the leading national channels and an underlying envy of Star Plus' 'success' with the viewers. An executive in Sony, which had been in the second half of the 1990s far more flourishing than Star Plus, did not quite subscribe to the politically influenced 'overnight-theory' but saw mainly a diminishing appeal of former concepts and formats at the end of the 1990s: “Nothing was really working with the audiences any more on any of the channels. Nothing was working big time, they were all getting very average viewership. It was as if somebody had let the air out of the whole thing”⁶⁴¹ (see 8.2.). While the Zee-executive would connect precisely this deflagration to the growing “regression that anyway brought the BJP to power”, a former Sony-executive redrew the circle towards Star Plus' supposed calculated politics: “It's not a coincidence that Star decided to go all Hindi after the BJP came to power”⁶⁴², which was again echoed in another statement of the same Zee-executive: “Because Star came in with this regressive programming, it took away the last chance of at least a slight resistance.”⁶⁴³

Yet, within Star Plus even, or particularly, the accusation of opportunism was outright rejected: “You must believe me that I'm right and that we are not cashing in on a Hindu sentiment. In the process it might have come to lean towards a certain bias, but *Kyunki* is not responsible for the communalisation of this country.”⁶⁴⁴ The Balaji-CEO argued in the same direction and stressed the moment of the unconscious: “I don't think there is any producer in Bombay playing that [Hindutva] line consciously. It is a subconscious thing of catering to a Hindu majority, and most producers are more familiar with that culture.”⁶⁴⁵ While this statement unwittingly adhered not only to the new normality of catering to a culturally defined majority, it also confirmed the total absence of Muslims in all Balaji-soaps (and their

⁶⁴⁰ Interview I/09 (italics according to pronunciation).

⁶⁴¹ Interview I/12.

⁶⁴² Interview I/06.

⁶⁴³ Interview I/13.

⁶⁴⁴ Interview I/15.

⁶⁴⁵ Interview II/38.

relegation to other, minor producers) as well as the absence of Muslims in leading and executing positions in television production as a whole.

Attempts like these to naturalise the situation, however, were pushed aside by another leading Star Plus-executive (the same who had humorously dismissed her colleague's 'cultural turn'): "It is clear as day that the Hindu family-theme is cashing in on saffron politics, but they are not even aware of it, they basically think of what is selling. It is obviously dangerous, as the stereotypes are perpetuated and Muslims, at least in our channel at the moment, are kept out. What is happening is a national mainstreaming, but it is not done consciously, there is no agenda as such. That's why I hope that change will and can happen, and that's why it is also so important to get the intelligentsia out of their comfortable realm of academia and critique, get them into the mainstream, the mass media, take the situation seriously and work for the change, even if they may not be able to earn the fruits in their lifetime, which they are so used to. Revolutions fail because they happen in a day. That's what I have come to understand."⁶⁴⁶

Without quite being able to free itself completely from the tinge of heroic sacrifice, this assessment expressed a new, and in its elaborate theory in the whole business rather rare position of consciously working within the emerged and in its apparent strength overwhelming reality, and accept it critically as factual, rather than wasting one's energy battling it. Socially, it represented a transcendence of the classical intelligentsia's position of an emotional and moral obligation of being 'realistic' with regard to the needs of the masses (see 4.2.), while at the same time avoiding the 'American pragmatism' of selling dreams that had started to dominate the business (see 8.2.). Politically, this position took into account the rather thorough appropriation of discursive as well as visual options through the Sangh Parivar and the fact that the Sangh Parivar itself is most observant in sticking to and promoting formal democratic procedures, which left little space for clear oppositional manoeuvre. In contrast to an 'inner exile', which marks the absolute lack of alternatives in a totalitarian regime, this attitude proposed a strategy of the long breath and of consciously investing the own privileged position in the pursuit of a distant aim that employs small steps and the advantageous use of others' ignorance in order to re-mould a moulded system. Its main asset consisted in a refusal or at least avoidance of naturalising the unconscious or subconscious, upon which the correspondence between political Hindutva and the K-soaps obviously rested.

⁶⁴⁶ Interview I/08.

Pradip Kumar Datta, on the other hand, in his analysis of the basic asymmetry between the logic of consumption, within which the soaps operated, and the objectives of Hindutva, argues that consumerism is predicated upon an “instability of desire” that is contrasted by Hindutva’s claim to “withstand the vagaries of circumstance and human desire.”⁶⁴⁷ Translated into the concrete context of the K-soaps, this would mean that they are, like all modern media products, predicated not only upon the individual – who has come to be increasingly celebrated in the news channels - but that the moment of fashion and the short-lived nature of consumerist desires would be likely to usher in before long a new trend that inevitably counters their obvious pro-Hindutva leanings. The immanent regularity of this commercial logic was mirrored in my informants’ hopeful expectation in 2002 – and already less in 2003 – that “everything reaches a top, and then new things start”⁶⁴⁸ or that “some sanity is bound to creep in some time soon.”⁶⁴⁹

Given, however, that the soap’s success outlived by far the BJP in the central government and the height of the Sangh Parivar’s – and basically the VHP’s (see below) – ‘visual regime’, another line of argument within the TV industry appeared to gain plausibility. The earlier mentioned suggestion ‘not to take things too seriously’ had a serious background in itself. While it was pointed out that Hindu symbolism “just gives you a lot to play with”⁶⁵⁰, the assertion that “all this religious symbolism is just a gimmick”⁶⁵¹ was frequent in the entertainment business, amongst writers and producers as much as amongst executives in the channels, not least with the one who had been so eager to perform his ‘professional cultural turn’: “The trend is towards spiritualism rather than plain religion, and to yoga instead of ritualism. Rituals and symbols are mere indicators in the plot, they don’t hold any meaning in themselves.”⁶⁵² While the news channels, precisely through their increasing de-politicisation (in the sense of covering state and party politics) and individualisation of the judging and participant consumer, carried the option of randomly integrating, but as well of ultimately marginalising the Sangh Parivar (as a de-politicising political set-up), the over-employment of religious symbolism – which was the counter-option to the actual impossibility of not using it all or refusing it on television – opened the space for taking its inflation through the Sangh Parivar itself to a level that would ‘through the backdoor’ empty it from (all) its meaning, thus

⁶⁴⁷ Datta, 2003, p. 195.

⁶⁴⁸ Zee TV executive, Interview I/02.

⁶⁴⁹ Star Plus executive, Interview I/17.

⁶⁵⁰ CEO, Balaji Telefilms, Interview II/38.

⁶⁵¹ Independent producer, Interview II/42.

⁶⁵² Interview I/04.

also creating new options of re-appropriating it. A statement of Star Plus Head of Content pointed quite clearly in that direction: “We became Hindutva in our own way. That’s the best strategy one can think of.”⁶⁵³ Not having to take things seriously, on the other hand, itself speaks of a certain naturalised privilege (see 8.3.2.).

8. *The Waves of Hindutva and the Victory of Television*

The obvious analogies between Hindu nationalism’s salience since the 1980s - in the form of the larger Hindutva movement and the embedded Ramjanmabhoomi Movement for the erection of the Ram mandir in Ayodhya – and the emerging ‘information revolution’ and unfolding globalisation in the same period have been the subject of quite a few studies and articles by now. They are all informed by the unease and puzzlement over the so blatant similarities and intersections between the two developments and the intrinsic difficulty to actually nail them down to a clear reason and source (like good old ideology and its supposedly causal effects).

Robin Jeffrey, for instance, in his endeavour to come to terms with this simultaneity of the rise of the media and Hindu politics after 1982 describes them as “the two walls of the canyon”, which suggests their actual incompliance as well as their likely collaboration, but arrives at the conclusion that “none of this *proves* connections or even suggests, in a step-by-step, empirical way, how such connections might work.”⁶⁵⁴ Jeffrey’s approach is somewhat invested with the conventional idea that the emergence and dissemination of ‘free’ media – and that refers today generally not to ‘public’ but to ‘private’ commercial media – carry some automatism of progress, which leads away from ideology towards democracy, a view that also underlies Rachel Dwyer’s finding, in her analysis of recent Hindi cinema and Hindu nationalism, that “Hindutva may be a powerful force in India [...] but it cannot compete with global market forces”⁶⁵⁵ (which has been refuted by the developments in Gujarat). More

⁶⁵³ Interview I/15.

⁶⁵⁴ Robin Jeffrey, 2001, Media Revolution & “Hindu Politics” in North India, 1982-99, in: *Himal Southasian* July, Vol. 14/7, p. 41 (italics in the original).

⁶⁵⁵ Rachel Dwyer, 2006, “The Saffron Screen? Hindu nationalism and the Hindi film”, in: Birgit Meyer/Annelies Moors (eds.), *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 284.

structural approaches like Datta's mentioned analysis of the respective dynamics and inherent logic of Hindutva and consumerism and the study of Rajagopal, who argues in terms of Hindutva's cooperation with and insertion in forces, particularly television, rotating towards cultural and political 'liberation' and empowerment against the Congress-state, lead much further in this respect.

While Rajagopal terms in this context democratising what I have so far tried to elaborate as de-ideologising (and, within the transnational context, de-westernisation), the previous chapters have attempted at showing various forms of interaction between the Sangh Parivar and transnational and commercial television and the press in the actual situation as well as in historical perspective, and within the mode of de-ideologising as well as – which is equally important – outside it. They range from calculated legal measures, threats, blackmailing and open attack, the partiality of government, and the intersection of the news media with cadres and sympathisers via the skilful organisation of a discourse of defense, the susceptibility of the elite to demands for anti-elitism, and the common pursuit of numbers to the appropriation of terminology (like secularism, scientific evidence, and democracy) and the visual sphere, the visualisation of the media, and the participatory effect of commercialisation, the combination of which tends to work towards the de-politicisation that I consider to lie at the heart of the Sangh Parivar's and Hindutva's endeavour.

Particularly the section on the invention of Aaj Tak's 'neutral journalism' and the latest developments in the news business towards personalised stories, subjective judgement, and active participation in reporting (see 7.2.) has already indicated that the de-ideologising which commercialisation fosters does not merely encompass a de-westernisation of the medium (of television) and a de-ideologising of the message (in the sense of an openness towards its contents and its interpretation) but also a de-ideologising of the image itself. By this I do not in the strict sense mean the frame that appears on screen but a change in the particular way in which it relates to and interacts with the viewers. The commercial image, as I call it here, which has its obvious roots in advertising, has a de-ideologising effect with regard to its counterpart, the educational image, by addressing and empowering not only the viewers' interest in participation, choice and judgement but also their sensuality and (hitherto) private feelings, dreams and affairs. It is as such an expression of privatisation, in an economic, political and social sense, itself. By defying the normative and the pedagogical, denying explanation and contextualisation (and enhancing the impact of visibility), the commercial image mythologises and naturalises its product, which is not claiming to *represent* an outer

reality but to *project* an option. While this mode of the commercial image slowly seems to develop its impact on news television in India as well (even though the news, as seen, have still other ways of enhancing participation than fiction has), the interplay between Hindutva and its 'visual regime' and commercialising television has, as the previous section has indicated, a particular history in the development of entertainment television, which – with the prominent role that Doordarshan's screening of the two Hindu epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* between 1987 and 1990 plays in it – does not coincidentally form the focus of all analysis in this regard so far.

I will in this last chapter try to show that the genealogy of the commercial image was tied – within the broader range of topics mentioned above – not merely to a 'rise' of Hindutva in a straight sense, but to the frequent re-inventions of the movement and was thus intrinsically predicated upon the economic development itself. I will in this context, with regard to the lost general elections in 2004 and the subsequent crisis of the Sangh Parivar, arrive at a similar conclusion like Datta who sees Hindutva as being ultimately unable to reconcile its projection of a collective and unified community with the individualisation that its own commercialisation (and inner diversification) generates. I will, however, slightly expand this point. Rajagopal has for the beginning of the 1990s concluded "the reconfiguration of politics following the institution of a new mode of communication, specifically, television"⁶⁵⁶, which gets verified, insofar as it is related to commercial television, from the observable tendency that political parties, quite independent from their basic ideology, occupy topics and causes that they will under different preconditions (if they change from government into opposition or vice versa) vehemently battle or ignore, much like commercial television has no quarrels putting on a programme that fundamentally contrasts an earlier one, if that did not meet with response from the audiences. The analogies between the hunt for votes in (commercialised) politics and the hunt for TRPs in commercial television are obvious, and they accounted particularly for the BJP and its endeavour to de-ideologise *itself* (not only with regard to the Congress-state but increasingly also from too close associations with active and violent Hindutva) and to become 'like any other party'.

While I thus basically subscribe to Rajagopal's finding, I suggest that the analogies go even a step further. Commercial television, and particularly entertainment television, is not only inherently 'irresponsible' in the sense of being basically disinterested in the audiences' 'real' well-being as well as being indifferent to the fates and values, such as democracy, of political

⁶⁵⁶ Rajagopal, 2001, p. 277.

parties, which is one of the main reasons why commercial media and non-democratic regimes or parties are not necessarily opponents but may well feed upon each other. Commercial television, while naturalising its projected state, also entails a basically circular, self-referential movement of putting up, often in a spectacular manner, an Other in order to retain and enhance the Self. The sex-scandal (which in the Indian context became for the first time a salient topic with the unfolding format of the soap opera – see below) is the most blatant example where the wilful projection of a danger (to the decency, morals, and ‘health’ of society) legitimises the call for its elimination. In the same way did Hindutva not merely project a naturalised ideal of Hindu unity but was at the same time dependent upon creating powerful Others in order to legitimise its violent action against them.

However, there are, as Datta’s thesis indicates, also limits to the analogies. Commercial television, being basically a non-ideological product that anticipates and thus subverts subversive readings, does not mind if its projections – that are usually imbued with naturalised ideologies – provoke diverse interpretations and even protest. On the contrary, controversy generally, not always, stimulates business and is one of the underlying motivations to create moral panic in the first place. Moreover does commercial television ultimately remain predicated on the image, i.e. its promise to deliver lies on the level of the image itself and nothing else. A political party, by contrast, and maybe especially one with a de-politicising and de-ideologising ideology, remains in one way or the other tied not only to its ideology in the sense that it wants to avoid controversy over its policies and actions as well as over its very premises as a party. It also cannot get rid of its responsibility to deliver upon its promises ‘in reality’. It can ultimately not, in a democracy, escape the logic of representation and recede into mere projection. In the case of the national BJP the projected image in its 2004-election campaign was one of a de-politicised, culturally and economically ‘Shining India’, i.e. it relied - in contrast to Narendra Modi in Gujarat who had started to foreground a primacy of economic delivery (see 8.2.) - on the mere power of the image that was, however, not met with the ‘felt’ reality of the voters. Privatised economics became here, even if in the most precarious way, the guarantor of political democracy.

8.1. *De-Ideologising the Image: The Educational and the Commercial*

As the previous chapter has illustrated, the Hindu nationalist aesthetics and the creation of a Hindu nationalist symbolic capital or visual regime, that have since the 1980s evolved within the context of the Ramjanmabhoomi and Hindutva Movement, have on various levels translated into television. This symbolic capital and its commercial dissemination, that was particularly pursued by the VHP and, initially, by the BJP, was, however, essential not only in de-ideologising and naturalising Hindu nationalism within and against the secular nation-state (and developmental politics) but also in de-ideologising Hindu nationalism itself in the sense of giving it a new image that was capable of attracting a majority and that directly interacted with the development of commercialisation in Doordarshan and successively in the private and transnational channels of creating a majoritarian viewership.

The RSS, the core organisation of the later expanding Sangh Parivar, had proven not to be able to generate such a majority. It betrays its roots in modern nationalism though its promotion of a disciplinarian, in its brahminical outlook hardly concealed, but largely anti-religious conduct, which had been shaped particularly by Madhav Sadashiv Gowalkar, the RSS' second 'sarsanghchalak' (supreme organiser – 1940-1973) and which was expected in a top-down approach to “gradually transform Hindu society.”⁶⁵⁷



RSS Headquarters in Nagpur, Maharashtra: to the right the (clearly VHP-influenced) memorial of Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS (in 1925), in the foreground young boys in uniforms during training (RSS-information leaflet, 2004)

Like the Nehruvian state had amongst the middle classes increasingly the standing of claiming an elitist, authoritative and non-democratic developmental ideology, traditional Hindu nationalism had thus amongst lower castes, Dalits and minorities (i.e. the majority of the population) the reputation of not only being anti-minority but of basically serving the

⁶⁵⁷ Kanungo, 2002, p. 52.

interests of the upper castes and thus of representing an elitist and hierarchical ideological order. The first attempt of shedding this image on the parliamentary level – through the 1951-founded Jana Sangh – was hardly successful, and it is interesting to note that L.K. Advani, on the eve of founding the BJP in 1980, pointed out that “in India a party based on ideology can at the most come to power in a small area. It cannot win the confidence of the *entire country* – neither the Communist Party nor the Jan Sangh in its original form.”⁶⁵⁸

While the RSS – maybe more than Nehru - had for long classified “what may be called the superstitious, obscurantist and non-rational beliefs and practises within Hinduism as bordering on the abhorrent”⁶⁵⁹, it was the ‘discovery’ of Hinduism through the VHP and the BJP that was to symbolise the end of open ideology’s restrictive effects. The commercialisation and accessibility of Hindu signs and symbols from the 1980s onward had a direct anti-elitist and anti-exclusive (and in many respects already post-parliamentarian/post-representative) objective - and effect - that connected itself successively to similar moves in Doordarshan and later in private and transnational television, but that has in a reciprocal process also substantially changed this symbolic capital itself. This development in particular points towards a growing self-referentiality of the Hindutva movement – rather than a ‘real’ abandoning of authoritarian claims - that links it to the self-referentiality of the commercial (anti-educational and post-representative) image, which tells about – and mythologises – the product it presents and tries to sell rather than the ‘real’ people out to consume it and which fosters emotional and participant involvement as much as subjective judgement.⁶⁶⁰

The moment where this process within the Hindutva movement was directly linked with the development in television was the screening of the Hindu epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* on Doordarshan, starting in 1987. I have in chapter 4 already argued against Rajagopal’s suggestion that television was ‘invented’ in course of this broadcast. In a similar vein, he also sees television as a medium that has – in its interaction with the viewers - basic and unchanging characteristics: “Television’s influence has, then, to be presumed rather than discovered, *contra* media effects research, as the backdrop, stage and vehicle of social interaction.”⁶⁶¹ It was, however, just the screening of the mythologicals, in whose form the epics were screened, which fundamentally changed television’s interaction with the viewers

⁶⁵⁸ Quoted from Noorani, 2000, p. 58 (italics in the original).

