Consuming Audiences?

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*Between the Normal and the Imaginary: The Spectator-Self, the Other and Satellite Television in India**

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... But one thing is certain after the introduction of the cable [television] . . . the fights between the neighbors have definitely reduced. That is for sure. Everybody is at home—everybody in their respective homes. They watch programs, they don't sit outside. Otherwise they [the women] would sit outside . . . remove lice from each other's heads and along with the lice, out would come all the stories, the gossip . . . [laugh] and that would start off fights . . . with the cable, all that is gone . . . much less fighting. . . . (F, Interview 9)

This is an attempt at beginning to answer, in a small, fragmented and partial way, the broad question of how global capital, as a cultural phenomenon mediated by satellite television, is negotiated by the diverse audiences that constitute the growing urban middle class in India in the post-liberalization period. The liberalization process, involving a dismantling of-state controls over the industry, foreign trade, and investment, was initiated in the mid-1980s by the Rajiv Gandhi government. It gathered momentum with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program, in July 1991.[1]

Satellite television is perhaps one of the most pervasive fall-outs of this phenomenon of globalization. The authors consider India a test case of what happens when the skies are "opened" to a large number of satellite networks, for, until the decade of the 1990s, in a country of 960 million people, there was only one state-sponsored channel. The notion of agency of the viewer assumes significance in such a scenario, which in India is invariably regarded as a "cultural invasion from the skies." In the process of exploring the complex relationships between audiences and television, this paper attempts to short circuit the debate concerning active versus passive audiences (and omnipotent media institutions) by pointing to the possibility that it is precisely this feeling of "agency" that constitutes a spectator-self and facilitates its assimilation into larger matrices of power. The spectator-self is the sum total of the strategic, sometimes conflicting subject positions that the viewer occupies in order to negotiate his/her identity as a continuum vis-à-vis the televisual discourse.

Drawing on unstructured interviews and discussions with families in Bombay,[2] the paper also aspires to map out some dimensions of the fluid terrain on which identities are constructed and reproduced within urban popular culture in India. The process of constituting the spectator-self in contradistinction to television is effected by constructing "others," both above and below the spectator-self, and by demarcating the boundaries across the "imaginary" and the "normal." The spectator-self appears to yo-yo between these coordinates.

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[1]For a critical discussion of the implications of this process, see Singh, 1993, and Ghosh, 1994.

[2]A series of nine interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with families and groups of youth, between March and September 1996, in two neigbborhoods in Bombay, one a lower-middle-class slum locality in North Bombay, and the other, a relatively affluent housing colony in Central Bombay. The families were chosen with two criteria in mind, the first being cable connectivity and the second, the need to represent various linguistic/ethnic/religious communities. For a profile of discussion groups, refer to Appendix 1. The discussions dealing with themes such as perceptions of satellite television and uses of TV were recorded, transcribed, and translated. They were coded and analyzed by the authors.

THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

Television in India was introduced in the 1960s as a state-run experiment, intended as a purveyor of educational and developmental messages. The rhetoric of development continued to characterize the functioning of Doordarshan (DD), the state-owned television network, through the 1970s and early 1980s; its reach remained limited. The first major expansion of DD took place in the 1980s, with satellite-based transmission. The logic of development-as-state program was substituted with the logic of marketing development and development as market expansion (Monteiro, 1993; Monteiro and Jayasankar, 1994). This process of going commercial allowed for the entry of private production companies and sponsorship by business houses, under state control. There was a circumscribed space, defined by the moral and political imperatives of the state, within which private, commercial producers could operate. This state control was most apparent and perhaps most resisted by viewers in the case of the news (Monteiro and Jayasankar, 1994; Jayasankar and Monteiro, 1998).

The expansion of DD facilitated the circulation, by the state, of a pan-Indian culture and an "Indian" identity organized around the primacy of consumption, the privileging of the modern, urban middle-class nuclear family, the conflation of the "Indian" with upper caste, Hindi-Hindu culture, and the acceptance of the "pastoral power" of the state (Foucault, 1986; Nandy, 1989). The strategies invoked by viewers to negotiate their own identities in relation to the subject positions normalized by DD have been explored elsewhere (Monteiro, 1993).