⁶⁵⁹ Bhatt, 2001, p. 179. See Tapan Basu/Pradip Datta/Sumit Sarkar/Tanika Sarkar/Sambuddha Sen, 1993, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags. A Critique of the Hindu Right*, New Delhi: Orient Longman (Tracts for the Times 1).

⁶⁶⁰ See Ron Beasley/Marcel Danesi, 2002, *Persuasive Signs. The Semiotics of Advertising*, Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, pp. 30-31 and 73-77.

⁶⁶¹ Rajagopal, 2001, p. 24.

and which paved the ground for the entry of private television and its commercial logic. Precisely by releasing the medium from the ‘stage’ or ‘the background’ it had so far occupied in Doordarshan’s definition, television, it could be said, came for the first time *off* stage and illuminated itself *before* its rather monotonous and imagophobic background by – with the full employment of then latest video technology – kindling a spectacular visual fireworks that ‘preached’ no more from the elevated and authoritative educational position of the state, but communicated on the sensual, personal, and thus also private level. Doordarshan thus, for the sake of reaching out to audiences, to increase its revenues and to *retain* its doomed monopoly, became more privatised in a structural and economic sense, as the epics were, like other programming before, produced by private production houses (which in this case were situated in the Hindu film industry). At the same time, while the somewhat monotheistic ring of the state’s ‘preaching’ was toned down, what had been declared to be ‘private’ before, namely (Hindu) religion, received a public and already commercialised valorisation to a hitherto unprecedented degree.



Doordarshan newsreader (National Programme) 1996



From the *Ramayan* (Doordarshan National Programme 1987-1988): Ram receives ‘divine weapons’ from the sage Maharishi Agastya

With the epics was thus introduced, well before the transnational channels arrived on the scene, the change from what can be called the educational image towards the commercial image, implied in which was the transition from social realism towards imaginative realism (that the soap operas *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* would take further from 1991 onward). While the educational (inherently normative and enlightenment-based) image claims responsibility for its recipients and the representation of their interests and social reality, the commercial and ontological, self-referential image does not carry a pre-defined message but connects to the reality of viewers’ imagination and proposes an option that is

sold as enabling free choice but rejects responsibility for its consequences. It was also at this point of the merger between the religious and the commercial that it became difficult to argue that television acquired Hindutva ideology. Rather did ideology leave the picture. As Romila Thapar, former Prasar Bharati-Board member, remarked: “When asked if they [the decision-makers in Doordarshan, B.O.] didn’t see the political dimension behind this [the decision to screen the epics], they would say: ‘Who cares?’ The contribution to a political agenda was set aside as the money-spinning factor gained precedence.”⁶⁶² The screening of the epics (in the form of televised mythologicals) thus anticipated the intrinsic relation between profit and de-ideologising that later increasingly guided Murdoch’s agency in India (see chapter 3) and as the very outcome of which the K-formula can be seen (see 8.2.).

While a public that had already been exposed to a few years of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement was feeding into the unprecedented number of the mythologicals’ viewers (which was over years about 90% of those who had then access to a TV set)⁶⁶³, the visual capital of the televised epics became itself a stepping-stone for the further campaigning particularly of the VHP and the BJP. In 1984 the just institutionalised Dharam Sansad had “resolved to ‘liberate’ the Ramjanmabhoomi”⁶⁶⁴ from ‘Muslim occupation’ and the nascent movement had with the founding of the Bajrang Dal (Bajrang – bachelor – referring to the unmarried status of the monkey-god Hanuman, Ram’s faithful servant and protector) in the same year taken a clear step towards its militarisation, which went along with what Hansen has called the “kshatriyaisation” of the Sangh Parivar⁶⁶⁵, i.e. the motion from the idealisation of brahminical practise towards endorsing and promoting the able-bodiedness of the aristocratic warrior caste. In 1990, a few months after the broadcast of the *Mahabharat* ended, then BJP Party President L.K. Advani embarked on his infamous ‘rath yatra’ that was to lead (before he was arrested in Bihar by the Janata Dal-state government) over 10 000 km from the re-built Somnath-temple in Gujarat to Ram’s proposed birthplace in Ayodhya in a converted Toyota van. The van was directly modelled upon the chariot used by the warrior Arjuna in the televised *Mahabharat*, while the display of large paintings of Ram and the proposed mandir in Ayodhya was accompanied by the soundtrack of the two broadcast epics.

⁶⁶² Interview I/36.

⁶⁶³ The near-total audience-response included, as was often emphasised, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Purnima Mankekar, however, has shown that Sikhs and Muslims, while many liked the attractive visualisation, felt uneasy or helpless at the massiveness of a stated representation that included and excluded them at the same time (Mankekar, 2002, “Epic Contests. Television and Religious Identity in India”, in: Ginsburg et al, p. 139-142).

⁶⁶⁴ Manjari Katju, 2003, *Vishva Hindu Parishad and Indian Politics*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, p. 45.

⁶⁶⁵ Hansen, 1999, p. 107.



Viewers of the *Ramayan* in an electronics shop (from the internationally marketed *Ramayan* edition, 1989); L.K. Advani (second from left) on the 'chariot' during the 'rath yatra' in 1990; cheering participants (archive material aired on Star News/NDTV in 2002, below the loop with the current stock exchange rates)

The 'rath yatra' was centrally embedded in the VHP's and the BJP's larger project of organising and mythologising an ontological and basically a-historical Hindu unity ('sangathan') as the precondition of the 'Hindu Rashtra'. Constructed as having to be strong against 'outside' enemies (Islam, Christianity and 'pseudo-secularism') and thus united within, it rested on the twofold participation through violent action and the accessibility and consumption of its proposed practises and symbols – and profited directly from fears of disintegration under the looming impact of profound economic reforms at the beginning of the 1990s. Through an ostentatiously integrative emphasis of generally common but often altered or re-invented rituals and performances (like the 'Ram shila puja' or the 'rath yatra' itself)⁶⁶⁶ and the organised availability of signs and effigies (like little statues, the Om-Sign, the Swastika, the lotus, the saffron flag, and, lately, the trishul⁶⁶⁷) an anti-elitism and equality of Hinduism was suggested that was aimed at fading out caste barriers and at "welcoming back all who had gone out of the Hindu fold."⁶⁶⁸ The latter proposition addressed explicitly those otherwise constituting the 'enemies', i.e. those "belonging to the communist or the Congress culture"⁶⁶⁹ and particularly the Indian Muslims, who are categorised as forcefully converted and as living in denial of their 'true (Hindu) self', thus becoming, when insisting on

⁶⁶⁶ The Ram shila puja is a prayer-ritual invented to publicly bless the columns of the Ram mandir to-be, while the rath yatra was taking up on the traditional procession performed each year at the temple of Lord Jagannath, an incarnation of Krishna, in Puri, Orissa, during which the deity – together with his sister and brother – is transported on massive carts along the main road.

⁶⁶⁷ The trishul, while employed for the Ram temple-cause as a sign of militarist determination, has actually nothing to do with Ram but is one of the salient emblems of Lord Shiva.

⁶⁶⁸ VHP-pamphlet, quoted in Hansen, 1999, p. 101.

⁶⁶⁹ Giriraj Kishore, senior vice president, VHP, recalling the 'ekatmata yagna yatra' (procession of sacrifice to unity) in 1983, the first monumental yatra-campaign of the VHP that was organised on the uniting theme of 'Mother Ganga' (www.vhp.org/englishsite/e.Special_Movements/cEkatmata%20Yatra/ekatmatayatra.htm) and that was a direct reaction to the collective conversion of the village Meenakshipuram (Tamil Nadu), almost all of whose inhabitants were Dalits, to Islam.

their religion – even by mere existence – but obviously even more so when contemporarily converting, traitors and legitimate targets. (At the same time, Muslims who do not openly display their religious affiliations are, basically because of Islam’s capacity to convert, denounced as being ‘not trustworthy’ – ‘Muslims can’t be trusted’ – thus in any case keeping the necessary Other alive.)⁶⁷⁰

The organised dissemination and multiplication of Hindu symbolism used increasingly the means of commercialisation in the form of stickers, buttons, posters, potted Ganges water, tokens for the participation in performances etc. It created what Rajagopal has called a “Retail Hindutva”⁶⁷¹ and Bhatt has termed as the VHP’s “branding strategy of Hinduism”⁶⁷² that successively turned a re-invented symbolic Hinduism into an organised service industry rather than an exclusivist and hierarchical social system and a troublesome and laborious way towards attaining ‘moksha’ (liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth). While in the context of this organised commercialisation it was less that mythic objects were disseminated than that they were themselves mythologised, Hinduism became at the same time potentially available to everybody who was willing and able to pay for it. Emptying in an entrepreneurial spirit the symbols and rituals of their (former) meaning essentially marked their transformation into commercial imagery as it entailed their availability independent of caste, sect and community (whilst introducing their availability dependent on financial means) and the myth of their encompassing validity, inscribed in which was a motion of instant upward mobility (rather than educational ‘upliftment’).

This myth and the inherent instigation of upward mobility in a crisis-ridden privatising context already indicates that the commercialised rituals and symbols were confined to a selection of practises and deities that carefully avoided ‘real’ lower caste, Dalit or Adivasi reference. While the VHP consciously cultivated spiritual, ‘bhakti’-oriented performances, which also played an important role in the televised *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* (in the form of ‘Ram bhakti’ and ‘Krishna bhakti’)⁶⁷³ and employed Gandhian motifs (such as the ‘satyagraha’), it has never, as Bhatt points out, “undertaken a *yatra* that has brought the world-views, animist beliefs, deities, and secular or religious practices of tribal or ‘untouchable’ people to ‘upper’ caste neighbourhoods and insisted that brahmins adopt these

⁶⁷⁰ Even though the caste system has transferred into Indian Islam and there are Muslim Dalits as much as Muslim Brahmins, its impact is less pronounced than in Hindu society, thus representing particularly for Hindu lower castes and Dalits an option of at least minimising their being discriminated.

⁶⁷¹ Rajagopal, p. 64.

⁶⁷² Bhatt, p. 189.

⁶⁷³ Mankekar, 2000, pp. 199-204. See Bhatt, *The VHP and Bhakti*, in: *ibid*, pp. 190-194.

in place of their own religions.”⁶⁷⁴ Rajagopal detects in this strategy “the cultural façade of Hindu society attempting to ‘liberalise’ without directly confronting the illiberal ordering of caste. The commodification of ritual objects potentially rendered them more open and available to appropriation by diverse caste groups, while at the same time, upper-caste retention of the means of cultural production led to new inscriptions of erstwhile hierarchies.”⁶⁷⁵ This pattern is expressed in the actual mismatch – even though at first sight often not discernable – between quality and quantity, or between form and content, in the public display of religious symbolism: while the variety seems at first overwhelming, it turns out at closer inspection to be always the same signs and deities in different packaging rather than actual plurality.

The strategy of mythologising an a-historical and encompassing cultural identity, which was employing the enforced patterns of neo-liberalist economics and directly countered the political, legal and immanently historical moves towards caste-based reservation systems (like the Mandal Report) and the growing presence of lower castes in the representative system of parliamentary politics, had a direct equivalent in the televised mythologicals. Particularly Doordarshan’s *Ramayan* was in its lavish visualisation, whilst sidelining the many lower-caste, oral and regional versions of the epic, largely based on the upper-caste Sanskrit interpretation of the poet Valmiki. It was thus also shifting the mythologising from the actual religious content onto the social level in the sense that it naturalised and projected as an aspirational norm the imagined value system of the upper castes and the symbols of wealth of the upper classes (which is typical of the classical, melodramatic soap opera).



Left: at the court of King Dashrath of Ayodhya: Dashrath (left) with the sage Vishwamitra and his three wives Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra; middle: Kausalya (Ram’s mother) and Kaikeyi (Bharat’s mother) in joyful anticipation of their status as mothers-in-law; right: the ideal couple, Ram and Sita, at their wedding.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 188.

⁶⁷⁵ Rajagopal, p. 67.

Roland Barthes, who has defined “myths [as] work[ing] to naturalize history”⁶⁷⁶ has in the context of increasingly mass mediated mid-20th century Europe spoken of a “phenomenon of ex-nominating”, which essentially meant the ideological disguise of the bourgeoisie: “As an ideological fact, it completely disappears: the bourgeoisie has obliterated its name in passing from reality to representation, from economic man to mental man. It comes to an agreement with the facts, but does not compromise about values, it makes its status quo undergo a real *ex-nominating* operation: the bourgeoisie is defined as *the social class which does not want to be named.*”⁶⁷⁷ The televised mythologicals of late 20th-century India, aimed at a viewership as large as possible, had the same effect as they resonated with the moment of capitalism’s unrestrained unfolding at a time of national economic crisis and the naturalisation and ex-nomination of the new middle classes’ economic aspirations and evolving moral disposition. The myth(ological) became here in the most literal sense an agent of naturalising history and of mythologising a new reality.

The vast employment of religious ritual and symbolism by VHP and BJP, the permanence of the Ram-topic and the spectacularisation of the performance since the 1980s made it, much to the advantage of the Sangh Parivar, increasingly difficult to distinguish between Hinduism and Hindu nationalism and generated substantial active participation (not least in elections). The same factors, however, carried rather early on the dangers of inflation, monotony, repetitiveness and thus deflation. Moreover, they risked a ‘real’ de-ideologising of Hindutva in the sense that its basic ideological and political aims threatened to vanish behind an ubiquity and random accessibility of its mythologised signs so that it became irrelevant if one was a Hindutva-sympathiser or not when adhering to them. Rajagopal has observed a first fatigue of the movement’s appeal already towards the end of the 1980s, when the BJP won for the first time a substantial amount of seats in the general elections. The screening of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* provided, as described above, also an invaluable vehicle for its revitalisation and its transfer into a second stage. After 1990, the movement actually for the first time used the term ‘Hindutva’⁶⁷⁸ openly and generated an unmitigated mobilisation of symbolism as much as of violence, which quickly culminated in the destruction of the Babri

⁶⁷⁶ Fiske on Barthes, in: Fiske, 1987, p. 134.

⁶⁷⁷ Barthes, 1972, p. 138 (italics in the original).

⁶⁷⁸ ‘Hindutva’ is a term which was in the 1920s coined by Vinayak Damodar (‘Veer’ – ‘brave’) Savarkar (1883-1966), leader of the Hindu Mahasabha. Because the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi, Nathuram Godse, is widely believed to have been a protégé of Savarkar, the term fell out of favour particularly with the Jana Sangh, the predecessor of the BJP, which had been keen to adhere to the principles of Gandhian socialism in the context of parliamentary politics.

Masjid in 1992 and which also, in its increasingly anti-parliamentarian outlook, carried the BJP to greater success in the 1996 mid-term elections but at the same time started to threaten its growing interest to establish itself within parliamentary politics (see 8.3.2). The dependency on the dynamism of recurring mobilisation spells the logic of a movement that has released itself from a stable and programmatic stand (as the RSS is largely still representing it) and that needs to stage and legitimise – and thus to re-invent itself – frequently, which prominently involves the organisation of riots as well as, as we have seen in Gujarat, the latest available form of media dissemination (in this case the Internet, digital cameras and mobile phones).

8.2. *Closing the Circle: From the Mythological to the K-formula*

Maybe it is this obvious necessity of frequent self-reinvention, which contributes to the equally frequent impression that the respective last stage or, as Hansen has called it, “wave” was also the last and that now the zenith of the Hindu nationalist appeal has been transgressed.

Whilst otherwise following very different approaches, Hansen and Rajagopal, for instance, come in their analyses of the late 1980s to middle of the 1990s to the similar conclusion that Hindutva will sooner or later wear out its symbolic and mobilising capital. Rajagopal proposes in this context a settling of Hindu nationalist themes in the wider public: “Given the inability of a political consensus to form itself in the contemporary context, and the presence of interests too varied and too far apart to be bridged given the prevailing social forces, the excess mobilised by the BJP finds its way into civil society, to reside as a more thickly culturalized presence.”⁶⁷⁹ While this assessment seems to exclude further excess – on the very basis of this more thickly culturalised presence – Hansen argues that “the Hindu nationalist movement, arguably the most authoritarian movement ever in power in the country, has come to power at a time when the prospects for actually imposing cultural homogeneity, political unity, and uniform governance on the country as a whole have never been bleaker.”⁶⁸⁰ Neither of these two accounts seems to have reckoned the possibility of a third stage – notably with

⁶⁷⁹ Rajagopal, 2001, p. 281.

⁶⁸⁰ Hansen, 1999, p. 237.

the BJP in power – that was even more totalised in its religious symbolism (the Indian Express aptly spoke of a “Vedic Disneyland”⁶⁸¹) and in organising the violence and that catapulted the BJP into power in three states in 2003. Nevertheless were there also in India itself in course of the Gujarat pogrom, probably because a further intensification bordered the non-imaginable, similar interpretations that this was “Hindutva’s last battle”⁶⁸², and after the lost general elections in 2004 the conviction that “they have been so thoroughly rejected by our people that they will never be able to raise their heads again.”⁶⁸³ What seems to have established itself is an interpretational pattern that equals each culmination with the end of a (supposedly final) transformation phase, while Hindu nationalism itself appears to keep on developing.

While, however, each of these transformations of Hindutva had its own quality, and at the same time followed a pattern of gradation, Gujarat seems to have marked indeed a twofold important shift. For one, in course of increasing decentralisation pursued by the Sangh Parivar itself, the thrust of the movement, that had been from a centre towards the regions, seems to have reversed, with the regions becoming, if successful, the forerunners that may form a new and more assorted Hindu nationalism that could, again, be a step ahead of opposition parties and the Congress.⁶⁸⁴ Secondly, Narendra Modi relied much less on religious symbolism in the way the VHP was proposing it – his post-Gujarat yatras were based on concepts such as ‘gaurav’ (honour) rather than referring to deities (and very rarely to Ram) – and most prominently introduced the topic of organised and capitalised economic ascension (at the cost of the (visibility of) the poor, the lower castes and the minorities). This indicates a more serious deflation of spectacularised symbolism and the replacement of a mythologised Hindu sangathan through the mentioned moral majority (see 5.3.2. and Conclusion) that also relies less on conventional representative media.

Insofar as particularly the first transformation of national Hindutva after 1990 has closely interacted with commercialising television and its own needs to mobilise viewership, there could indeed be observed something like the closing of a circle with the emergence of Star Plus’ K-formula and the latest (and last?) grand Ayodhya-mobilisation through the VHP from 2001 onwards that also coincided with the moment at which the process of re-inventing television (and an image of the nation) in India was winding up. Whilst both came up in a

⁶⁸¹ *The Indian Express*, April 21, 2003: Taking the cake. The increasingly bizarre symbols of Indian politics.

⁶⁸² Javed Akhtar in *The Big Fight*, March 09, 2002.

⁶⁸³ Swami Agnivesh in a panel discussion in Frankfurt/Germany, October 05, 2006.

⁶⁸⁴ See in this context Zoya Hasan, 2004, The New Power Centres, in: *Frontline*, April 10.

situation of economic crisis, the materialisation of the K-formula at the turn of the century marked a gradation from the situation of Doordarshan in the late 1980s, when it started to broadcast the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*.

After the screenings of the epics, there developed in course of the 1990s under the impression of economic recovery, the closely succeeding entry of Star TV and its then American programming as well as under a fuelled spirit to experiment with the new options of the medium a (in its proposed reach national) representation that combined follow-up mythologicals or religious symbols and practises with secular (and partly instantly Americanised) forms and aspects of life, thus indeed displaying the ‘negotiation of identity and culture’ that has inspired much of the writing at the time. There existed a form of represented hybridity and simultaneity that had, as I have elaborated in chapter 4, with varying evaluations of Hindi, English, Hindi-based Hinglish and English-based Hinglish an equivalent in the realm of language and that basically spoke of a search for the unknown viewer after the taken-for-granted national audience under the state-broadcaster (and in which Star Plus cut increasingly a poor figure).⁶⁸⁵ Viewers thus had a continuously swelling amount of programming to choose from, without, however, providing any of the private channels with substantial earnings (whilst Doordarshan, that could rest upon its vast terrestrial network, operated since the broadcasting of the mythologicals increasingly in the profit-making zone). In this situation, the integration of a marketed religious symbolism that had been promoted by the mythologicals and that was increasingly found in the public sphere became on all private channels a synonym for at least approaching profit, especially after from the middle of the 1990s onward Star Plus’ American programming had become increasingly discredited and exposed to moral critique. However, none of the produced programmes before 2000 became a big hit with the audiences (and thus with advertisers). At the same time, as no existing outstanding hit had to be countered, the chances of creating a success were naturally enhanced, resulting at the turn of the century in an increasingly relentless competition between Sony, Zee TV and the ‘outsider’ Star Plus. It was the latter who, out of its disadvantaged position and under the mounting pressure to Indianise itself as much as possible, took the biggest chance.

Like Doordarshan had taken the decision for the mythologicals under the acute pressure to retain its position and the calculation to increase its revenues (which worked very well as the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* raised the highest advertising revenues up until then), Star

⁶⁸⁵ See Ien Ang, 1991, *Desperately Searching the Audience*, London/New York: Routledge.

Plus, which Murdoch had increasing difficulties to hold in the Indian market, was driven by the despair not to lose its position (and its jobs). Seeing that it could not compete with the (anyway only generally accepted) programming of Zee TV and Sony, and disabled by Murdoch to stand out with programming based on social realism, the only chance to get anywhere was to stand out with something unprecedented. Doordarshan, however, could in the late 1980s create a spectacular effect by just inserting itself into a discourse that had already gained some prominence through the public activities of the Sangh Parivar (as well as through a growing ‘soft Hindutva’ approach of the Congress) – thus also creating the impression that it was finally ‘connecting’ to its viewers. Star Plus, by contrast, as these possibilities were already somewhat used up and taken further by the competition, involuntarily had for the same effect to invent something that at the same time had to generate the impression that it was just what viewers had missed. Moreover, the rather suddenly emerged option to go ‘all Hindi’, which became the basic ideology for the channel, and the missed opportunity of carrying out more in-depth audience research (see 4.2.) necessitated the setting up of a completely new programming schedule in virtually no time. With the back thus against the wall, Star Plus’ Head of Content brought on air in mid-2000, against all assessments in the industry (which argued that “Indians don’t like game shows”⁶⁸⁶), the Hindi version of the internationally famed game show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, named *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, in a package with *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* five days a week at prime time (between 9 pm and 11 pm) – and scored a sensational success, that immediately recalled the time of the mythologicals’ screening: “It almost was like during the times of the *Ramayan*. We brought people back to TV! And this time in a highly competitive TV-environment!”⁶⁸⁷ Even the way this triumph came about internally was reminiscent of Doordarshan’s letting all doubts go 13 years before. Had Doordarshan officials answered with a ‘Who cares?’ to political scepticism and alarm, Star Plus’ Head of Content, after *KBC* had already taken off, was under immediate pressure to fill the schedule with matching programming (“*KBC* is from 9 to 10. But what do you do with the rest of the time?”⁶⁸⁸) and very quickly accepted Balaji Telefilms’ proposal for *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* virtually behind his colleagues’ back, from whom he feared ‘sensible arguments’: “With *KBC* I’m going to blow this place apart, and after I do *KBC* I want to get everybody and his uncle and his aunt and his nephew and his servant and his everybody else into sitting transfixed in front of a tube. And I’m not going to

⁶⁸⁶ Interview I/15.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

lose them once I get them. And I'm not going to lose them on a sensibility issue now. Nothing like 'Oh, you know, but they're wearing so much jewellery and mangalsutras and expensive saris, and then when she walks into the room there is slow motion, and the tears are dropping ... Hey man, this is real archaic nonsense, we can't do this.' [...] I didn't want any input from Star, I didn't want any sensibility crap to go on here now, I just wanted it put on air."⁶⁸⁹

This 'insensible' decision came at a time when, like towards the end of the 1980s, the symbolic capital of the VHP was again somewhat exhausted, having long used up the boost it had received through the televised epics and the destruction of the Babri Masjid, while the BJP had anyway the priority of settling itself in government. It is thus at least not unlikely – even though direct connections are far less obvious than in the case of the *Ramayan*, the *Mahabharat* and Advani's 'rath yatra' – that the opulent depiction of Hindu families busy with religious ritual and greeting each other with 'Jai Shri Krishna' that received at the time ecstatic responses from viewers fed into the re-animation of the Hindu symbolic capital with the VHP's Ayodhya-campaign from 2001 onwards. On the other hand did the soaps – with the famous game show as the forerunner – employ this symbolic capital by actually corresponding with and integrating the very inflation of this capital in the public sphere. Despite its opulent and ostentatious display in the soaps, the Hindu symbolic capital was neither spectacular – as it still had been in the mythologicals - nor any more *illustrating* or *indexing* 'Indian' (Hindu) identity – as it had largely been in the various serials during the 1990s in combination and negotiation with 'Western' insignia. Instead, by actually becoming removed from the field of discourse and negotiation, this capital became set as an ontological fact but therewith also as a mere backdrop. These families *were* (upper caste) Hindu (and *spoke* (Hindustani) Hindi) without this being exposed to any questioning or alternative signs while the pompous symbolism was relegated to being an eye-catcher (and an index of wealth as much as of religion) that could even run counter to the storyline. On the one hand, thus, exclusively Hindu, upper-caste, wealthy life became, precisely through its de-spectacularisation, as naturalised as it had hardly ever been before on screen, and how quickly accepted this affluent Hindu-ness was became tangible from the fact that the considerable criticism that the soaps provoked, in the English-language press as much as from viewers, was never related to this naturalised symbolic capital. The broad indifference towards the Gujarat pogrom should be seen in this context as well (see 6.1.). On the other hand entailed this de-spectacularisation also the option of actually transcending the Hindu symbolic capital,

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

which did, however, presuppose that one did indeed not take these soaps too seriously (see 8.3.2.).

A significant change from earlier approaches represented also the form, in which *KBC* and the K-soaps related to the audiences. Doordarshan's epics, whilst reviving the traditional film genre of the mythological, had captivated the viewers through the employment of new visual technology and the valorisation and re-animation of an increasingly prominent Hindu discourse. The serials and shows during the 1990s, on the other hand, had, characterised through search movements, tried to interact and to represent viewers' (earlier unattended) demands and interests. The K-formula, however, can be seen as marking the transition from what Ien Ang has described as the, more based in the European broadcasting tradition, principle of "serving the audience" (which was rather short-termed in the Indian context) towards the more US-based maxim of "marketing the audience".⁶⁹⁰ In contrast to the productions of the 1990s, which had tried to anticipate the audiences' priorities and were loosely guided by the idea of social realism, *KBC* was the Indian prototype of manufactured success in the sense that a US-American producer of game shows has expressed it: "Good ideas create the public mood, not anticipate it. [...] The formula comes first; then we see if the public goes along with it."⁶⁹¹ *KBC* was in exactly this way presented to an audience, which had shown no demand for anything like it, in order to bring in a new form of television: "*KBC* was not a need gap, there was no need for a *KBC*, nobody wanted a *KBC*. *KBC* was pure strategy, we never conducted any research for it particularly, and nothing in our interaction record suggested that they wanted *KBC*, nothing, zero. [...] We got again such strange undercurrent reactions to this before, like 'This is Rupert. This is Rupert Murdoch behaviour, coming in and trying to buy us. Do you think our honour is for sale?' [...] *KBC* was about ,We want to change your thinking', complete paradigm shift."⁶⁹²

Whilst the K-formula as a whole (together with the 24 hour news modus of 'neutral journalism' which Aaj Tak was bringing in at the same time) can thus be seen as representing the point at which the endeavour to re-invent television in India came at least to a temporary close (and at which Rupert Murdoch's attempts to execute a 'cultural turn' were becoming half-successful and half-irrelevant), it confronted the audiences with something that claimed the power of the factual - and thus enhanced the self-referentiality of the commercial image

⁶⁹⁰ Chapter 2 and 3 in: Ang, 1991.

⁶⁹¹ Thomas A. DeLong, 1991, *Quiz Craze. America's Infatuation with Game Shows*, New York/Westport/London: Praeger, p. 238.

⁶⁹² Star Plus Head of Content, Interview I/15.

that the mythologicals had introduced – and that was able to carry them along. In this context it also marked the transition from the idea of a representation of outer reality, which the 1990s serials had still largely followed, towards the provision of a projection screen that hardly claims to be representative of a social reality, but whose realism is confined to a basic theme and the generation of emotional involvement. It was this qualitative jump from symbol to fact, from negotiation to ontology, and from representation to projection (but thus also towards the banal and insignificant), which at the same time indicated the ultimate nullification of the educational ('preaching') image that made particularly the soaps stand out and rendered their success somewhat 'untouchable'. One could say that, recurring to Rajagopal's metaphor of television as a backdrop and stage, with this transition some circle of visual representation came to a close, as television returned to being a stage and backdrop on another level. Unlike Doordarshan in the 1970s and 80s, which had naturalised itself as the national educator and kept a safe distance between stage and audience, the stage on which the soaps were projected to the audiences, whilst naturalising (an imagination of) wealthy upper caste Hindu life, presented itself as being attainable for everyone.

Insofar, finally, as the K-formula indicated the transition from the earlier discussed (see 3.3.) mode of social realism towards imaginative realism that is predicated upon upward mobility and that *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* had brought forward in India, a related reason for the success both of *KBC* and *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* was that they represented Indian *originals*. They terminated the previous times on television that had always been under the suspicion of ultimately copying and imitating Western patterns, generally through the more or less clear identifiability of Western elements in the depiction, and they – either in its own way – powerfully re-connected television, as the mythologicals had done, to the Hindi film industry. *KBC* featured as the host the most charismatic popular actor, Amitabh Bachchan, that the Hindi film has so far produced (see 8.3.1.) and was at the same time itself the Indian *avatar* of a programme – *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* – that inherently disables the old logic of copying. More than earlier quiz shows does it live of its international adaptability and demands (by licence) that its various versions in different countries were formally not adapted but *identical*, whilst opening – by relying merely on question and answer - unlimited space for local (national) variation in its contents.⁶⁹³ Consequently, it were

⁶⁹³ *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* was created in Britain but rose to success very quickly in the US and successively in over 70 countries. See Amir Hetsroni/Riva H. Tukachinsky, 2003, 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire' in America, Russia, and Saudi Arabia: A Celebration of Differences or a Unified Global Culture?,'

successive game shows that started flooding Zee TV and Sony as soon as *KBC*'s success became palpable and that tried to sell themselves as 'more Indian', which were seen as cheap copies – not least because a concept as basic as question and answer does not quite lend itself to formal cultural adaptation. *KBC* was not an adaptation, it was what it was, and it was its own self. "We pulled out all stops to make it right down to the last nut and bolt and it was perfect. It was *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, I mean, it was not an *attempt* to be *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, it was *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Just as if you remove Chris Tarrant [the host of the English edition] or Regis Philbin [the host of the American edition] and you put Amitabh Bachchan, bingo, everything else is identical."⁶⁹⁴

The K-soaps, on the other hand, stood out as originals insofar as they were not quite 'authentic Indian cultural programming' but as they were the first Indian *soaps*. Nilanjana Gupta has classed the mythologicalised epics as "the first really indigenous television form"⁶⁹⁵, as they were relying on a visualisation of religious narrative that had its roots in India's own early film history. *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* took the legacy of the televised epics a step further. They were "all about the gloss, the look, the feel"⁶⁹⁶ that connected them to contemporary Bollywood and its new, largely digital imagery, while they were at the same time directly taking up narratives and motifs from the televised *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* and for the first time on Indian television re-presented them in "the only form of narrative (with the possible exception of comic strips) predicated upon the impossibility of ultimate closure."⁶⁹⁷ The format of the soap opera, as I have shown in chapter 3, had entered the Indian screens with *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* at a time of acute economic change and insecurity, indicating the new dominance of capitalism and the centrality of a class (and caste)-based society structure. They had been basically accepted by Indian viewers because of the lavish wealth of the represented families and their reliance upon the primordial myths of human civilisation – familial relations and the fight of good against evil – which are generally characteristic of the soap opera genre. But they had been othered not merely in terms of the 'immoral' depiction, but, apparently, also in terms of the format, as all parallel or successive narrative productions on Zee TV and Sony remained confined to the format of the

in: *The Communication Review* 6 (2), pp. 165-178, and Des Freedman, 2003, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? The politics of television exports*, in: *Information, Communication & Society* 6 (1), pp. 24-41.

⁶⁹⁴ Interview I/15.

⁶⁹⁵ Nilanjana Gupta, 1998, *Switching Channels. Ideologies of Television in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 49.

⁶⁹⁶ Executive producer of *Kahaani*, Interview I/19.

⁶⁹⁷ Allen, 2004, p. 251.

‘serial’ that had also dominated Doordarshan’s programming and that entails, even though a serial might run for a long time, a termination of some sort.⁶⁹⁸ Not coincidentally contained of all previous programs the televised *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* the most soap opera elements, yet comes Rajagopal, for instance, to the conclusion that, as the soap-genre is defined in terms of its infinite, open-ended narrative, its everyday and domestic concerns and its female target audience, “none of these features applied to the Sagar⁶⁹⁹ *Ramayan*, strictly speaking. The *Ramayan* was a story with a definite ending [...], it had an epic rather than a mundane subject, and its audience was evenly divided, although there was a larger number of ‘serious’ female viewers.”⁷⁰⁰ *Kyunki* and *Kahaani*, by contrast, were designed as a permanent and open-ended companion of everyday life. In order to target a family- but increasingly a female audience, they translated the melodramatic depiction of the eternal fight of good against evil that dominates the classic American soap of late capitalism into the theme of ‘dharma’ and ‘adharma’ (right and wrong social conduct) that had stood at the centre of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*.

Insofar as the soap opera is predicated upon the instant recognisability of a familiar topic within the larger theme of good and evil, dharma and adharma, in order to evoke the ‘socially convincing sense of the real’, *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* focussed on a most basic yet specific subject that had in this concentration rarely been represented and that the producers knew to concern a large majority of the targeted female viewers of the middle and lower middle class, namely the woman’s coming into the house and/or family of the husband after marriage and her intrinsic dependence on their acceptance. In this context, the soaps introduced as pivotal the relationship between ‘saas’ (mother-in-law) and ‘bahu’ (daughter-in-law) in the joint family next to the primacy of monogamous marriage, which the *Ramayan* had – for the first time on television in this clarity as a Hindu moral code⁷⁰¹ – explicitly advanced and shown as being under constant threat through outside seductions (nonchalantly sidelining king Dashrath’s three wives). The main embodiments of this threat in the mythological were the

⁶⁹⁸ As a ‘middle-format’ between the closed-serial format and the open-ended soap opera format can be classed the telenovela, which has developed in Latin America and which is ‘semi-open’ in the sense that it provides for a finalisation of the story as much as for its continuation. The telenovela-format had been discovered – within the state’s official non-alignment outlook – rather early by Doordarshan, which modelled its first long-running family serial *Hum Log* (We people), 1984-1985, on the format and has over the past few years been increasingly adapted in European television.

⁶⁹⁹ Producer of the *Ramayan*, Ramanand Sagar.

⁷⁰⁰ Rajagopal, p. 92.

⁷⁰¹ Can be seen as a direct repercussion of the Shah Bano-case (1985) and the growing accusations against Muslims of enjoying polygamous marriages protected under the Muslim Personal Law (the rate of polygamy and births is factually not higher amongst Muslims than it is amongst Hindus and only partially relates to Muslim Personal Law – see Ahmad, 2003).

lustful, undomesticated and self-determined woman (who would later re-emerge in form of the Westernised woman), and the barbaric, sexually uncontrolled male, who in the *Ramayan* comes in the person of the ultimate Other, the demon-king Ravan (of Lanka), depicted as the primitive parvenu-ruler over an outlandish-looking army that latently evokes the Muslim.⁷⁰² Both these seductions, moreover, in contrast to the unchangeable and morally flawless self that Ram's family represents, come in the form of a double identity – first approaching in form of the good to then reveal their actual evil face -, stressing the non-trustworthiness of mere appearances.



Left: the female demon Shurpanakha, in her avatar as a princess, proposes marriage to Ram, who politely declines (“I am married”); middle: Shurpanakha, showing her real devious self (her dress pointing to tribal – ‘uncivilised’ - descent), attacks Sita; right: Lakshman (Ram’s younger brother) cuts off Shurpanakha’s nose, ultimately separating the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’ woman.



Left: Lakshman drawing the ‘Lakshman rekha’, the invisible fire circle that surrounds Sita and protects her from intruders (unless she herself transgresses it); middle: Ravan, pursuing to abduct Sita, confesses – after he had first approached her in the avatar of a sadhu – his desire for her; right: Ram single-handedly destroys Ravan’s army.