Until the inception of cable and satellite television in the 1990s, DD had only one channel and a second channel for the four metros in the country. In the 1990s, as liberalization gathered momentum, cable and satellite television proliferated. At the end of March 1995, of the approximately 46 million households, 30 million were in urban areas and 16 million, in rural areas. Of the former, a third, 10 million, were connected to cable and satellite channels (Audience Research Unit, Doordarshan, 1995). The Indian identity produced by DD encountered an intensified circulation of the cultural artifacts of Bollywood[3] and the marketing of a range of newly emerging subject positions, spawned by advertising, and new genres such as the music videos, the chat show, the American soap, and so on. DD countered the threat of its diminishing popularity among urban audiences with a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, it encouraged more Bollywood film-based programming; on the other, it revised its strategy of unitary pan-Indian programming by

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[3]The Bombay Hindi film industry is popularly known as Bollywood (as opposed to Hollywood) and the fare dished out projects a "pan-Indian" character.

establishing regional channels in most of the major Indian languages.[4] The discussions with audiences show that these regional channels are popular, particularly among the older viewers in the cities, many of whom are first-generation migrants. With the success of DD's regional channels, several regional language channels have emerged, particularly in the South Indian languages.[5] The availability of these channels has created diasporic viewer collectivities across the country. The regional and the national are not mutually exclusive and viewers slide between these identities effortlessly:

> V: One thing is for sure . . . people do watch Hindi films, songs . . . everybody irrespective of their regional background . . . they do watch these programs . . . Philips Top Ten and Countdown programs. Another thing is when they watch programs in their language . . . cable helps them establish their regional identity . . . that is certain. . . . (family discussion 6)

In an attempt to draw the boundaries of local identities even tighter, the local cable providers have started producing relatively amateurish programs on community events and news in Bombay. They have also introduced "interactive" game shows such as "Tele-housie,"[6] which are becoming increasingly popular.

India has one of the largest indigenous film industries in the world and cinema is an integral part of urban popular culture, with a wide reach in rural India as well. Hindi films have a market not only in the subcontinent, but also in the Middle East and the African countries. This popular culture mediates and refracts the entry of global culture via satellite television. For instance, direct imports of Hollywood films dubbed in Hindi have, with some exceptions, fared poorly at the box office. Locally generated clones of Hollywood films and American serials have to translate the narratives into local idioms that are culturally relevant. This imperative to be responsive to the sensibilities of audiences operates more strongly in the case of cinema, which, given the economics of the film industry, needs to draw mass audiences across the country. For example, almost every film

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[4]India has 16 languages that are recognized by the Constitution, in addition to Hindi, which is the national language.

[5]The South Indian languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam have film industries probably as large as Bollywood.

[6]Tele-Housie is a game in which each household is given a card with a series of numbers on it. The organizer of the show draws out numbers by lot, which are announced on the program. The viewers have to cancel the individual numbers from their card. The top winner is the first one to complete the card. There are other consolation prizes, too. There are several local variants of this game.

has to pay homage to the primacy of the patriarchal family and other traditional kinship ties, however "modern" its situations and characters might be. In contradistinction, given the segmentation of television audiences, televisual representations tend to be more diffused and contradictory, at times allowing for a questioning of familial norms. However, even here, popular American soap operas, such as "Santa Barbara" and "Beverly Hills 90210," have a relatively limited viewership, not merely because of the unfamiliar language, but also because of the alien cultural context.[7]

There are close interlinkages between television and cinema in the Indian context. Television becomes a major source for the dissemination of films and film-based programming and constituted a major reason for families to opt for cable and satellite television. Cable providers have channels that primarily disseminate films, whereas satellite television offers both films and other genres of programming:

Daughter: We are not so interested in films . . . now we are tired of films . . . it's just a time pass. . . .

Mother: Earlier, it was because of the films that we got the cable connection. Why go and stand in long queues and end up buying tickets in the black. . . . With the cable we can all sit at home and watch the film. Later, with the increasing number of channels . . . we are more interested in this, than in cable. . . . (family discussion 8)

A cross-fertilization of styles and genres across television and cinema appears to be taking place; film song picturization, an essential feature of popular Indian cinema, has been influenced by television commercials and music videos, count-down programs for Hindi film songs, and game shows based on film music are among the most popular television genres.