Kyunki and *Kahaani*, in a way re-incarnations of the previous doubles of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*, thus profoundly Indianised contents and narrative while moving within a universal theme and partly even depiction of good and evil (the ‘evil’, highly sexed – and physically violent - Alexis Colby against the ‘good’, chaste Krystle Carrington in *Dynasty* (in the US 1981-89), for instance, is basically

⁷⁰² See Rajagopal, 2001, p. 106, and Mankekar, 2000, p. 175.

identical with the formation above between Shurpanakha and Sita). Hence being a hybrid that was, however, in the Indian context clearly an original insofar as Westernisation had here moved from the contents onto the mere level of the increasingly universalised structural format of the melodramatic never-ending story – thus also indicating that India now operated on an equal ‘global level’ - can be seen as one of the reasons for the soaps’ sweeping success (but also for their controversial debate amongst viewers – see 8.3.2.).

This form of a genuine Indian soap, that combined the display of fantastic economic wealth with the struggle for the morally good, resonated, on the one hand, doubtlessly well with the moral, economically defined Hindu majority of Narendra Modi’s emerging Gujarat (where the soaps, not least because *Kyunki* is depicting a Gujarati family, are said to have the highest ratings)⁷⁰³. On the other hand, though, while it paralleled the structural Americanisation that the “Vedic Disneyland” of the VHP’s Ayodhya-campaign and the successive election campaigns of the BJP generated, it also transcended them, and – being ‘real soap’ - ultimately showed the longer breath (see Conclusion).

8.3. *Manufacturing Success: The Tandem of the K-formula*

In order to approach more closely how this interplay between the soaps and the image-based Hindutva movement as well as their disintegration occurred, I will in this last section look at a few of the inner compulsions as well as flexibilities of the soaps, which contains not least their ultimate freedom to be irresponsible, that the demands of the political, at least as far as national Hindu nationalism was concerned, could ultimately not comply with at the time.

But the K-soaps did not only feed upon the above-described merger of Indian visual mythological tradition and the mythical melodrama that is intrinsic part of the soap opera format, altogether enhanced through the mythologising and naturalising power of the commercial image. Insofar as they were also part of the classical tandem of American television – the game show and the soap opera - that had with the K-formula hit the Indian screens, they also closely interacted and were dependent upon the visually at first sight altogether different *KBC*. The game show, after the unruly and ambiguous 1990s, had the

⁷⁰³ Amrita Shah, 2003, The Curse of the K women, in: *Screen*, December 05.

foremost function – with an unprecedented format – to “bring everybody together”⁷⁰⁴ and delivered a number of direct prerequisites, upon which the invention of the Indian soap opera could blossom.

8.3.1. A Crore for ‘Indian Ethnic Knowledge’: From Bachchan-the-Hero to Bachchan-the-Host

There were basically three components which can be said – apart from the above-mentioned formal ones – to have turned *KBC* into a milestone in India’s television history, as far as the response from viewers is concerned. One decisive factor was the choice of Amitabh Bachchan as the host, which instantly connected the show to the glamour and charisma of the Hindi film industry rather than to stuffy TV studios in which strained candidates struggled to win mediocre prizes.

Bachchan “is, arguably, the most recognisable Indian face alive”⁷⁰⁵, yet he was, arguably, at the time of his employment for *KBC* in 2000 also facing the most substantial crisis of his career. The most phenomenal icon that popular Hindi Cinema had yet produced, he then



threatened to sink into the sadness of a “down and out superstar, not really going anywhere”⁷⁰⁶, and in this situation he was almost a metaphor of the condition Star Plus itself was in at the end of the 1990s. Bachchan had been the unmatched hero of the 1970s and early 1980s who represented the ‘angry young man’ and the underdog, fighting injustice on

all fronts without ever fighting the system as such, much rather even embodying it as a whole in its antagonisms. Ranjani Mazumdar has pointed to the unique way in which Bachchan combined the inscriptions of poverty and deprivation on his body and in his livelihood with

Above: Amitabh Bachchan 1975 in *Sholay* (the original is in colour).

⁷⁰⁴ *The Indian Express*, January 10, 2002: ‘KBC brought everybody together’.

⁷⁰⁵ Star Plus Head of Content, Interview I/15.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

“the codes of an upper-class upbringing projected through his gestures and posturing.”⁷⁰⁷ The nobility and composure which he displayed in films like *Zanjeer* (The Chains, 1973), *Deewaar* (The Wall, 1975), *Sholay* (The Embers, 1975) and *Coolie* (1983) and which were well-arranged into violent outbreaks against a deserving enemy, were not equitable to the ascribed dignity of the downtrodden, carrying their fate with calm but defending themselves when unjustly treated. Bachchan was not defending himself, and he was not a political revolutionary either. He had the situation under control, he himself embodied the solution to the problem he detected, and he was walking a tightrope in not belying his proud and self-evident belonging to an outsider caste by his own nonchalant elegance. This very likely crack in his credibility was avoided through “the fantasy of a rise in class status, (...) itself imbued with a desire that remains unfulfilled in the narrative, but [is] strikingly apparent in the images.”⁷⁰⁸

Bachchan thus managed to symbolise the dream of ascension from deep down to highest status within his own projected personality, thereby accounting for the improbability of this to happen as much as for the aspiration staying alive, and also revealing that interpretations which connected his immense popularity to his symbolising simply the fight of the poor against the rich were a fantasy in themselves. The main motif Bachchan obtained was that of the anti-parvenu without being a pariah, of ascension without losing oneself, of already being what one wanted to be, an internalisation that was defying displacement of all kinds which also enabled him to become the first credible urban hero without romanticised roots in the village and one of the few who stood above caste connotations. At the same time, this internalisation rather represented the structures and barriers of the social system – and the fettered dream of overcoming them – and carefully circumvented its deconstruction in order not to destroy that very dream that in turn kept Bachchan’s phenomenal status itself alive. Thus a crack in his credibility would probably only have occurred, had he ever really made that social ascension in any of the plots, or had he been defeated and banned to the realm of the excluded. While he died in many of his films, he was yet never defeated in his cause, instead he maintained the balance between the two extremes of ‘having made it’ and ‘never making it’, transcending them whilst carefully keeping them in place even beyond his physical disappearance.

⁷⁰⁷ Ranjani Mazumdar, “From Subjectification to Schizophrenia: The ‘Angry Man’ and the ‘Psychotic’ Hero of Bombay Cinema”, in: Ravi Vasudevan (ed.), 2000, *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 247.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

It was not only his personal process of ageing that naturally could not forever support the role of the ever-needed 'angry young man'. As he constituted a signifying system in himself that was directly tied to a social reality, Bachchan was also not immune to the latter's systemic changes. Lalit Vachani has noted that towards the middle of the 80s, a period which was characterised by a process of growing liberalisation and commercialisation (under Rajiv Gandhi's Prime Ministership), Bachchan's signifying system started to disintegrate and veer towards a self-referentiality that could no longer maintain its earlier quality of internalising antagonisms.⁷⁰⁹ If self-referentiality, rather than significance, tends to be the characteristic of signs and symbols in a process of commodification, Bachchan's performance and the recognisability of what it stood for became a first victim of this process insofar as Bachchan started to increasingly stand for himself, moving from the status of an idol to that of an icon, and acquiring the means of (often comical) spectacle instead of being able to maintain a cause. In course of the 90s, with market forces 'officially' taking over, he became marginalised as an icon that could not generate dreams and aspirations any more. One might say that Bachchan, deprived of the system he embodied, virtually dissolved and failed to fit in with the new system that temporarily did not so easily allow for an integrated identity. His attempts to simultaneously keep up his cinematic appearance, to lend his face to advertising (for the electronics firm BPL), to engage in event management (with his chronically ailing Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Ltd. that can be seen as a trial to re-invent a personified system on the marketing level) and to venture into politics (as a friend of Rajiv Gandhi for the Congress Party) can be read as testimony to the dissolution of the Bachchan- system which resonates with the evaporation of a representative system that in another (educational) vein also Doordarshan had stood for and to quite an extent also with the fading of the Congress-system as standing for conventional representative parliamentarianism.⁷¹⁰

The re-invention of Amitabh Bachchan in the most unlikely role as the host of a millionaire-quiz show on the small screen has been described as "a filmi drama, the hero returns with a vengeance."⁷¹¹ The improbability of the setting might have been part of the surprise effect (which vengeance also requires), but altogether Bachchan's appearance had nothing of revenge, trying to force himself back into the centre of attention. More like having successfully overcome a terrible midlife-crisis, the Bachchan who presented himself here –

⁷⁰⁹ Lalit Vachani, 1999, "Bachchan-alias: The Many Faces of a Film Icon", in: Brosius/Butcher (eds.), p. 219.

⁷¹⁰ See also "Making H(e)istory", Interview with Amitabh Bachchan, in: *G Magazine*, April 2002.

⁷¹¹ Shiv Visvanathan, 2000, The Crorepati Narratives, in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Aug. 26-Sept. 2 (online edition).

and with him the show – was the re-assembled person on a new level. “Millionaire is the kind of show where you don’t want somebody coming in and cracking jokes. You need some kind of a person, the music and the sets and the lighting is all very dadada [indicates mellowness, B.O.]. So you need somebody with what we call gravitas. So we picked AB [Amitabh Bachchan], after all he is a brand, he has a great voice. [...] After having got him, we built all kinds of theories around him. One theory was that, Mr. Bachchan don’t worry about a thing, you’re gonna become like a messiah, ruling out cash to India. And he loved that. Like, you in your film career you were the angry young man fighting against the establishment, in your TV career you are the wise old man who is saying: Listen, knowledge can bring you wealth.”⁷¹²

Into the re-invention of Bachchan thus went the creation of an image that reunited the various loose ends he had come to dissolve into during the 90s. The new image essentially built upon the old and known, but turned it upside down. Bachchan, who had never portrayed the upwardly mobile but had embodied the futile but necessary dream of just upward mobility in the persona of the underdog, had meanwhile, so to speak behind the audiences’ back, performed the ascension in the social hierarchy and was now addressing them from the upper end in the persona of the understated gentleman with basically the same message: the crore might be out of actual reach, but it might as well be possible for you if you stick to what you know. And I can help you, I’m on your side.



Bachchan 2001 in *KBC* (Star Plus archives)

However, whereas Bachchan had transformed himself, so to speak within his own system and again managed to avoid a crack in his credibility by remaining close to the viewer’s dream,

⁷¹² Interview I/15.

the dream's form and conditions (as much as the audience) had changed and thus also accounted for the possibility of Bachchan's transformation. As the angry-elegant hero, walking the urban space, Bachchan had in his early films contrasted with his surroundings in which wealth represented a symbolic capital represented in architecture, goods, clothing and professional or social position. Just because it was materialised, wealth was thus far more abstract and far less in reach as it was ascribed to real others, to people who belonged to a world oneself could definitely never belong to. The only connection to it provided Bachchan himself who opened that world for (critical) inspection and kept it closed for access at the same time. *KBC*'s crore now, despite coming in the abstract form of money – or rather a virtual number of zeros -, was theoretically far more in reach precisely because it was not yet materialised. It did in itself neither signify class nor status – as a car or a house as a prize would have done -, but the sheer possibility of its materialisation according to one's individual needs and ideas. As the mellow-elegant host, inhabiting the virtual space of a TV studio, Bachchan was now embodying the dissolution of the contrast between wealth and the (unjust) impossibility to reach it.

Thus the second component of *KBC*'s success was that it “made the crore available for the middle class”⁷¹³, which was the first addressee in the ‘nation of numbers’. In this context it was particularly important that the show – as the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* a decade earlier – started to be broadcast at a time of great economic insecurity. The ‘first wave’ of globalisation, which had during the 1990s produced euphoria as much as an increasingly uneven economic development, was ebbing off, particularly with the crash of the New Market and the dotcom-boom in 1999, giving way to acute signs and feelings of crisis. *KBC* was in this situation the programme that ventured television towards the new priority of selling hope and escape, thus connecting it closer to the film industry as much as bringing the motif of the family stronger to the fore: “Up to 1998, we were addressing hope with our programmes, meaning that people had hope anyway. You have to keep in mind that the dotcom-revolution almost overnight brought about professionals who earned up to 70 000 Rps. a month (then around 1800 US\$) and had fathers who had all their lives not made more than 5000 Rps. in government jobs. [...] In 2000, we had to address despair. All the hopes that had gone into the IT-business crashed in 1999, and a whole lot of high aspirants were jobless, had to return from abroad, and here they found the government security collapsing. People were mentally not tuned in to the dynamics of privatisation, and the shame to lose a job is a big factor in

⁷¹³ Star Plus executive, Interview I/08.

India. In 2000, we had a 40% retrenchment of jobs, and whom do you turn to in such a situation? That's where the glorification of the family started, the looking back, the localising, the closing in. When there was hope, the family was scattered, when there came hopelessness, the family became sacrosanct."⁷¹⁴

This specific middle-class oriented depiction of the scenario, however, which somewhat suggests that acute impoverishment was on the cards, leaves out setting it into relation to the larger economic development which showed an overall, even though slow, decline in absolute poverty in 15 major Indian states between 1993 and 2000.⁷¹⁵ The acute insecurity of the middle classes was largely connected to a 'felt descent' that stood in relation only to temporary disappointments about a stuck ascension that had been imagined as unhindered and speedy, to the increasing visibility of big money and fast enrichment, and to the growing demands for access and participation of the lower strata. *KBC*, while ostentatiously re-invoking the family-audience that had dispersed during the 1990s, worked at the junction of this acutely felt danger of social descent and the deepening relative gap between the rich and the poor in the sense described above, cushioning the impending panic of the middle classes to be swallowed by this gap through an extraordinary amount of prize money. It was Rupert Murdoch himself who, immediately understanding the direct condition between the height of the sum and the chance to gain an unprecedented number of viewers, made the suggestion of the crore. "We first thought of a lakh, but Murdoch said: 'Why not a crore?' That was kind of bizarre! A crore! An amount so far unheard of in the reach of the common man. The top prize money so far given away on Indian TV was not more than 40 or 50 000 Rupees!"⁷¹⁶ Money itself, in a near-unimaginable amount, won, significantly, with the help and the handling of the prominently placed computer screen (which is the secret star of the *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*-concept) thus became the spectacular sensation that the display of a Hindu religious narrative with the latest video technology on the state-broadcaster had been 12 years before. Bachchan-the-host, whilst ultimately abandoning the lower class-audience that once had worshipped Bachchan-the-hero, became in this context not only the designed guide of the aspiring middle to lower middle classes, but also a moral authority and the embodiment of possible security that the economic situation lacked, but that also the political situation seemed to require. A Star executive connected feelings of insecurity quite clearly to the

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ K. Sundaram/Suresh D. Tendulkar, 2003, Poverty in India in the 1990s. An Analysis of Changes in 15 Major States, in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 05, pp. 1385-1393.

⁷¹⁶ Star Plus executive, Interview I/15.

absent sense of direction that the BJP-led government, even if subliminally, evoked: “There is no real perspective, no figure like Amitabh Bachchan you can look up to, no-one really to give you a vision to work with. Nobody wants to look up to Vajpayee, he’s some sort of a weird compromise. AB even in *KBC* gave you this idea of leading you, of telling things from the Gita [Bhagavad Gita, B.O.], of representing reliability and guidance.”⁷¹⁷ While the figure of Bachchan-the host can thus, on the one hand, be read as an (incidental) anti-BJP statement, as far as the central government was concerned, it carried on the other hand the subliminal message that ‘if you have right leader you can achieve anything’, which invoked the trope of traditional charismatic leadership that was, however, not any more occupied by the Congress but by figures like Narendra Modi.

That Bachchan was recurring to the Gita, the central conversation between Krishna and the warrior Arjuna in the *Mahabharat*, in his moderations, leads in this context on to the third component of *KBC*’s success, which was the psychology and naturalisation of knowledge that the show generated. In this, there existed a striking parallel with Aaj Tak’s procedure at the same time. While Aaj Tak (see 4.5.) built its advertising strategy on accepting and continuously augmenting what people *did* buy instead of confronting them with goods they could not afford, *KBC* accepted and valorised whatever people *did* know instead of trying to provoke ambition through the demonstration of lacking knowledge – and risking the aggravation of feelings of inferiority and rejection. *KBC* was just the right show to meet the resentments against elite education that the Star Plus audience survey (see 4.2.) had recently revealed, and to, particularly at a time of acute insecurity regarding the own capacities, encourage and empower the own, already existing knowledge.⁷¹⁸ In this sense, the end of the educational image materialised itself here most directly. Earlier quiz shows, mainly on Doordarshan, had the aura of “an intellectual competition between elite schools that supposedly drank Bournvita.”⁷¹⁹ *KBC*, by contrast, eased “the middle class fear of exams and failure.”⁷²⁰ It was not about education, it was about – popular – knowledge, and it kindled just through this rejection of academic educational standards the competition that the ‘Bournvita-contests’ had tended to choke off. Moreover, by partly actually exposing higher educated candidates to questions that avoided higher education, viewers at home became subliminally

⁷¹⁷ Star Plus executive, Interview I/16.

⁷¹⁸ See in this context Olaf Hoerschelmann, 2000, Beyond the Tailfin: Education and the Politics of Knowledge on Big Money Quiz Shows, in: *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 24 (2), pp. 177-194.

⁷¹⁹ Visvanathan, 2000. Bournvita is a British-made energy drink traditionally advertised in India in connection with school-kids.