In the postliberalization period, the extension of cable and satellite television has become a major strategy for the expansion of global markets and consumer culture,[8] not only among the newly emergent prosperous and burgeoning middle classes, but also among relatively disenfranchised and increasingly marginalized sections of the urban populace. This reproduction of consumer culture takes place through several genres and strategies: advertising and telemarketing, game shows based on finance and commodities, soaps and film extravaganzas that celebrate conspicuous consumption, commercial sponsorship of

[7]Star Television Network (owned by Rupert Murdoch) experimented with dubbing its soaps like "The Bold and the Beautiful" into Hindi, however, with little success. It has recently reserved its prime time for programs in Hindi.

[8]Morley foregrounds the need to conceive of television viewing as both ritual and ideological practice (Morley, 1991).

popular television shows and films, marketing of sports and other events. All these strategies foreground the creation of identities defined primarily in terms of consumption and utilize dominant cultural motifs to surcharge commonplace products with incongruent value.[9] In so doing, on the one hand, they create a climate for the consumption of upmarket branded products and on the other, a burgeoning underworld of unbranded surrogates (popularly known as "duplicates"), which illegally carry a reputed brand name, or a clever cognate of the name.[10] More than products per se, what is being sold are lifestyles that transcribe modern consumption strategies in terms of popular traditions of celebration and consumption. Festivals like *Diwali* or *Dassera* afford opportunities for sustained marketing hype and frenzied consumption. As though unsatisfied with this, culturally alien, "modern" festivals such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day are becoming a part of the urban upper-class imagination, generating ever new terrains of consumption.

> K: Earlier there was a limit . . . to lead a good life . . . one needs so much . . . not any more . . . now one needs everything . . . many, many things.
> J: It is increasing day by day . . . (youth group 1)

The 1990s have witnessed the phenomenal growth of the Hindu right-wing political parties, which have succeeded in making significant electoral gains. The Hindu right rode to victory on the plank of restoring the mythical glory of Hindu tradition and cleansing Indian society of the pollution of Western culture.[11] Nevertheless, it was the extension of commodity culture and the proliferation of communication technologies that played a crucial role in the packaging and marketing of the new brand of *Hindutva* (Hinduness), invented by the Hindu right.[12] Today, several

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[9]Appadurai (1990), explores the notion of consumption as "eminently social, relational, and active rather than, private, atomic or passive." In other words, consumption becomes a mode of communication, a means of "sending" and "receiving social messages" (Appadurai, 1990: 31).

[10]We are indebted to Arvind Rajagopal for drawing this point to our attention.

[11]Some constituents of this coalition, such as Shiv Sena, have, nevertheless, ruthlessly utilized their new-found power to forge a nexus between their political agenda and that of the multinational conglomerates. The latest among other controversies is Shiv Sena's patronage of Michael Jackson's concert in Bombay, the proceeds of which are supposed to go to an arm of the party. It is interesting that the supremo of the party, Bal Thackeray, though no office bearer in the Shiv Sena-led government in Maharashtra, calls himself the "remote control"!

[12]See Rajagopal, 1994, for an insightful study of the place of communal discourse within commodity culture, in particular, the role of national television in creating a Hindu identity.

Bollywood products celebrate this marriage between consumer culture, upper-caste Hindu "tradition" and nationalist identity;[13] mythological serials on the lives of Hindu gods and goddesses dominate prime time on many cable and satellite channels; politicians on the far right, who were considered to be on the lunatic fringe a decade ago have become respectable figures, featuring in talk shows and on the news. This Hinduization of popular culture is not as all-pervasive as the foregoing account might seem to indicate. The ethnocentric conflation of tradition with parochialism and modernity with tolerance also needs to be questioned. As our discussions bear out, some viewers who regard themselves as Westernized and modern are staunch supporters of the Hindu right. The intertwining of the local and the global, as mediated by satellite television and interpreted by viewers situated in domestic time and space, is a complex, ever-changing matrix.