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

privileged over the struggling candidate in the studio: “It is not really a quiz show, it’s not only about questions and answers, it’s all about ‘I know the answer but you don’t’, right? And you’re playing and I’m sitting at home watching, getting all stressed up, saying ‘Shit, I can do this! I can actually win this crore!’”⁷²¹

The three main columns of this popular knowledge, in combination with other fields, were cricket, religion, and Hindi cinema, the latter already being most prominently embodied by Bachchan himself. “We put in a lot of cricket, because everyone knows cricket, and we put in a lot of movies, because everyone knows movies, and we put in a lot of mythology and religion, as in ‘Ram’s brother was Bharat, and Bharat’s wife’s uncle was who?’, and that is something which 99% of Hindi heartland knows.”⁷²² One of the most salient features of *KBC* was thus the equation of secular and religious knowledge. This became obvious in questions like “Who succeeded the five Pandavas to the throne of Hastinapur after they renounced the world?”⁷²³ – which referred to the *Mahabharat* – and “Who succeeded Lord Wavell as the Governor General of India?” – which referred to Indian colonial history. Like during the 1990s very different formats had co-existed in the emerging flow of a permanent programming (mythological follows English detective serial follows Indian family serial follows Hindi film), followed in *KBC* – in a much more condensed form – questions for religion immediately those for geography (often the names of foreign capitals), political history, medicine and anatomy (“Which function serves the appendix in your body?”), (changing) food habits (“In which country did the pizza originate?”), cricket (“Which one of these cricketers is left-handed?”), public life (“Which colour have the public buses in Bombay?”), flora and fauna (“Which of the following plants has thorns?”), and Hindi films (“Who directed the Hindi film Mr. India?”). However, the *absence* of actual visualisation, the prominence of language – all written questions on the screen were in English, while the talking and moderations was in Hindi – and the simultaneity in one and the same programme evoked not only a new form of convergence. Through the reduction to question and answer, which only allows the alternative of right and wrong, an aura of the factual and ‘truth’ was created, which made this popular knowledge not merely the antidote of conventional education but also of discourse.

⁷²¹ Interview I/15.

⁷²² Ibid.

⁷²³ All questions from Star Plus archive tapes, without broadcasting date (between August 2000 and January 2002, first relay).

The diminution to ‘facts’, which were inherently disabled of being exposed to different options of representation and interpretation, generated, on the one hand, a canonisation of what the Head of Content called “Indian ethnic knowledge”, which, as far as knowledge on religion and mythology was concerned, somewhat intensified the canon that had been introduced with the choice of particular – ‘nationally valid’ – versions of the televised *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*. At the same time there could be observed a levelling of time and a disappearance of history. Historical questions concerned mainly political, colonial, and/or Muslim history (see below), whilst Hindu history (that could have been invoked, for instance, through questions on historical periods like the Gupta Empire, or historical figures like Swami Vivekananda) was because of the focus on mythology and religious narrative released from the dimension of time, thus gaining a moment of the eternal and timeless that was, as it was independent from chronology, present on the same level as all other questions. Whilst one could say that during the 1990s, clearly ‘secular’ or ‘Western/Westernised’ programs somewhat had the function of a time-check, as they had framed the separate – though growing – format of the mythological, this separation or differentiation was completely blurred in *KBC*. Hindu religion and mythology were thus naturalised and canonised, but at the same time also – precisely through their reduction to ‘factual knowledge’ – exposed to rationalisation, if not secularisation, which, however, was not any more down to ideological interference but to the inner logic of the programme format (see 8.3.2).

But the equation of mythological and religious knowledge with historical and secular knowledge also implied that it was only Hinduism that could claim to encompass wider fields than mere religious practise and texts, representing what L.K. Advani has often praised as a “Hindu way of life”. This became particularly obvious with regard to the representation of Islam in the show. It was not that there were no Muslim candidates in *KBC*, yet it was striking that as soon as a Muslim candidate had succeeded in the selection round, questions for Hindu mythology tended to be replaced by questions for Mughal history or Islamic religious practise (like the ‘haj’ or prayer rituals). This – contrary to the popular belief that ‘Hindu culture is everybody’s culture’ – indicated not only that there was obviously no expectation that Hindus and Muslims knew much about the respective other’s religion. It also showed in quite a few episodes that neither necessarily knew that much about the own religion either. There could be observed an interesting paradox, though: while questions on Hindu mythology, which generally entailed a higher degree of complication (“Starting with the youngest, arrange these

members of Krishna's family in the correct order“⁷²⁴ let candidates from both communities stumble, it was the questions regarding Islam, which overall focussed on the most basic aspects (“On which day of the week are Muslims required to congregate in mosques for community prayer?“) that everybody could answer.

The setting of Hindu religion and mythology as the encompassing, generally compatible category relegated Islam not only to the position of a minority culture in relation to the ‘general’ majority culture, it also reduced it to a mere historical and religious category, which also stood in the tradition that the screening of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* had generated on Doordarshan. As Rajagopal has noted, “the mythological genre tended to be denied to shows based on Muslim subjects, which were labelled ‘historical’ instead (e.g. *Akbar the Great* and *Alif Laila*), or ‘quasi-historical’ (e.g. *Akbar Birbal*), with one arguably historical serial, *Tipu Sultan*, actually labelled ‘fictional’ because of protests by Hindu conservatives.”⁷²⁵ The reduction of Islam to history and religious practise, which excluded not only the contemporary Indian Muslim but also the in India particularly rich tradition of syncretism, ghazal and quawali music, Urdu poetry, Sufi mythology as well as the substantial contribution of Muslims to the development of the film industry, thus preceded and became embedded in an increasingly global trend. And while the product – in this case the programme and its questions – was not the outcome of targeted ideological considerations but rather reflected the, itself already naturalised, state of knowledge and information of those responsible for designing the questions (who were exclusively Hindu) and their – realistic – anticipation of existing knowledge with the audiences, the (further) naturalisation and discrimination of an established ‘Muslim’ was the outcome of its success.

Because of its basic non-ideological performance, there could be observed a number of instances where the stumbling over questions relating to the own community made it clear that the respective cultural knowledge could actually not be presumed and that Hindus as well as Muslims had far-reaching knowledge in the field of secular questions (thus also unwittingly documenting that this was basically for both the least problem-ridden). These instances were not unwanted side-effects – as they would have been in an ideological production – but could be used as an argument that the show was actually fair and tried its best to integrate everyone and everything. Yet while Bachchan can be said to have obtained

⁷²⁴ It is quite amazing, though, to find how closely even this question, implying detailed cultural knowledge, was actually predicated upon the ‘global’ logic of the programme; in a qualifying round of the English edition, the question read: “Starting with the most senior, put these servants in a Victorian household in order.”

⁷²⁵ Rajagopal, p. 95.

the position of authority “which denies that it is authority [but] claims instead that it is an identity and a point of view predicated on mutuality with the beloved [in this case the candidates and the viewers, B.O.] and freedom of choice”⁷²⁶, the keen and genuinely well-meaning excitement of the Head of Content about *KBC*’s sensational success unwittingly revealed how naturalised ‘Hindu values’ had actually become: “It just shot off, worked out perfectly. The whole hype around him [Bachchan, B.O.] went to insanity levels, how polite he was, how...everything. Then there was this whole theory that not only are you getting knowledge, you’re also learning Hindi, ‘cause AB speaks such polished Hindi. Then AB started along the way of giving a piece of wisdom to open each show. So that thing became one big deal, that, you know, that opening, the AB-opening as we call it, so he comes in and says ‘Hello, welcome to the show *and* knowledge is power and power is wealth, and in the darkness of ignorance nanananana....*and* therefore...’ and so on. So that one little piece used to be like one majorly crafted piece, one of our writers was writing that which AB used to correct. [...] And even with regard to *KBC* we never ever played up the fact that it was about money, it was always supposed to be knowledge, it was supposed to be good family values, it was supposed to be polite to elders, and AB says Namaskar and Mataji, it’s not like ‘Hey man, how are you doing’. He was recommending and encouraging that you go to school, don’t bunk class, study hard, become rich. That’s the way forward. Be regular, be straight, be good, don’t go after another man’s wife. The shows that follow immediately, *Kahaani* and *Kyunki*, in a manner of speaking, follow the same values, good Hindu values.”⁷²⁷

⁷²⁶ Ravi Vasudevan, 1996, “Bombay and Its Public”, in: *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 29, p. 47.

⁷²⁷ Interview I/15, italics according to pronunciation.

8.3.2. *Life According to the Soap*

Within the tandem of the game show and the soap opera, *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* provided on the psychological level the necessary re-settling and homely reassurance after the excitement of the game. On the visual level, the unification of the family in *KBC* under the impression of economic and political insecurity and under the (very economic) primacy of Star Plus to get viewers “from the age of six to sixty in front of the tube”⁷²⁸ delivered the indirect platform for



the resurrection of the joint family on screen in *Kyunki* and *Kahaani*. The direct relation between *KBC* and *Kahaani*, which was scheduled right after *KBC*, could have hardly been more striking in this regard: in the trailer of *Kahaani* it was indeed as if the joint family (that had ‘just finished’ watching *KBC*) was coming running up the staircase in its lavish

villa that it seemed to have invested the just won crore in (as such a house was hardly achievable by just not bunking school and studying hard). David Morley has termed the family as the “symbolic heartland of national life”⁷²⁹ (which not coincidentally resonates with the heartland as the central figure of populism)⁷³⁰, and the soaps could thus be seen as visually producing the national family of the ‘Hindi heartland’ as the naturalised norm for the Indian viewer.

In contrast to – but complying with - *KBC*’s direct empowerment through ‘Indian ethnic knowledge’ and its predication on computer technology, and thus a design of the future, this heartland joint family was fundamentally imbued with the nostalgia that was generated though the feeling of economic recess and fears of social descent. In its ideal form of living under one, only vaguely urban roof – that both *Kyunki* and *Kahaani*, in contrast to ‘more daring’ variants on Sony and Zee TV, forecasted – the joint family itself took the place of the crore in *KBC* as a platform onto which worries about the vagaries of an unpredictable tomorrow could be projected and which promised warmth and protection. The representation

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

⁷²⁹ David Morley, 2004, “Broadcasting and the Construction of the National Family”, in: Allen/Hill (eds.), p. 419.

⁷³⁰ Taggart, 2000, “Populism, the People and the Heartland”, in: *ibid*, pp. 91-98.

of a resurrected grand family at a time of factual nuclearisation⁷³¹, the decreasing ontology of conventional gender norms⁷³², increasing divorce rates, growing abandonment of elders to old peoples' homes and a raise in women's professional activities (documented not least by the large amount of professional actresses that the soaps sported) was enhanced by the projected seclusion and supposed security of the own private home, which was also metaphorically reflected already in the trailer of *Kahaani*:



The light of (of the family) is (re-)kindled and carefully protected (by the hands of a couple)

Not coincidentally, the executive producer of *Kahaani* at Balaji Telefilms set this development in direct relation to the 'Bachchan times': "In the 70s there was a lot of frustration, there was the Emergency, people were out on the roads, and AB represented that larger than life. Now people want to stay in, they want to be sheltered; all sorts of things could happen to you, they need this illusion. Now is the time of going back to our roots."⁷³³ The equation of (cultural) 'roots' with security (and of public action with insecurity) indicated the soap opera format's general inherent dependency on economically unequal social constellations (see 3.3.). It emphasised in the concrete situation in India *Kahaani*'s and *Kyunki*'s direct implication in the growing discrepancy between the pressures to stand one's ground in an increasingly incalculable economy and a fear of loss of control and disintegration that generated a mental withdrawal from the public into the private within an overall de-politicisation process and a rather uncompromising urge to keep 'reality' out of perception. Under this unfolding preliminary, the (imaginative) 'realism' of the soaps was expressed by the successive change of even slightly progressive elements in the original plot, as Sakshi Tanwar, the actress of the Parvati-character in *Kahaani* reported: "There was a

⁷³¹ See *The Telegraph*, July 24, 2001: Joint-family blast on screen in nuclear age; and Minna Säävälä, 1998, "The 'Hindu Joint Family': Past and Present", in: Asko Parpola/ Sirpa Tenhunen (eds.), *Changing Patterns of Family and Kinship in South Asia*, Helsinki (Studia Orientalia 84), pp. 61-73.

⁷³² See *Outlook*, May 05, 2003: Adultery 2003. Woman on Top and *Outlook*, December 20, 2004: Sex and the Married Indian.

⁷³³ Interview I/19.

point of time in our serial when my husband could not handle his work, and therefore I started going to the office. Could you believe that women who met me said ‘Oh, you shouldn’t be going to office, then who will look after the home?’ This is the mindset. And that’s where the market comes in. We realised that people don’t like it when Parvati is going to office, so then it had to be changed. She is not going to the office, she’s looking after the house. People don’t accept it, people don’t want to see these changes.”⁷³⁴

A field where this closing-in of the family and the closing-off from (social) ‘reality’ became most visible was, again, the clothing of the female characters and the prominence of the opulent sari in often heavy and stiff materials and draped in the most classic-conservative fashion. An independent producer and filmmaker, herself out of work then, remarked: “There are 100 and one ways of wearing the sari, there are many forms, like when you look at the way the fisher women wear it down at Sassoon’s [dock area of Bombay, B.O.], that enable total freedom of movement, more than any other dress. After all it’s only a long piece of cloth, you can do what you want with it. But the way the holy middle class clan wears it keeps you from doing anything but looking glamorous. It is to impede all movement. Not in a thousand years would you even manage to get on a bus in those kinds of saris.”⁷³⁵ The process of de-politicisation was thus joined with a purification process in terms of the exclusion of all possible contamination, which concerned not merely gender roles. With the soaps vanished also the Muslims and other minorities from the projected lives of Hindu families. The disabling of public activity and movement of women, and the exclusion of non-Hindus and poverty, and thus of all forms associable with dirt, was commensurate with the ‘Lakshman rekha’, the invisible fire circle that Ram’s brother Lakshman had drawn around Sita to protect her chastity from intruders, virtually being re-drawn around the family home.⁷³⁶ Resonating with the real-life tendency of the affluent to segregate themselves into highly guarded townships at the metropolises’ peripheries (see 3.3.), the basic plot of the joint Hindu family life with clear-cut traditional gender roles in totally secluded and opulent wealth was to represent a moral as well as an economic ideal. The former accounted for *Kahaani*, that was directly modelled upon the televised *Ramayan*, even more than for *Kyunki* (which tells the basic story of Tulsi, a ‘poor’ Brahmin priest’s daughter – representing the basic moral values - who marries into an industrialist’s family and has to struggle for her

⁷³⁴ Interview I/20.

⁷³⁵ Interview I/22.

⁷³⁶ See Leena Abraham, 2004, “Redrawing the *Lakshman Rekha*: Gender Differences and Cultural Constructions in Youth Sexuality in Urban India”, in: Sanjay Srivastava (ed.), *Sexual Sites, Seminal Attitudes. Sexualities, Masculinities and Culture in South Asia*, New Delhi/ London/Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 209-241.

acceptance as a daughter-in-law): “The *Ramayan* is about people from an ideal family where it was depicted how a person in relation to others should behave. Ram was the perfect son, perfect husband, Sita was the perfect daughter-in-law, perfect wife, and this is what we are trying to portrait through this particular serial. Our message here is to convey that ideal how an ideal daughter should be, keeping the justice intact. That way she [Parvati, B.O.] takes a stand. [...] We are not forcing these values on anyone, we’re not telling anyone that women in a joint family are behaving like we are behaving. We are telling how it should be. We’re doing it in a magnified way. If it is adopted even in a smaller quantity, that’s something.”⁷³⁷

The direct analogies with Hindutva in this offering of a “magnified”, ‘ideally’ structured joint family (parivar) – that suggests within the logic of the commercial image the freedom of choice, the empowerment of judgement, and the ease of attainment, while denying responsibility for consequences – were manifold, in the dissociation from the political as much as in the proposed achievement of unity. With regard to the former, the depiction of women was particularly illuminating. Even though the soaps were initially conceptualised, in connection with *KBC*, as targeting and resurrecting a family audience, they factually were addressing, more than all serials before, mainly the female audiences, thus shaping the new image that television is – at least as far as the contents are concerned – “essentially a female bastion.”⁷³⁸ The quote above makes clear how much the soaps - in contrast to the televised mythologicals – put the woman into the central role of “keeping the justice intact”, which has earned them amongst viewers and observers the assessment that they actually empower the role of the woman and “finally give due respect to their position and capabilities.”⁷³⁹ However, “upon closer examination we will find that disagreements [in the family, B.O.] concern expanding and reclaiming the ‘responsibilities’ of the female character rather than her ‘rights’, so that the core values of patriarchy and male domination remain intact”⁷⁴⁰ – which directly resonated with the ‘façade’ of Hindutva to pretend Hinduism’s liberalisation towards lower castes, while carefully watching the maintenance of erstwhile hierarchies.

While social and moral responsibility was disconnected from and set against political rights with regard to women’s rights, the woman’s pivotal role transferred this shift also onto the family as a whole with regard to the lack of reliable state security. Like *KBC*, which countered this problem with the projection of a charismatic and benign leader – thus also

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR), 2003, Contemporary Woman in Television Fiction. Deconstructing Role of ‘Commerce’ and ‘Tradition’, in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 26, p. 1685.

⁷³⁹ Analyst of the Centre for Media Studies (CMS), Delhi, Interview II/10.

⁷⁴⁰ CFAR, 2003, p. 1686.

catering to the image of the perfect male - the soaps were setting the woman as the embodiment and guarantor of moral values in the family: “When you have to survive in a society which doesn’t really give you too much, then you tend to do anything to survive, it becomes a survival of the fittest which is also what America is very close to. Which is why you then tend to do things which may not be correct, which may not be socially and morally correct, and that’s why television then has to take the other part of the role where you project the socially and morally correct. It reminds people of what is right, even if they cannot always do the right thing. [...] It is also a way to make the government realise that they should provide for such means. [...] We’ve got to make the attempt to make people realise that there are right ways of approaching things.”⁷⁴¹

The experience of the absentee or only partially and arbitrarily present state, of the dissolution of government secured incomes, the uncertainties of market-dependent existence, of corruption and exclusion – which are here formulated with regard to the addressed lower middle class audience – is thus countered not with the recommendation to identify and sue one’s rights but with the ‘realistic’ acceptance of their negligence and the encouragement of alternatively developing a moral and basically a-political attitude, of which the woman is the keeper and preserver - and which would hardly be suited to provoke any government into action but rather unburdens it from executing its duties. Moreover, while a sense of duty towards an honest conduct and the maintenance of ethical standards outside and also against the state does have a strong tradition in India – not least in correspondence with the historical experience of corruption -, the morality advocated here was fundamentally different from ethics. As the earlier mentioned independent producer emphasised (and Gujarat has amply shown), the inclination of these ‘moral values’ was, in accordance with the withdrawal from the public into the private realm, not quite towards the society at large but just towards the depicted hub of the own family: “The morals in the concept of Indianness always mean fidelity towards your own husband, your own wife, your own clan, only that. A boy can be beaten up right next to you, and you ignore it, that’s not bad morals. But when it comes to your own house and wife, that’s where the morals count.”⁷⁴² This basic motif of a shifting emphasis from political rights and engagement towards a private moral(istic) position resonated quite strongly with the “voluntary normative standards for media” that the BJP had advanced in its 1998 election manifesto instead of proposing a democratic legislation (see

⁷⁴¹ Star Plus executive, Interview I/04.

⁷⁴² Interview I/22.

3.2.). Point one had advocated the “promotion of family values and extended family relationships to preserve its character as a basic socio-economic and socio-cultural unit”, while point six had proposed “entertainment as an embodiment of the traditional Indian view of ‘Navarasa’ so that it does not degenerate into a source of amoral living.”⁷⁴³

While there thus existed clear correspondences between the setting and outlook of the K-soaps and the BJP’s declared objectives of its cultural policies – which doubtlessly accounts for the fact that the BJP never attempted to interfere with the entertainment channels, and particularly not with Star Plus - a similar equivalence can be made out with regard to their kinetics and the way both were basically interested in maintaining an ideal and stable image. This is where the soaps’ development can be read as a barometer and metaphor for the increasingly tense relations between the BJP in central government and its needs and attempts to project stability and leadership in a large coalition and the extra-parliamentarian Hindutva forces, particularly the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, which are more predicated upon keeping the movement of Hindutva going. The tension between the requirement of projecting a stable image and the continuous need to reproduce it are built in the larger specific logic of Hindutva - which had increasingly been organised in a division of labour between its different and overlapping organisations - of forecasting an existing Hindu unity and of simultaneously constructing it as a permanently threatened and endangered community that has to be continuously protected from and defended against ‘outside’ influences and enemies. The basic conflict between good and evil which is inscribed in this construction is at the same time the necessary prerequisite for creating an ongoing story of melodramatic excess as the soap opera format requires it (see 3.3.). In this context it can be said that it was the agitating forces of Hindutva that operated with the classic logic of the soap opera genre by employing in the circular movement of pursuing their ideal, which is at the same time presented as an ontological fact, spectacular and excessive means of public mobilisation against the basic projected Others of Islam, Christianity and ‘pseudo-secularism’. In the K-soaps, on the other hand, while they introduced and employed the format of the soap opera, the basic focus was on melodrama rather than excess (other than that of wealth), particularly insofar as it entailed immorality – and thus potentially also violence. They were in this primacy much closer to the needs at least of the more moderate, immediately government-responsible fractions of the BJP around Vajpayee that were not particularly interested in disruptions through violent action and in alienating the substantial votebank of the minorities. While the K-soaps involved in the

⁷⁴³ www.indiantelevision.com/indianbroadcast/legalreso/BJPmediapolicy.htm (2000).

same way as agitating Hindutva the continuous protection of an ideal that is simultaneously projected as naturalised normality, they did not merely signify a privatisation and active participation in the sense of anti-parliamentarianism and a disowning of conventional representation. They were designed for consumption in the 'real' private sphere of a growing audience that tended, while sympathising with the cause, to feel disturbed by the loud spectacularisation of public mobilisation, that wanted after a day's work and struggle to get emotionally involved and be relaxed by the suggestion of an untainted world and whose interests the central BJP considered as its main focus.

The central BJP had in this context increasing difficulties to mitigate the dynamic desires of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, while being additionally under ideological pressure from the RSS. For a while, however, this incoherence could pass off as a diverse discourse within the Sangh Parivar that encompassed virtually every policy area and thus appeared, by seemingly allowing intra-organisational dissent, to be far more democratic than particularly the Congress, which is far less transparent in displaying intra-party disagreements.⁷⁴⁴ Similarly, the initial concentration of *Kahaani* and *Kyunki* on selling security rather than action, and thus of projecting the ideal of the Hindu joint family rather than the conflicts in defending it, stood increasingly itself in conflict with the requirements of their own format that is predicated upon conflict and potential excess in order to keep viewers interested (a problem that *KBC* did not have because of the continuous thrill of the game). For a while, however, this problem could be tackled by the foregrounding of 'rishte', the intra-family relations that are the basic ingredient of the soap opera, thus projecting the usual disagreements within a family as the actual proof of its unshakable foundations. As 'rishte', however, refers to 'relation' as much as to 'bonding', the basic constellation in *Kyunki*, for instance, the introduction of Tulsi as a caste-wise (Brahmin) but not class-wise ('poor') suitable 'bahu' into a rich industrialist's family, marked the weakest – but at the same most 'realistic' - of possible social conflicts, as opposed to, for instance, the presentation of a Muslim or lower caste daughter-in-law, and was set as provoking the rather fast development of family bonding. The problem of dowry was inscribed in this formation but not thematised.

Indeed all potential sources of conflict and excess had been excluded from the beginning so thoroughly that the soaps threatened to choke on their own perfection. Their strict limitation on the domestic realm of one respective family had renounced of creating an antagonistic

⁷⁴⁴ See Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 2003, Of Hindutva and governance, in: *The Hindu*, December 15, and Balraj Puri, 2004, Congressisation of BJP, in: *Deccan Herald*, January 03.

setting between two families or clans, as had been the case in the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* as well as in, for instance, *Dynasty* or *Dallas*. The construction of Hindu against Hindu was not desirable, whereas the plot in *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* was also not about antagonising Muslims or the poor but about making them invisible in the projection of an affluent, potentially immortal and timeless Hindu family life. Neither the integration nor the antagonising of ‘others’ would in this sense have been ‘realistic’. Moreover, a clearly antagonistic setting between a Hindu and a Muslim family was bound to disadvantage the latter and thus to alienate Muslim viewers, who do represent, after all, a substantial potential number. The representation of Muslims was in this context consequently relegated to ‘their own’ soaps, which were – recapitulating the segregation between mythologicals and ‘Muslim



historical serials’ – not referred to as ‘soaps’ but as ‘Muslim socials’, which was in itself taking up an older film genre. These basically consisted of one main serial, *Heena*, running relatively successful on Sony. It had actually preceded the emergence of the K-soaps (it was on air since 1999) and was itself, to the dismay of Muslim producers and directors I spoke

to⁷⁴⁵, meanwhile produced and directed by Hindus. *Heena* was, in the post-Shah Bano mode, all focused on the fate of the woman under ‘triple talaq’, the provision for men of divorcing a

Above: still from the trailer of *Heena* (in Muslim marriage dress), which tells the story of a young woman who is in her wedding night confronted with her husband’s love for another woman but decides to stay with the family.

⁷⁴⁵ The frustration and depression amongst Muslim writers, directors, and producers was rather grave at the time, including the writer and director of *Heena*, on whose dismissal from directing *Heena* and his replacement by a Hindu director in 2002 neither he nor the production house wanted to comment. Whereas only a few were in touch with the debates within the larger Muslim community about the Muslim Personal Law and the ‘talaq’-topic, most were complaining, while channels were generally hesitant about taking on Muslim-related topics in the first place, that all possible variation on the representation of Muslim themes was disabled. “The Muslim exists as Nawabi, talaqi, or terrorist” (Muslim producer, Interview II/44). This reduction concerned not merely, as indicated in 8.3.1, the representation of actual identifiable ‘Muslim’ and thus somewhat religion-related issues, but also the representation of the liberal, potentially a-religious Muslim. In many ways, this situation mirrored the dilemma of Hindustani that I have referred to in 4.5.: while Hindustani tends to be non-existent because it is identified as being ‘actually’ either Hindi or Urdu, the liberal Muslim tends to be impossible because (s)he is either Muslim or liberal – and thus part of ‘the (Hindu) mainstream’. Invisibility is the threat that looms over both alternatives. How strong the resistances were against attempting a diverting representation of Muslims, which went in 2003 along with the effort of some Star Plus executives to re-introduce social realism on the channel, showed in the serial *Kashmeer*, which was not a soap and which was hastily rounded off after 17 episodes of originally planned 32. The story was, quite daringly, set at the time of the emerging Kashmiri Azadi movement in 1989, the ensuing militarization of the conflict and the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits (see 6.1.). The plot revolved around Zoya, the tomboyish, short-haired and mostly jeans-wearing daughter of a local Muslim doctor, and her two male childhood friends, one Hindu and one Muslim. After Zoya’s father, who had seen it as his duty to also treat injured Kashmiri insurgents, is found shot dead, Zoya suspects the Indian Army to

woman by the triple expression of the word ‘talaq’ (‘I divorce you’) under Muslim Personal Law. To the stereotypes of Islam as a historical and religious category added this framing the one of the Muslim as a judicial (social) problem and in this context as a threat to unity and ‘equality’ (see 6.2.1). The motif of the televised *Ramayan* refigured here in the sense that the woman was – in contrast to the Hindu women’s depiction in the K-soaps as ‘strong’ keepers of moral justice – shown as the in her endurance somewhat sacralised victim at the mercy of sexually uncontrolled men.⁷⁴⁶ There was a fourth category evolving at the time of my fieldwork amongst channel-executives and producers, namely that of the ‘exotic Muslim’, who surfaced in announced plans of “a Muslim social, very colourful, you know, with ornaments and stuff”⁷⁴⁷ (which did, however, never quite materialise).

As far as the K-soaps were concerned, the thorough exclusion of possible excess began to show in a waning interest of audiences and the feeling that “it’s not really going anywhere.”⁷⁴⁸ The mere projection of an ideal, however desired, becomes boring and annoying rather quickly, and the K-soaps’ basic inclination provoked in one of the Star Plus executives the hope and expectation that “for over 500 episodes now people have looked at this ideal picture and it will not take much longer for them to realise that they will never be like that, however much they try, and that will ultimately result in rejection, because it would be against their self-esteem to acknowledge that the own family is deficient.”⁷⁴⁹ The realisation of the weak action-factor in the soaps led the producers (Balaji Telefilms) to introduce, on pressure from Star Plus, in late 2001 a 20-year time jump in the plot in order to be able to bring in the children of Tulsi and her husband Mihir, who might infuse more life into the scenario. However, with this move also became nearly unavoidable the universal list of the soap opera’s intra-family conflicts.

Tania Modleski, in her early analysis of 1980s soap operas, has observed that “as a rule, only those issues which can be tolerated and ultimately pardoned are introduced on soap operas.

have been behind it and develops an increasingly militant stance herself that ultimately leads her to join the insurgents and militants. The end had been planned to be a reconciliation, but while TRPs had actually not been particularly low, signalling viewers’ interest in the serial, protests from Kashmiri Pandits, who saw Zoya’s militarization process depicted as too sympathetic, and pressure from the Home and External Affairs Ministries (which have the right to inspect every portrayal of the Kashmiri issue) led to quickly letting end *Kashmeer* in a bloodbath caused by Islamist militants that also kills Zoya herself, leaving behind the impression that a liberal Muslim girl, like a traditional one, cannot be trusted because she might harbour sympathies for terrorists and thus can ultimately not survive in ‘the mainstream’.

⁷⁴⁶ See in this context Sanjay Srivastava, 2004, “Non-Gandhian Sexuality, Commodity Cultures and a ‘Happy Married Life’: Masculine and Sexual Cultures in the Metropolis”, in: *ibid* (ed.), pp. 342-390.

⁷⁴⁷ Executive producer of *Kahaani*, Interview I/19.

⁷⁴⁸ Star Plus Head of Content, Interview I/15.

⁷⁴⁹ Interview I/17.

The list includes careers for women, abortions, premarital and extramarital sex, alcoholism, divorce, mental and even physical cruelty. An issue like homosexuality, which could explode the family structure rather than temporarily disrupt it, is simply ignored.”⁷⁵⁰ While many of these issues had been treated in one or the other way in serials on Doordarshan, Zee TV and Sony before and during the 1990s, the fast exclusion already of the first point, careers for women, from *Kahaani* indicated the basic intolerance towards all the other issues - with the exception, maybe, of abortion – within the ‘magnified’ set moral standards that the K-families were projecting. In dealing with this emerging problem there can be observed a development, which ultimately led to a (involuntary) ‘representational turn’ that also marked the slow dissociation of the soaps from the BJP’s projected image of stability.

Both soaps, in 2000, started off representing intact Hindu joint families with a focus on their (re-)unification as Hindu entities, as, for instance, the son of *Kyunki*’s Virani family, Mihir, returns from his studies in the US into the fold of the family as the successive head and tells his grandmother (in both soaps typically from the beginning the secret centre): “I did not want to change. You know, in that culture of jeans and jacket, I used to wear the pyjama kurta sewn by you; in my collection of thick English books, you will find a copy of the Bhagavad Gita; and even in the midst of Rock&Roll and Jazz, I used to chant the name of our Shri Krishna uncle.”⁷⁵¹ As this set-up of Mihir’s returning into the fold of the family had already anticipated the theme of a successful de-westernisation rather early – directly taking up on the growing moral panic that *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* had evoked (see 3.5.) - and the possibility of intra-society antagonists was excluded, with the ongoing stories and the increasing necessity to create conflict in order to keep the story going and keep viewers interested, the above-mentioned list of issues was approached by way of declaring them in toto as signifiers and dangers of Westernisation: “The ultimate fear is Westernisation.”⁷⁵² Extramarital sex, divorce, violence, drug abuse thus were framed and projected as the (much needed) ‘outside’ – Western – dangers and excesses that unfolded their morally decomposing powers onto one of the family members, and here particularly onto the men. The danger of alcohol, for instance, ‘approached’ Tulsi and Mihir’s meanwhile grown son Gautam in the form of a bottle of whisky that is found with him. While Tulsi breaks into tears of shame and

⁷⁵⁰ Modleski, Tania, 1984, “The Search for Tomorrow in Today’s Soap Operas”, in: Marris/Thornham (eds.), 1999, p. 585.

⁷⁵¹ Episode 04, Star Plus archives.

⁷⁵² Star Plus executive, Interview II/43.



despair, grandmother Virani speaks facing her late husband's portrait (prominently placed by the villa's main staircase) the vow that everything will be alright if Gautam will light the auspicious lamp and that the family will execute a hunger strike until he fulfils his duty. The (potentially) disobedient and 'seduced' son becomes here

the source of the whole family's disgrace, and the leather jacket that he wears is – from the times that Bachchan wore it as a sign of rebellion – re-defined into a sign of moral decay.⁷⁵³

The pre-definition of all moral attacks as coming from 'outside', however, enabled also their ultimate re-othering and expulsion and the re-purification of the family in the sense that in this case, for instance, it turned out that Gautam had been falsely accused and the bottle actually belonged to 'a friend'. Similarly was in *Kyunki*, whilst employing another intrinsic option of the soap opera format, the revelation just of an extramarital affair of Mihir's with his (female) doctor assigned to amnesia. As Robert Allen has noted, "in soap operas it is not unusual to witness the resurrection of a character assumed to be but not really dead, even after the passage of years of intervening story."⁷⁵⁴ In the case of *Kyunki*, Mihir, who had been thought dead after a car accident, returned all well but with an amnesia regarding the time of his absence, so that he could not really be made responsible for his actions and his sexuality.

Three aspects are highlighted by these instances. For one, the basic mode of the repression and denial of, rather than the dealing with, emerging problems. The introduction of the whisky bottle does not lead to a depiction of Gautam's life, in which alcohol plays a part (despite his working out in the home's own gym), neither does it extent into a – thinkable - plotline on the problems of having an alcoholic in the family (the alcoholic is not a generally tabooed character in Indian fiction, with the famous story of

⁷⁵³ Episode aired on April 03, 2002.

⁷⁵⁴ Allen, 2004, p. 252.

Devdas marking only the most popular example).⁷⁵⁵ Instead, the bottle left the plot as quickly as it had appeared, leaving behind a relieved family that could go on – in anticipation of being exposed to the next unavoidable ‘Western’ intrusion, though - that ‘these things’ do not happen in our family. Secondly, the absence of explanation and contextualisation, which is inscribed in the commercial image, disabled in this case the recognition of problems *as* (human) problems that have discernable reasons and generated their perception as a mere a-historical curse and catastrophe that befell the family, excluding all options of dealing with them other than through the equally a-historical strength of belief and ritual. It was very common for interview partners as well as viewers I randomly spoke to point out that rituals like the lightning of the auspicious lamp and the declaration of a hunger strike (or the praying of a ‘path’, an ongoing form of prayer that sets the believer in a delirium, see below) were everyday ways particularly for their parents or grandparents of meeting difficulties and the soaps were thus ‘realistic’. The basic introduction of a familiar and realistic theme, though, is characteristic of the soap opera in its functioning as a daily, ever-recognisable companion. The problem with the K-soaps was not that they projected – rather than represented - ritual and superstition (even though in coagulated, upper caste form). The problem was that they projected them as the *only possible* way of encountering problems. By taking away all rational options of problem-solution (that in a ‘real’ family one or the other member might bring forward), the soaps (and their producers) were unmistakably revealing their basic



indifference towards the ‘humanity’ of their characters, as they constantly produced and aggravated the moral panic that they actually promised to soothe (and were in this now indeed very close to the circular, self-referential logic of VHP and Bajrang Dal). The family was now basically in a constant state of moral shock, which was left non-provided

with means of abating other than denial of the own involvement (which in itself resonated with a common reaction to the Gujarat pogrom of claiming that all atrocities had been committed by ‘outsiders’). Again, and thirdly, this permanent aggravation of moral panic

Above: the mother in *Kahaani* is praying a ‘path’ in front of the monumental house deity upon the vanishing of her son (episode aired on April 29, 2003).

⁷⁵⁵ Written in 1917 by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay in Bengali, the novel of *Devdas* has been adapted for the big screen numerous times and reference to the character in film and literature is common.

accounted particularly – and actually exclusively – for the women, and here especially the mothers, the ‘keepers of moral justice’ in the house, who, deprived of contact and activity outside the family home - and thus the possible exposure to reasons of problems - found solace and strength only in religion. Their reliance on ritual and superstition was in this context also revealing of the increasing absence of other family members and the basic loneliness of these women and was in many ways also reflecting the loneliness of the individualised consumer.

A very supportive factor in this creation of the woman/mother in moral agony was the depiction of the male characters. As the above mentioned figures of the disobedient son and the amnesiac husband indicate, were they not – unlike Ram in the televised *Ramayan* – shown as particularly able to encounter and ward off the catastrophes that befell the family. With the pivotal role shifted from the men to the women within the format of the soap, and the feature of aggression relegated to the males in ‘Muslim socials’, the men in *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* were seen as the product of “mothers-in-law clinging unyieldingly to their sons for emotional sustenance”⁷⁵⁶ and as “faceless, weak and dependent.”⁷⁵⁷



Left (*Ramayan*): Ram defending Sita’s honour; middle (*Kahaani*): brothers Kamal and Om – who was designed together with Parvati as the ‘ideal couple’ reminiscing Ram and Sita – in tears over their missing third brother; right (*Kyunki*): Mihir in despair over Tulsi not forgiving his ‘amnesia affair’.