THE REMOTE CONTROL

As opposed to popular Indian cinema, satellite television, both through its very entry into the domestic space as well as through the nature of its programming, has resulted in a renegotiation of familial relations and has caused a moral panic among many parents:

> Mother: . . . we are always living in fear . . . on Star Plus and Star Movies, there are hardly any good films. There is always a fear that if children are at home alone and they switch on Star Plus, etc. . . . these channels show all rubbish. . . . We are worried when we go out of the house . . . we feel tense. . . . (Family discussion 8)

More than the effects of screen violence, parents are perturbed about the corrupting influence of sexually explicit programming on their offspring. In an environment where discussion of sex between the generations offends the codes of decency, watching television together as a family becomes an act potentially fraught with peril:

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[13]Rustom Bharucha, 1995, in his analysis of the popular Hindi film "Hum Aapke Hain Koun?" points out that the film represents, with fetishized intensity, the pleasures of familial rituals—a quintessential celebration of consumption on an obscenely lavish scale. In so doing, it reinscribes the discourses of religion and patriarchy, reaffirming the time-tested values of familial sacrifice and duty above all.

> R: I can't sit with my parents and watch Star Movies—I feel embar-
>   rassed!
> G: (Laugh) We really only watch under 15 films, when our parents
>   are there.
> S: I watch films on Star with my family at home. . . . I don't mind
>   and my parents know I am not going to go out . . . sometimes, I
>   feel a little uncomfortable . . . a little uneasy. I just scratch my
>   head or some such thing. . . . (Male youth group 2)

With the entry of satellite television and the availability of a large number of channels, differences in the tastes of family members, which were hitherto never a source of conflict, now generate struggles over the control of the remote control. This struggle for the control over viewing becomes, as it were, a struggle for recognition of one's personhood, one's identity as a spectator-self. This emerges particularly in discussions in which both fathers and children talk about how the mother is permitted her occasional hour of soap! Although daytime watching is a field of negotiation between the mother and/or the children, it is taken for granted, in most households, that when the father returns home, the remote becomes his possession! Though his stated preference might be for sports and news, he may relinquish his privilege in favor of any other member of the family.

> Q: *[Laugh] In every house there is an argument!*
> Daughter A: Yes, if he wants to see sports, I may want to see a film,
>   or if I want to see my serial, he may want to see anoth-
>   er serial. . . .
> Daughter B: And we cannot fight with Daddy . . . we have to see
>   what he sees. . . .
> Q: *He does not like serials . . . ?*
> Son: No, not at all. He does not like serials or films . . . just
>   once in a way . . . he sees it with us. How can he dis-
>   please his wife, so he watches Tara once a way
>   [laugh]! (Family discussion 8)

Some families, who have the resources, have resolved the problem by opting for a second television set. Interestingly, television commercials for 14-inch television sets market their product either as a panacea for family conflict or as permitting the creation of private individual spaces, connoting individual liberation, within the confines of the domestic space.

> Father G: Before I bought the second TV, there was a lot of dis-
>   cussion or in-fighting—I want to see this and that . . .
>   and I have always wanted to see news, and sports and

> my children wanted to see star and film-based and all
> such programs. . . . Before I got the second TV, we had
> time-sharing, this is your time—when I am at home, I
> am the master, and they have to give me one hour, of
> my TV time—my time for BBC news and some sports
> program—But after the second TV in my bedroom—
> there are no problems. . . . (Family Discussion 3)

In a certain sense, the kinds of resolutions arrived at by the household over time sharing embody the regime of discipline and relationships of power within the familial space. Satellite television offers a new site of resistance to parental authority.[14]

Television becomes a marker of the very matrix of power relations that defines familial space and epitomizes, in particular, the tensions between generations. It also presents, for some viewers, a possibility of reiterating and accounting for the change in familial relationships, of constituting themselves as a "modern" family.

Q: *You think people are changing attitudes?*

Daughter A : Yes, like my parents have changed their attitudes, like now you talk about, a particular scene on TV, I don't think it is so bad. . . . I can watch it with my parents— like it is not like earlier . . . switch off the TV . . . or change the channel or walk out of the room. Now I don't feel embarrassed or anything. . . .

Mother A: They can talk anything to us. . . .

Father A: I talk to my children a lot . . . which my parents have never spoken to me. . . .

Daughter A: Like the attitude of my parents about me going for a date—I really had never been told—don't do this or that. . . . (Family discussion 3)

THE "IMAGINARY" AND THE "NORMAL"

One of the basic coordinates for the spectator-self is the relationship between the "imaginary" and the "normal." DD, at least in some viewers'

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[14]Some of the other concerns that mediate television-viewing behavior are academic pressures. For the middle-class family, the secondary school leaving examination represents a warlike situation, that has to be combated by making their children slog at their studies. The common perception is that the child's entire career depends on the grades in this examination. The entire family gears up to meet the impending crisis and television is the first casualty of this process; many families even discontinue their cable and satellite television connection for that particular year.

accounts (*apna* or ours), comes reassuringly close to normalcy. Cable and satellite television, in contradistinction, are unknown, treacherous territory. A Muslim family (family 8), for instance, would not watch cable and satellite television during *Ramadan,* a month of abstinence, but would watch DD news![15] In its earlier avatar, DD was the counterpoint to popular cinema, which unlike the domesticated, "educative," staid DD, afforded "suspension of disbelief," an escape into a fantastic, larger-than-life world, which had to be sought, braving long queues in movie houses (Monteiro, 1993). Though DD has shifted its program strategy, with the onslaught of cable and satellite television, to cash in on the popularity of Bollywood, its reputation as the upholder of familial values has survived to some extent.

A new set of differences has replaced the earlier distinction between television and cinema. Indian popular cinema has come metonymically closer to the position of DD, and satellite television has probably come to occupy the position vacated by it, offering "imaginary" spectator positions that violate the "normal." Indian cinema, with its rabid avowal of patriarchal kinship positions, is in stark contrast to the promiscuous, nebulous cliffhangers of the soaps on satellite television. It is a well-worn formula, in Indian cinema, to ruthlessly disallow sexual subject positions extraneous to the monogamous (needless to say, heterosexual). If there is, for example, a love triangle, one of the characters conveniently gets killed towards the end of the film, leaving behind a monogamous, reassuring residue! The soaps, with their endless rounds of extramarital and premarital relationships, replete with children born out of wedlock, offer a sharp contrast. The talk show is another new genre that is redefining the boundaries of the private and the public.

> Daughter A: You know in these talk shows—so far everything was hidden, but now things have started coming out. It is like if it is there on TV . . . it is all so open, why can't we also—like Oprah Winfrey . . . like . . . if there it is so open, why can't it be like this in India? (family discussion 3)

With all this, the moral landscape of urban popular culture has become far more complex and problematic, engendering resistance of various kinds. It is not only the moral panic of the parents, which always existed vis-à-vis sexuality, that is significant here, but a schism that the spectator-self experiences in terms of not being able to adopt the positions offered by televisual images.

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[15]The genre most affected by satellite television is television news. News on DD had a very wide viewership, as it was watched as part of a single channel flow. Refer to Monteiro and Jayasankar, 1994, and Jayasankar and Monteiro, 1998, for a further discussion on the reception of news.

J: It [the styles in soaps] cannot be imitated . . . nobody tries to imitate . . . not in this area at least. Anybody who watches Tara . . . she has short hair and she wears a sleeveless blouse. . . . I don't think anybody in this area will even dream of imitating her—That's something that they think is all right for TV . . . it has nothing to do with us. . . . (youth group 1)

Sometimes the trappings become a part of the spectator-self, failing to touch an immutable inner core, that is seen to be governed by the normal. Most viewers feel that if at all the media exercise any influence on their lives, it is merely at the level of style, restricted generally to clothing and appearance. They are insistent on the fact that their behavior is determined by many other considerations, as there are social, community, and peer group norms that they have to comply with. Any change has to be accommodated within these norms.