The ‘weakness’ of the males was within the plot, at least partly and for a while, explained by the ‘bad influences’ of ‘outside’/‘Western’ forces, amongst other things, of course, in the form of the lustful, sexually unbound and freely roaming Westernised woman who brought upon the family – materialising as catastrophes - the topics of pre- and extramarital sex, divorce, and, ultimately, death. While in *Kyunki* this carrier of catastrophe had been the professional woman – Mihir’s doctor -, in *Kahaani*, for instance, has the middle son of three, Ajay, an affair with his boss’ daughter Mita, whilst his wife is pregnant. His lover – otherwise

⁷⁵⁶ *India Today*, January 21, 2002: Witches in Diamante.

⁷⁵⁷ A.L. Chougule, 2003, Where have all the men gone?, in: *Screen*, September 26.

largely invisible – has the impertinence to actually turn up at the Agrawal’s mansion, where she is met with a flood of curses from grandmother Agrawal: “Even if I’ve become old, for my family I can confront any probe, and the values of this house I will protect with my last breath and take your inauspicious ‘manhus’ (bad energy) off this house. Get out! And don’t ever show your ‘manhus shakal’ (bad face) ever again!”



Grandmother Agrawal in *Kahaani* in disbelief over finding her grandson’s demanding lover (wearing jeans and a top with the logo ‘Elle’ written on the chest) at the doorstep (episode aired on April 29, 2003)

Ajay, however, in his role as the disobedient son, refused in an argument with his elder brother Om to even declare his affair a mistake. While Om tries to invoke his role as the future head of the family (“You have stopped respecting the elders, and if I as your older brother could teach you walking with holding my fingers, I can also bring you from the wrong to the right path. [...] I am not going to let the blood-relations (‘khun ke rishte’) suffer”), Ajay retorts: “You may have held my hand and taught me to walk, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to walk according to your decisions all my life. I have the right to lead my life according to my own ways. The ‘rishta’ that is immoral to you is for me the most important thing in my life.”⁷⁵⁸ Ajay consequently has to exit the soap (by falling off a cliff after a fight over a revolver, which leaves it open if Om actually shot his brother, while the body remained untraceable). Yet this depiction actually indicated a perceivable reversal in the soaps not only regarding the impossibility of denying individualism and subjective views but in this context also concerning the transfer of the tropes of disorder and threats onto the men themselves. As it was them who were mobile outside the house – discernable through their framings mostly in office surroundings and their absences from the family home – it was inevitably also them who became the carriers of contamination and dangers, while at the same time the ‘evil’ of Westernisation started to show its face within the family in the form of the female villainess,

⁷⁵⁸ Translated from Hindi.

“the negative image of the spectator’s ideal self”⁷⁵⁹, thus introducing the last of the required ingredients of the soap opera genre.

The increasingly prominent figure of the villainess, who “refuses to accept her own powerlessness, who is unashamedly self-seeking”⁷⁶⁰ and who now appeared in the same opulent saris as the ‘keepers of moral justice’, marked the point at which excess had to be acknowledged as coming out of the midst of the own family. In contrast to the televised *Ramayan*, where Kaikeyi, King Dashrath’s second wife, shows - by rebelling against Ram being selected for enthronement instead of her own son and blackmailing Dashrath into exiling Ram - the basic characteristics of a villainess, the K-villainesses – appearing as the frustrated daughter-in-law, the wicked stepmother, or the enraged ex-fiancé - ultimately refuse to be re-integrated.⁷⁶¹ As Philip Lutgendorf has pointed out, Kaikeyi is finally redeemed in order to unfold the “family saga, in which the members of the sundered royal clan are shown as united in their emotions even though physically apart.”⁷⁶² In the K-soaps, in the narrow closed-ness of the family home, the villainess could neither be redeemed nor be othered and expelled and thus showed herself as an intrinsic part of the self.

It was this emerging construction that, significantly, provoked protests from viewers against the K-soaps, resulting in late 2003 even in a suit being filed against Star Plus by a young girl at the Allahabad High Court on the grounds that the K-soaps “portrayed women as selfish, cunning and characterless” and that they were “affecting the rights of every Indian woman to live with dignity and respect.”⁷⁶³ The move was followed, in the form of reader-comments on the Times of India-website, by a flood of enraged support: “Serials like Balaji are poison for the society, they should be banned!!!”; “Bravo, girl! Well done. We have grown so insensitive to the trash that the idiot box emits, that it does not even strike us that we should protest. She has woken women from their slumber” etc.⁷⁶⁴ Significantly, it was not the Hindu upper caste opulence and their resonating with Hindutva’s performance and politics, or the restriction of women to the family home and their consequential limitation to ritual and superstition in their encountering human problems that had triggered off dissent (even though it had generated boredom), but this portrayal of the negative side of the self. While protest directed itself

⁷⁵⁹ Modleski, p. 585.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ See *India Today*, April 07, 2003: Mean Queens, and *The Times of India*, December 07, 2003: Sex, lies, murder... How wicked can our soaps get?

⁷⁶² Philip Lutgendorf, 1995, “All in the (Raghu) family. A video epic in cultural context”, in: Allen (ed.), 1995, p. 337.

⁷⁶³ *Times of India*, December 07, 2003: School girl files suit against STAR.

⁷⁶⁴ www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/opinions/280590.cms.

instinctively also at the messenger – (commercial) television itself – and demanding the exclusion – in the form of censorship - that the soaps had so far executed in their denial of social reality, the objection concerned particularly the projection of women deemed as negative (see below).

With this introduction and ‘inothorability’ of the negative self, I argue, showed the soaps – unwittingly, but with immediate effect on the viewers - not merely that the family can ultimately not be kept ‘clean’ from ‘outside’ influences, as whatever is ‘outside’ is also already within (and whatever is within makes the outside). They also revealed their character as extremely commercial and un-ideological products that basically allow for readability ‘both ways’ and are thus inherently unstable – and ‘irresponsible’ - with regard to their meaning. *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* were designed, and willingly imagined by the viewers, as projecting the ideal of a happy united Hindu family with an untainted morality, strong dutiful women and responsible and benign men, respecting their elders and heritage and living in the bliss of a secure family home, able to withstand all vagaries. Yet, with only the logic of the soap opera format unfolding itself within them, they soon virtually invited to be read as showing a golden cage in which it became obvious that it is not (merely) Muslim women that are suppressed by husband and family and kept from contact with the outside world but (as much) Hindu women, that the men are undergoing a profound identity crisis regarding their manhood (and thus become uncalculable)⁷⁶⁵, that the women are scheming and blackmailing and the men are collapsing and refusing responsibility, that pre- and extramarital sex is rampant, that the elders have no influence over the younger, that it is the ‘Westernised’ women and the realities of life that keep the story going, and that the dominant emotions in the house are not joy and happiness but fear and despair – to the degree that it invited a recently launched competing channel (SAB, meanwhile part of Sony) trying to win viewers for its programming with the promise “No Tears – Guaranteed!”⁷⁶⁶ As an executive in Star Plus put it already in 2002: “Come to think of it, this is actually the most accurate portrayal that I’ve ever seen of the abyss of social pressure, hypocrisy and emotional blackmailing that the Indian family actually is.”⁷⁶⁷

Along with this went what can be called a secularisation process that resonated with the actual secular foundations of Hindu nationalism. While the RSS itself had and has rather atheist

⁷⁶⁵ See in this context *Outlook* (Special Issue), May 06, 2002: The Indian Male. Who is he? What does he want? And will he survive?

⁷⁶⁶ SAB-billboard, Bombay, 2003.

⁷⁶⁷ Interview I/17.

features, Bhatt points out that the VHP, when formulating its normative ‘achar samhita’ (code of conduct) for Hindus in the late 1970s, it consciously chose first as the text central to Hindu practise the Bhagavad Gita (in its one-dimensional interpretation as justifying the – mental and physical - battle for ‘dharma’), which, “as part of the *Mahabharata*, belongs to the more ‘secular’ epic tradition” (in contrast to the Vedas, for instance, which are “considered universal sacred books of divine origin”).⁷⁶⁸ While the declared centrality of the Gita was shifted towards the Ramayan with the unfolding of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement, both the televised *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* evoked – because they hardly *portrayed* religious ritual and practise but were their subject – amongst wide sections of the audiences rituals of worship, for instance in the form of a bath before the screening, the garlanding of the TV-set with flowers, and the performance of pujas and aartis, as the broadcast was conceived as a possibility of ‘darshan’, the visual interaction with a deity or guru.⁷⁶⁹ The transfer of (permanent) religious ritual *onto* the screen marked in this sense – and within the logic of the projecting rather than representative quality of the commercial image – its de-sacralisation and its subjecting to secularised consumption: “It is not that people have become more religious, it’s just that the signs of Hinduism and Hindutva have become more entertaining.”⁷⁷⁰

The revealing diverse readability of the soaps, on the other hand, and their flip-sided character of actually showing the ideal and its mere illusion at the same time, could indeed be seen as a reason for ‘not taking them seriously’, which was, in the absence of an impending change in the programming, gaining ground in the production circles. In fact, there were numerous instances, in comments on websites and in newspapers, which indicated that viewers looked at the soaps from an ironic distance or with the absolute primacy of being entertained, which was also independent from community. A group of Muslim women, for instance, that I travelled with in 2004 (which was, however, after the general elections) showed themselves highly amused about the soaps, particularly regarding the circumstance that they were still watching them. As one of them said: “This is like a loop, you can put on your TV any time and they are there. It is always the same, but still I am sitting and wanting to know who gets the start of whom this time.”⁷⁷¹ However, as the strong protests against the soaps themselves showed, were they taken very seriously by others, and this accounted not merely for what

⁷⁶⁸ Bhatt, p. 185.

⁷⁶⁹ See in this context Christopher Pinney, 2002, “The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. Or, What Happens When Peasants ‘Get Hold’ of Images”, in: Ginsburg et al. (eds.), pp. 355-369.

⁷⁷⁰ Interview I/22.

⁷⁷¹ Irregular interview, November 2004.

viewers perceived to be negative, but also for what they endorsed. A woman in a debate on NDTV India, for instance, which remained stuck in the logic of social realism (“Do TV-serials portray India’s contemporary reality?”)⁷⁷², was very clear on her unqualified identification with the characters: “The role the mother-in-law is portraying is very good, and all mothers-in-law should be like this. The role of Tulsi is beyond expectations, and I feel all daughters-in-law should be like this.” The young girl that had filed the suit against Star Plus, on the other hand, seems to have been interested in defending the dignity of Indian women not quite with regard to maintaining an ideal image of them, but with the knowledge that a ‘negative’ portrayal can have in the context of women’s factual dependency on the husband and his family – particularly in the lower middle classes, the main target audience of the soaps – a very immediate effect on their lives and well-being. How right she was with this basic concern confirms already the comment of a male reader on the Times of India website: “I agree that most of Indian women have a scheming character. Specially the ones that sit at home all day doing nothing. Empty Mind is Devil’s Workshop.” Similarly was a Zee executive acutely worried about perceivable developments amongst less affluent women and their temporary ignorance towards their actual strict limits to social and economic ascension: “My maid in my house who is economically independent, when she goes out for a movie or when she leaves for her holiday she looks like the stereotyped middle class woman that my television portrays. She aspires for it. I had two maids who got married and are suffering like mad. In the last ten years of my life in Bombay two maids who eventually got married, aspiring for a higher life, are in ruins today.”⁷⁷³

This schism between seriousness and irony points to a process which Umberto Eco has observed in the Western debates on television in the 1980s and which led him to critique the “radical proposal of the postmodern aesthetics” (favouring the ironic stance that presumes a ‘smart reading’ of actual trash through audiences) as “singularly snobby: as in a sort of neo-Orwellian world, the pleasures of the smart reading would be reserved for the members of the Party; and the pleasures of the naïve reading, reserved for the proletarians. The entire industry of the serial would exist, as in the world of Mallarmé (made to end in a Book), with its only aim being to furnish neobaroque pleasure to the happy few, reserving pity and fear to the unhappy many who remain.”⁷⁷⁴ Soap operas, just because they are non-ideological products,

⁷⁷² www.ndtv.com (video gallery, 2003), translated from Hindi.

⁷⁷³ Interview I/09.

⁷⁷⁴ Umberto Eco, 1990, “Interpreting Serials”, in: *ibid*, *The Limits of Interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 98/99.

are not only immanently “antiprogressive”⁷⁷⁵, in the sense of repeating themselves and thus being self-referential, they can also still carry strong ideological norms, as we have seen above, and even the flipside of this ideology need not be tolerant.

Conclusion

The earlier-cited expectation of a Star Plus executive in 2002 that the K-soaps would sooner or later, through their projection of an ideal picture, evoke not only boredom but rejection upon the realisation that this ideal could never ‘really’ be achieved, was in the end met not with regard to the K-soaps themselves but with regard to the BJP-led NDA-government.

The establishment of the K-formula as a sweepingly successful programming, that invented the global Indian game show and the Indian soap opera, can be seen as representing not only the re-invention of television in its fully commercialised avatar in India and the re-creation of an image of the nation. It was also set precisely at the junction between the affluent and the aspiring in a neo-liberalising economy of vagaries and thus reconciled the nation of numbers with the nation of values. Itself the immediate outcome of a lack of knowledge and education – in the sense of the neglect of audience research and Murdoch’s non-investment in the training of executives, writers and directors (see chapter 4) – the formula employed the non-explaining commercial image in order to absorb the imagined lives of Hindu upper classes and the shimmering prospects of a potent nation – relying on its own values and knowledge – and to project them as a naturalised ideal to a constantly growing number of cable television viewers in order to inculcate their aspirations and consumption. In this sense they marked not merely the decease of the educational image but also of development theory: “It will take a lot of time for most people of this country to improve, and there are no easy solutions, so this is to cheer them up for the time being.”⁷⁷⁶

Insofar as the K-soaps were non-ideological products, the revelation of their diverse readability and their transition from illusion to disenchantment did not - as would have been the case with an ideological production that had a ‘real message’ that could be subverted –

⁷⁷⁵ Modleski, p. 591.

⁷⁷⁶ CEO, Balaji Telefilms, Interview II/38.

result in their rejection by audiences or the introduction of alternative programming: “They are a brand now, you can do anything with them.”⁷⁷⁷ On the contrary, captivating the audiences through the psychology of wanting to see what one does not want to see, they thrived on the new mode of permanent controversy – until that itself became somewhat boring (see below) – in a way that the governing BJP could not.

In the characteristic Hindutva mode, the ‘Shining India’-image as the leading motif of the election campaign naturalised an ideal state as ontological that in actual fact it only had to create rather than promoting a political goal. While the campaign was thus in itself, by a basic absence of contents and the primacy of form, resonating with the mode of the soaps⁷⁷⁸, the BJP relied during the 2004-campaign even more on the media than it had done during earlier campaigns – and could count even more on their compliance and support. The open recruitment amongst film and TV celebrities for poll road shows and the BJP’s eagerness to appear in their light on every possible occasion⁷⁷⁹, the readiness of actors and producers to join the party – Smriti Irani, the ‘Tulsi’ of *Kyunki*, contested a seat in a Delhi constituency⁷⁸⁰ - and the quick legalisation of running glossy ‘India Shining’-ads on private television channels (repealing the respective paragraph in the Cable Networks Regulation Act, 1995, that barred political advertisements on the electronic media)⁷⁸¹ were largely supported by the ‘visualised’ news media, television and press. They only occasionally pointed to the total absence from the campaign of the alarming decay in fields like basic supplies in water and nutrition, the agricultural sector, education and environment – and hardly at all to Gujarat -, but overall, if at all, criticised rather than exposed the campaign (see 6.3.2.).⁷⁸² The ‘totality of the image’ that the campaign displayed immanently posed the question what possible alternative opposing parties, prominently the Congress, could have in this scenario to bring forward their own campaigns, and the apparent lack of such an alternative doubtlessly informed the overall conviction that there was no way the BJP/NDA would not win the elections with a landslide. The Congress, which had been largely absent from view even during Gujarat and played an overall low profile, thus deemed to be ‘finished’, proved in this situation that it had learned its

⁷⁷⁷ Star Plus executive, Interview II/43.

⁷⁷⁸ See Shiv Visvanathan, 2004, Politics as Soap: The Emptiness of India’s Elections, in: *The Times of India*, May 01.

⁷⁷⁹ Nilanjana Bhaduri Jha, 2004, BJP star parade. The more the merrier, in: *The Times of India*, April 20.

⁷⁸⁰ *The Times of India*, November 15, 2003: *Kyunki Tulsi ab politician hogi*.

⁷⁸¹ *The Times of India*, March 24, 2004: HC okays poll ads on TV; *The Statesman*, February 10, 2004: PM justifies ad blitz.

⁷⁸² See P. Sainath/Mohammed Yousuf, 2004, The Feel Good Factory. A government-media joint venture, in: *Frontline*, February 28-March 12.

media-lessons by understanding that the only alternative to a totality of the image is the total refusal of the image. The election campaign of the Congress, carried out with a focus on rural areas and smaller towns and reported only by now almost subversive magazines like *Frontline*, was probably the least visible and the most effective ever, as it worked, so to speak, at the backside of the media's attention and their enthrallment by visually attractive displays. At the same did it prove that it had understood Modi's message of a primacy of the economic by occupying exactly the topic of social economic development and distribution which the BJP's campaign excluded.

It was the Congress' invisible campaign, and its victory in the elections, that exposed the BJP's (non-)agenda – and the media themselves⁷⁸³ –, and it took the considerable risk of losing everything. Its learned media- and social economic-lessons point towards a re-invention (and de-ideologising) of the Congress, and thus its dynamic ability, that the BJP did not account for and that has since also generated a tentative re-invention of the social state. An account of the NDA's actual policies and legal initiatives comes down to nothing much more than a draconian application of POTA against the Muslim minority, various attempts to change the Constitution and well-targeted legal measures to its own advantage. Compared to that seems the Congress to have understood, even though with difficulties (see 3.2.), that the state can also, and ultimately has to, work on behalf of its citizens. The implementation of a 27% quota for OBCs in higher education, the promotion of Mandal 2 (the expansion of the reservation scheme into the private sector – including television), the instalment of the Sachar Committee in order to probe into reservations for Muslims⁷⁸⁴, the advancement of cheap loans for underprivileged students and farmers, the focus on irrigation schemes in the rural areas etc. emphasise not only the indispensability of the state but also to the difference that party politics still makes.