R: We cannot think like them [characters in Western soaps]. We act like them. . . . We try to act like them. We cannot be that free as guys are or as teenagers are there—no never!
Q: So the V and MTV culture. . . .
R: We have been brought up like that, we should not try to act like somebody else. . . .
G : Even if I cut my hair short and wear earrings. . . . I cannot become someone in 90210 Beverly Hills. . . .
Q: We cannot become like them. . . . Are we under some pressure . . . or we don't want to . . . ?
S: No, I don't want to be like them. . . . (Male youth group 2)

For many housewives, caught in a humdrum, unromantic existence, with little familial recognition of their contribution or desires, watching soaps becomes not merely an escape but also an affirmation of their hidden anger, their revolt against the image of a good mother/wife, as this discussion with two women on the soap *Hazratein*[16] demonstrates:

[16]The basic narrative of the soap *Hazratein,* according to M, is as follows:

M: The protagonist of the serial—her mother was married to a man old enough to be her father, so she [the mother] eloped with a younger man. She [the protagonist] was brought up by her aunt and uncle. And she looks forward to a stable, married life. She finds a person of her choice and once she has a child, she feels like going out. She isn't educated, she has done her SSC. Her husband is a professor—he ridicules her, but somehow she finds a job, and is promoted. Then she starts liking her boss, who molds her way of thinking. He tells her to be more open about herself and everything about herself changes, once she meets her boss. . . . (female group 4)

D: In fact, I know of men who are against their wives watching it, because they think. . . .

M: They might get influenced!

D: They may turn rebellious because it is very true what they are showing . . .

M: . . . As women, everybody can identify with it, all the women I knew have been watching it—we always discuss—with other women—if we miss out one episode, we catch up with others.

D: I think if you watch the serial you don't feel guilty of your feelings, like you might be having some feelings which you don't want to show, but you see this program, you are not so ashamed . . . that guilt in you is little less. Okay like I am not the only one who has these feelings. . . . Like if the woman is giving in, she is accepted, but if she tries to rebel in any way, he tries to put her down some way or the other . . . that insecurity in men. . . . (female group 4)

The imaginary is also a space for women to explore forbidden subject positions as spectator-selves. This has bearing on Ang's discussion of the relationship between the world of reality and the world of fantasy:

> [Fantasy] is a dimension of subjectivity which is a source of pleasure *because* it puts "reality" in parenthesis, because it constructs imaginary solutions for real contradictions which in their fictional simplicity and their simple fictionality step outside the tedious complexity of the existing social relations of dominance and subordination. (Ang, 1985: 135, emphasis in original)

Popular Indian cinema with its mandate for preserving the patriarchal family has always had its "negative" women, clearly polarized against its "heroines," untainted by any signs of "evil." Actors/actresses tend to get typecast into set roles of hero/heroine or villain/vamp. DD's earlier soaps have tended to comply with this code. With the likes of "Santa Barbara" and "Dynasty" and their Indian counterparts, the line between the good and evil has become blurred. Women admit to secretly admiring "bad" women, who are seen as "strong," as opposed to "good" women, who are regarded as "wishy-washy."

Q: *What do you think about the negative characters being portrayed by women?*

M: Maybe, I think, it is a deep down . . . all women, at some point of time, want to be like vamps . . . negative . . . and they want to behave that way, but because of the upbringing we have had, we have to be good, even if we want to go out and slap some body . . . we are forced to be good, so, whatever of us that is

> repressed . . . when we see these negative characters on
> screen, we feel . . . what we could not do, she is doing. . . .
> (female group 4)

Indian marriages are generally arranged by the parents and relatives,
within the boundaries of caste, religion, and many other complex sys-
tems of kinship and belief. Generally, in Hindi films, interreligious/inter-
caste marriages are not common. The popular film "Bombay" (1995), set
against the backdrop of the Hindu-Muslim communal riots of 1992-93, in
Bombay, is a love story of a Hindu boy and a Muslim girl. The screen
representation of this transgressive relationship has been invoked by
some youth, who resist the norm:

> L: The incidence of love marriages is increasing . . . There is a
>   "dar-ingness" [sic] . . . I mean after seeing "Bombay" . . . a
>   Muslim girl and a Hindu boy—earlier one could not think of . . . .
> J: To be frank, he [pointing to L] has a Muslim girl friend and even
>   he [pointing to K] has a Muslim girlfriend, and they have started
>   thinking that there is nothing wrong in that. . . .
> K: But that is not because of that film.
> J: No, no. But you got this "daring" [sic] from the film. Now you
>   have realized that this is also possible. . . . (youth group 1)

To another group of youth, such a relationship is unthinkable. They do
not identify with the characters, but regard the film as merely an abstract
moral lesson in brotherhood. This is perhaps related to the deeply
ingrained stories of Muslim "atrocities," narrated to them by their elders,
who came to India as Hindu refugees during the India-Pakistan Partition
in 1947:

> S: What! A Muslim girl? Never—I will definitely not marry a
>   Muslim. . . .
> Q: *Somewhere you still think Muslims are different?*
> G: No, we only think that riots are unnecessary. . . .
> S: We should not fight. . . .
> G: Yes, we should not fight—it does not mean that we should be
>   too friendly to Muslims or marry Muslims, no, never!
> R: Any other religion, but not Muslims! (male youth group 2)

Given the current crisis gripping the Indian nation-state, and the growth
of the Hindu right, the Muslim has become all the more demonized by
the mainstream Hindu culture. The talk of Hindu-Muslim harmony
remains a pious platitude that does not impinge on everyday choices.
The discussions, with youth, on the film "Bombay" bear witness to the

varied readings and strategic uses that viewers construct in relation to the discourses of the mass media, which can not be deduced from a study of the discourses per se. The representations of the transgressive, the imaginary, would be invoked only in situations where they relate to immediate struggles, as also in the case of women for whom soaps like *Hazratein* become an assertion of their resistance, of their spectator-selves. In other words, the imaginary tends to be judged by the yardstick of the normal, in the process affirming the latter; the distinction between the imaginary and the normal blurs when viewers perceive a coincidence between the "agenda of the text" (Morley, 1996) and their own agendas. A mere textual analysis would not negotiate this coincidence. Having said that, this paper does not seek to romanticize the ability of readers to put the agenda of the text to consistently subversive uses, nor does it advocate the notion of a "semiotic democracy" (Fiske, cited in Morley, 1996).

THE OTHER ABOVE, THE OTHER BELOW

A crucial element of the constitution of the spectator-self is the invocation of dividing practices (Foucault, 1986), which involve the identification of a normal "us," in contradistinction to a deviant "them." These dividing practices invariably surface in viewers' accounts when the "effects" of cable and satellite television are explored. Middle-class viewers regard themselves as free agents, capable of consciously regulating and mediating their relation to the mass media; they regard the "impact" of the media on their own lives and selves as limited. In contrast, they posit a "them" below, who are vulnerable, unable to ward off the ill effects of media representations, often by virtue of their lack of "education" and "class".[17]

Q: What do you think—the influence of romantic or violent films. . . .
S: It only affects the others.
Q: Who are the others?
S: The uneducated people. . . .
G: . . . It is only the *wadiwalas* [the less affluent, who live in one
    room tenements], their way of talking changes . . . they will talk
    like *taporis* [loafers]. . . . (male youth group 2)

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[17]This dividing practice is at the heart of the discourses of development communication and the very notion of development (Monteiro, 1993).

As opposed to the "modern" other above, the other below is constructed as a "traditional" being. The other below is also defined by a lack of finesse, taste, and above all, lacking knowledge of English language:

> P: It is not the good crowd, that goes and watch these films, it is for. . . .
>
> N : The locals
>
> P: Yes, the vernacs [derogatory term for vernacular language speakers]—who watch these films . . .
>
> N: Even we watch, but we don't like it, when in the films, the crowd is whistling and clapping. . . . (female youth group 5)

Interestingly, this invocation of an educated elite "us" who can see through the crudity of the Hindi movie versus an uneducated, lower-class "them," who are swayed by the violence and glamour of Bollywood is but a replica of the dividing practice employed by the adult world in talking about youth. It appears that impact is something that happens to someone who is looked down upon, the less powerful! Age becomes another dimension along which flows of power are organized.

> J: I think action films are a bad influence. Children start thinking that violence is a solution.
>
> K: It is all about taking revenge, actually . . .
>
> J: Yes . . . they think that if you are violent, you will be the winner . . . the hero does it, so even we can do it. (youth group 1)

The availability of programming from the West on a hitherto unprecedented scale has influenced definitions of what is considered "cool" among upper-middle-class youth.[18] There are peer group pressures to keep up with the latest (read Western). Even those who come from families with limited acquaintance with Western music and other cultural artifacts, are compelled to conform to the norm.