However, as much as the flipside of an intolerant ideology need not be tolerant, neglects the impression that the Congress victory implies that 'things are back to normal', or, as a friend of mine said, "the spook is over", the overall de-ideologised scenario that the various re-inventions of the Sangh Parivar and now of the Congress have generated. While it might be that the Congress was also voted for out of ideological reasons, it is quite likely that an NDA-government that would have provided more realistic and perceivable economic prospects for broader sections of the society would have won the elections irrespective of its basic

⁷⁸³ See *Times of India*, May 14, 2004: Voters shined, even of BJP, media did not.

⁷⁸⁴ See *Outlook*, November 27, 2006: India counts its new Dalits.

ideology. The BJP seems to have seen this point at the last minute, trying to advance its developmental achievements and embarking on various yatras particularly to woo the Muslim electorate, but could not any more capitalise on that. The idea that Hindu nationalism is a temporary phenomenon that will vanish in due time, though, is mirrored in the perception that Hindu-Muslim riots are ‘uncontrollable’ eruptions of cultural differences. Chetan Bhatt in particular has shown how deeply ingrained and settled Hindu nationalist thinking is historically in India’s political and social fabric (including the media), and if the various ‘waves’ of Hindutva have brought forward anything it is that they have established the BJP, despite its current impasse, as the only serious alternative to the Congress on the national level, thus also somewhat giving expression to its actual historical role. While so far it has been presumed that it was the Congress’ failures and own involvement in Hindu nationalism that has paved the way for Hindutva’s rise, the tables have been turned insofar as it was an over-present and, as the RSS and the VHP saw it, a diluted Hindutva that had compromised too much on its core ideology, which has this time paved the way for the Congress’ re-invention. Under these new preconditions of mutuality pragmatic alliances as well as ideological disputes seem to work themselves out, as indicated in 8.2., foremostly on the regional level, where decentralised Hindutva outfits compete and well as form coalitions with those split-offs of secular parties (like the Janata Dal (Secular) in Karnataka) and the Congress (like Sharad Pawar’s NCP in Maharashtra) that are willing to align themselves with them.

If this marks a trend regarding the national level remains to be seen, and it is under these circumstances of de-ideologised mutuality difficult to outline the options of the national BJP regarding its next re-invention after its visual repertoire has, at least temporarily, been used up. While the new dynamics of the Congress will complicate the BJP/Sangh Parivar’s traditional route of representing itself as the democratising and active force against a Congress that is set as monolithic and overpowering, its main topics, anti-minorityism, a strong anti-liberal state and a de-politicised citizenry, are as valid as ever and can also not be ignored by the Congress, evidenced, for instance, in the repeal of POTA that was merely replaced by the older but equally controversial version of TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act) and the perpetuation of the ‘Shining India’-motif under only slightly changed premises.⁷⁸⁵ The reverence of Narendra Modi in some circles of the Sangh Parivar as the embodiment of the future leader tells in this context about the significance of

⁷⁸⁵ See *Hindustan Times*, November 15, 2006: Epic in the Making.

the shift towards ‘economic populism’ that Modi has brought about⁷⁸⁶, and much will depend in this regard on the Assembly elections in Gujarat (due in late 2007). At the same time might the current courting of the lower middle classes and the underprivileged, who have mainly decided the 2004-elections, by the Congress as much as by parts of the Sangh Parivar (the RSS, for instance, proposed the Hindu community be organised under Dalit leadership)⁷⁸⁷ motion before long a frustrated middle class, whose anxieties the K-formula reflected and aggravated but the elections hardly soothed, back to the poll stations in the 2009-elections.

As far as the media, and particularly television are concerned, I have tried to show that they have decisively supported this process of de-ideologising, which I have sketched as the ‘backside’ of democratisation, through their own commercialisation that is basically adaptive to the projection of an ideal image as much as it is to its deconstruction. While it is thus in form always a step ahead of politics, the development has also emphasised that the media are – despite or because of their ‘liberated existence’ – hardly advancing politics but tend to be mainly reactive to it, which can be seen as an indication that India has also in this respect reached the (current) ‘global standard’. As much as the K-formula cannot be dissociated from the latest height of the Sangh Parivar’s appeal, the ensuing fashion of reality shows – another new format on Indian television – after (and not before) the elections can be read in the context of its impasse. And while the continuing popularity of the K-soaps virtually mirrored the dissolution of the ideal image and the de-ideologising in the political arena, the appointment of contemporary Hindi cinema superstar Shah Rukh Khan, after a second relay with AB, as the new host for the third relay of *KBC* can be seen as being reflective of the return of the “psychotic hero”⁷⁸⁸ of the 1990s, who lacks – in contrast to AB’s ‘gravitas’ and composure – the certainty of the self and the charisma of leadership, thus signifying that the ‘moral guide’ can, for the time being, be done without. Like the ‘return of the Congress’, this seems to suggest a ‘second liberation’ of the media, but at the same time points to their growing basic political indifference. Whereas Doordarshan, in its decision to screen the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*, did not care about contributing to a political agenda, commercial television does not care – either way - about Hindutva.

⁷⁸⁶ See Saba Naqvi Bhaumik, 2006, Manna for Modi. A BJP in disarray leaves the centre stage vacant for Gujarat CM, in: *Outlook*, September 04.

⁷⁸⁷ *The Statesman*, July 24, 2006: RSS sees Dalit virtues.

⁷⁸⁸ Mazumdar, 2000.

Finally, while the processes I have tried to describe here are in many ways specifically Indian developments, they are also, as far as the introduction of television formats is concerned, actualised repetitions of what occurred in the West, but particularly in the US, in the 1980s, thus illuminating, on the one hand, the growing proximity between the two systems – and the receding significance of Europe - especially regarding their strong class differences, indicating what I would call a structural Americanisation of India that exceeds the media sector. On the other hand can these developments, particularly the ‘soap operatisation’ of political reporting and the tendency of closing in on domestic problems and topics – in the news as much as in entertainment (and their increasing merger) - be seen as representing a global trend in themselves insofar as they describe the struggle of and for the nation-state and its image.

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Glossary

<i>Aarti</i>	ritual, often at the end of a <i>puja</i> , during which light and camphor are offered on a tray to the deity
<i>Ashram</i>	from Sanskrit <i>aashraya</i> ('protection'), also used for places of learning and schools
<i>Azad</i>	free
<i>Bahu</i>	daughter-in-law
<i>Bandh</i>	lit. 'close'; general strike
<i>Bhakti</i>	spiritual form of loving devotion to different deities in Hinduism
<i>Brahmin</i>	highest caste of priests and scholars in the <i>varna</i> -system
<i>Crore</i>	Rps 10 million
<i>Dalit</i>	from Marathi <i>dal</i> , 'held under check' or 'crushed'; person outside ('below') the <i>varna</i> -system, formerly called 'untouchable' or, in Gandhi's terminology, 'harijan' (child of god), today considered patronising
<i>Dargah</i>	Islamic (Sufi) shrine
<i>Darshan</i>	moment of visual encounter and interaction with a deity or guru
<i>Dharam Sansad</i>	religious parliament
<i>Ghazal</i>	originally Urdu form of couplet-based poetry and lyrics in songs
<i>Goonda</i>	gangster
<i>Guru</i>	teacher
<i>Jagran</i>	devotional chanting in Hinduism
<i>Jai Shri Ram</i>	'Hail to Lord Ram'
<i>Janmabhoomi</i>	place of birth
<i>Kar sevak</i>	volunteer (term for Sangh Parivar-volunteers active in the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement)
<i>Kshatriya</i>	second-highest caste of warriors and the nobility in the <i>varna</i> -system
<i>Kurta Pyjama</i>	clothing (traditionally for males), consisting of a long loose cotton or silk shirt with matching trousers
<i>Lakh</i>	Rps. 100 000
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	lit. 'people's congregation'; Lower House in the Indian Parliament

<i>Mahabharat</i>	lit. <i>Great India</i> (containing the <i>Bhagavad Gita</i>), known to be the world's longest epic poem (with in its longest form over 74 000 verses) and to have developed in layers since the 6 th century BC; its core story is one of brotherhood warfare that describes the dynastic struggle between the clans of the Kauravas and the Pandavas for the throne of Hastinapur (in today's Uttar Pradesh); it culminates in the great battle of Kurukshetra, marking the beginning of <i>Kali Yuga</i> , the age of moral decay
<i>Mandala</i>	paintings, often from differently coloured sand, expressing cosmic patterns or charts
<i>Mandir</i>	Hindu temple
<i>Mangalsutra</i>	long necklace of gold and sometimes black beads indicating a Hindu woman's married status and devotion to her husband
<i>Marwari</i>	influential trading community, originally from the kingdom of Mewar, Rajasthan, mainly belonging to the Kshatriya caste
<i>Masjid</i>	mosque
<i>Moksha</i>	liberation from the circle of death and rebirth (ultimate goal in Hinduism, directly pursued by <i>sadhus</i>)
<i>Namaaz</i>	Muslim prayer
<i>Nawab</i>	termed originally the provincial governors in the Mughal Empire, later also a high title for Muslim nobles
<i>Navarasa</i>	lit. 'nine expressions', basic array of mimic and bodily expressions in Indian classical dance and theatre
<i>Panchayat</i>	originally an assembly (<i>jat</i>) of the five (<i>panch</i>) village elders, panchayats represent today the elected local governing and adjudicating level
<i>Pracharak</i>	full-time unmarried RSS-volunteer
<i>Puja</i>	Hindu prayer
<i>Ramayan</i>	lit. <i>travels</i> (or <i>way</i>) <i>of Ram</i> ; Hindu epic that developed – with around 24 000 verses – a little later than the <i>Mahabharat</i> and has been centrally attributed to the poet Valmiki (ca. 100 BC), but exists in myriad versions all over India (for instance in sung folk theatre in the form of the <i>Ramlila</i>); its core story is focussed on Ram, one of the four sons that

king Dashrath of Ayodhya has with his three wives Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. Because Kaikeyi wants her own son Bharat enthroned, Ram is exiled to the forest for fourteen years and is accompanied by his wife Sita and his younger brother Lakshman. In the forest Sita is abducted by the demon-king Ravan of Lanka and after long persecution is freed by Ram with the help of the monkey god Hanuman. After Sita has to prove her chastity to Ram by going through a fire ritual, Ram and Sita return to Ayodhya where Ram is crowned, representing ideal rule

<i>Quawali</i>	Islamic devotional song
<i>Rashtra</i>	country or nation (diverting from <i>desh</i> – land)
<i>Rath Yatra</i>	annual major Hindu festival in Puri, Orissa, associated with the god Jagannath ('master of the universe'), an incarnation of Krishna, and his brother and sister, in which massive carts are used to transport the deities; appropriated as a term by L.K. Advani (BJP/RSS) for his 10 000 km travel from Somnath/Gujarat to Ayodhya in 1990
<i>Rajya Sabha</i>	lit. 'states' congregation'; Upper House in the Indian Parliament
<i>Rishta</i>	(intra-family) relation, bonding
<i>Saas</i>	mother-in-law
<i>Sadhu</i>	from Sanskrit <i>sadhana</i> (practise); Hindu ascetic (usually member of a sect)
<i>Salwaar Kameez</i>	female clothing; long, often applicated dress worn over trousers together with a matching <i>dupatta</i> (chest-covering shawl)
<i>Sangathan</i>	organisation of Hindu unity
<i>Sant</i>	religious teacher or <i>guru</i> , actually in the non-brahmin, anti-sectarian and bhakti-influenced tradition
<i>Sanyasi</i>	Hindu monk (from Sanskrit <i>samniyasa</i> – renouncement)
<i>Sarsanghchalak</i>	'supreme organiser' (ideological leader) of the RSS
<i>Satyagraha</i>	Gandhian concept of, lit., 'truth force'; passive resistance
<i>Shakha</i>	branch or local office (term used by the RSS and the Shiv Sena for their local outfits)
<i>Shankaracharya</i>	head priest of a Hindu monastery (<i>peeth</i>) or sect
<i>Swadeshi</i>	'self-sufficiency', economically based anti-British movement
<i>Swami</i>	Sanskrit, lit. 'owner of oneself', honorary title for Hindu scholars

<i>Swayamsevak</i>	RSS-volunteer
<i>(Triple) Talaq</i>	lit. 'I divorce you'; term that effects, spoken three times by the husband within the time span of three months, according to Muslim Personal Law, his divorce from his wife
<i>Tilak</i>	mark on the forehead worn by practising Hindus or on religious occasions
<i>Trishul</i>	trident, emblem of the god Shiva
<i>Varna</i>	from Sanskrit 'colour' or 'class', referring to the colour of skin and the hierarchical order of the four main castes (Brahmins, Kashtriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras)
<i>Vaishya</i>	caste of merchants, artisans and landowners in the <i>varna</i> -system
<i>Yagna</i>	Vedic ritual of sacrifice
<i>Yatra</i>	procession or pilgrimage
<i>Zamindar</i>	from Persian 'holder of real estate'; landowner entitled to collect tax

List of Abbreviations and Organisations

AB	Amitabh Bachchan
AIMPLB	All India Muslim Personal Law Board (short mostly MPLB)
AIR	All India Radio
Bajrang Dal	'Hanuman's Team' (action force of the VHP)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CM	Chief Minister
CNN	Cable News Network (USA)
CP	Congress Party
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist); split-off from the CPI, governs West-Bengal since more than 25 years
DD	Doordarshan
DV	Digital Video
EC	Election Commission
INTAM	Indian Television Audience Measurement (one of the two leading organisations in India that determine TRPs, the other one being TAM)
ISI	Inter Services Intelligence (Pakistan's intelligence service)
JKLF	Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front
<i>KBC</i>	<i>Kaun Banega Crorepati (Who Wants to Be a Millionaire)</i>
MSO	Multi-System Operator (umbrella of cable operators)
NBC	National Broadcasting Corporation (USA)
NCP	National Congress Party (split-off of the Congress in Maharashtra)
NDA	National Democratic Alliance (coalition under the leadership of the BJP, in government 1998-2004)
NDTV	New Delhi Television (news production house)
NFTII	National Film and Television Institute of India
OB-van	Outside Broadcasting-van (for mobile transmissions)
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PAC	Provincial Armed Constabulary

PM	Prime Minister
Prasar Bharati	Broadcasting Corporation of India
POTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Corps of Volunteers)
Sangh Parivar	'Family of Organisations' (cooperative Hindu nationalist network of RSS, BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal, and Shiv Sena)
SC/ST	Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes
SEC	Social Economic Classification (scheme applied in advertising in order to define target groups)
Shiv Sena	'Shivaji's Army' (regional Hindu nationalist organisation in Bombay and Maharashtra, referring to the Maratha king Shivaji (1630-1680))
TRP	Television Rating Point
UCC	Uniform Civil Code
UPA	United Progressive Alliance (under leadership of the Congress Party, in government since 2004)
VCD	Visual Compact Disc
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council)

Appendix

Ownership of Broadcasters and Chronology of their Appearance in India

- 1959 Television arrives in India as a ‘present’ from the Dutch electronics company Philips in course of an electronics exhibition in Delhi and falls – under provision of the Telegraph Act (1885) - automatically under the control of the state
- 1975 Television operates as a small subdivision of All India Radio (AIR) and is, with modest test-broadcasts and internationally supported programmes (through the UNESCO and the Ford Foundation), more or less kept in limbo under Nehruvianism
- 1975-1977 Emergency under Indira Gandhi’s Prime Ministership. Between 1975 and 1976, Gandhi instructs, in cooperation with the NASA, the first satellite-bound television broadcasts – the so-called Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) – to 2400 villages in six states; in 1976 Doordarshan is established as a self-sufficient broadcaster that operates from Delhi and different regional centres (‘kendas’) under tight government control
- 1980-1990 Forceful extension, first under Indira, then under Rajiv Gandhi, of a satellite-supported terrestrial ‘national network’, incorporation of advertising and privately produced programming, increasing focus on growing middle class audiences; growth of an unregulated cable operator network that offers Hindi and Western films as well as first experiments with locally produced news
- 1991 Cable operators catch the signals of CNN’s Gulf War transmissions. Shortly after entry of Star TV (Satellite Television Asian Region), at the time owned by Li-Ka Shing (a Hong Kong-based business man), on a satellite platform offering Star Plus, Star Movies, MTV, BBC World, and Prime Sports, rapid dissemination by cable operators
- 1993 Rupert Murdoch (News Corporation) acquires the controlling shares of Star TV

- 1994 Murdoch enters into a 49/51% contract with Zee TV, the first private, nationally oriented broadcaster in Hindi
- 1995 Sony Entertainment Television (Sony), part of Columbia Entertainment, launches a predominantly Hindi language channel; at the same time most globally receivable Western channels become, in addition to a growing variety of regional channels, part of the bouquet offered by cable operators (ESPN, HBO, Hallmark, Disney, National Geographic, Animal Planet, Cartoon Network, BBC World etc.)
- 1997 Zee TV launches India's first news channel, Zee News; Star TV enters a contract with NDTV, a Delhi-based news production
- 1999 Zee TV buys back Star TV's shares in it, enabling the latter to offer Hindi language programming
- 2000 Star Plus 'relaunches' with Hindi language programming, consisting mainly of the 'K-formula', the Indian avatar of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire (Kaun Banega Crorepati)* and a number of Indian soap operas, the titles of which overwhelmingly begin with the letter 'K' (bringing the production house Balaji Telefilms into a near-monopolist position;
the India Today Group launches its first 24-hour news channel in Hindi, Aaj Tak (Up until now), which quickly turns into a new model for news television
- 2003 the Indian government (under the BJP) declares a 26% limit of foreign ownership in Indian news channels;
Murdoch terminates the contract with NDTV and launches Star News Hindi in cooperation with the Ananda Bazaar Patrika, a Calcutta-based newspaper corporation;
NDTV sets up three own channels, NDTV 24x7 (English), NDTV India (Hindi), and NDTV Profit;
India Today launches the English partner channel of Aaj Tak, Headlines Today;
Sahara, an Indian corporation, launches Sahara Samay, a project that is to include increasingly news channels in regional languages

- 2005 Rajdeep Sardesai, after leaving NDTV, launches CNN IBN and IBN 7 in cooperation with CNN;
- 2006 NDTV announces its cooperation with Dharma Productions, a Hindi film production house, in order to launch its first entertainment channel; The Times of India launches its own news channel, Times Now; other Hindi-language news channels, like channel 7 and Janmat, are set up