> N: I feel it is very necessary to know about English music, if you are a part of a group, otherwise if others are discussing music, you really feel left out . . . if you don't know about some songs. . . . (female youth group 5)

Many would be ashamed to admit that they enjoy the products of Bollywood and the Hindi soaps, particularly male youth. Schwarzenegger is mentioned as one of the "cool guys"; male youth would aspire towards a physique like his.

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[18]The phenomenon of watching MTV, Channel V, and other English language channels appears to be restricted to educated, upper class youth.

S: Yes, we have become more Western . . .
R: I think it is because of the basic Western culture, this culture
     has come through the TV, through the media . . .
R: I think somewhere we are trying to look a little like them. . . .
Q: Like whom? Shahrukh Khan [a Bollywood actor]?
S: No, not the Hindi stars. . . .
G: [laugh] His haircut is like Arnold's [Schwarzenegger]. . . . (male
     youth group 2)

These youth are conjuring up an image of the "other above," located above Bollywood stars; the styles of the latter are only for the *taporis*. The stereotypical images of Western youth culture that appear on satellite television are difficult to emulate: "We cannot be that free as guys are or as teenagers are there [in the West]—no never. . . ." At one level, even when these youth claim that they do not choose to be like these Western stars, these claims appear to be tinged with a sense of envy.

THE SPECTATOR-SELF

The spectator-self is a position that emerges through a range of viewer strategies, including a process of "othering" and a negotiation with imaginary and normal subject positions. The axis of the normal and the imaginary intersects the relationships between the other above and the other below (Fig. 15.1). As the following discussion reveals, the spectator-self regards the other below as unable to situate itself as a knowledgeable entity vis-à-vis the televisual image; it can only posit those images as the unattainable imaginary that belongs to the world of the other above. On the other hand, the spectator-self, located somewhere between the other above and the other below, is able to see through the agenda of the text, the promise held forth by the imaginary.

D :   I think these serials are pushing us to take our own decision—I
      think it is like cajoling. . . .
M :   No, I don't think it is pushing anybody. There are many people
      who watch these serials who are not educated, not much for-
      ward [progressive] in their views . . . have not gone out in the
      world, so for them, it is something out of their reach. They can
      just watch the serial, watch the women. . . . Say, "Oh, how I wish
      I could be like these women," but they cannot be like those
      women. And other women who watch these women characters,
      it is okay for them, they are educated, financially secure and are
      not much carried away by these—they see the grey shades—
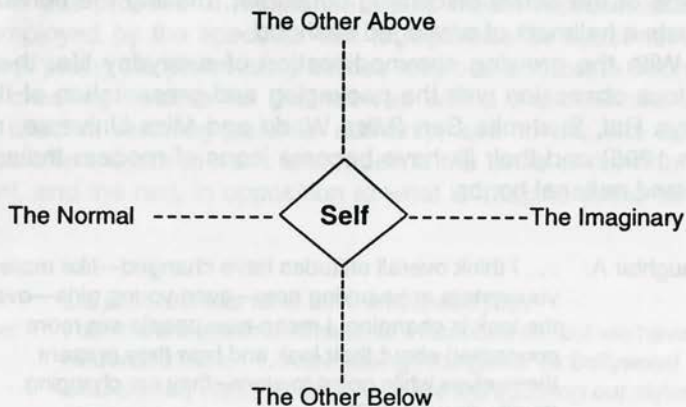   the others may see the white or black. The women whom they

The Other Above

The Normal --------< Self >--------The Imaginary

The Other Below

Figure 15.1. The site of the spectator-self

want to influence, may not be influenced because they are not in
a position to be influenced . . . and the others, they are not going
to be influenced . . . because they are aware . . . their awareness
level is quite high. . . . (female group 4)

Those women subjects, who should benefit from the influence of the
transgressive, are unable to make use of it, since they do not perceive
themselves as worthy of being influenced by it. It does not benefit the rest
either, because they are aware. In short, there is no point along these
axes that the spectator-self might occupy, where it would be affected by
the televisual discourse. The relative immutability of the spectator-self is a
recurrent theme in viewers' account about themselves. There are others,
and only others, who would suffer damage. In other words, the spectator-
self posits itself as a free agent, thus making this positioning an inclusive
proposition; every one seems to belong to this category. Their exclusivity,
in turn is guaranteed by "them," those who are corrupted by the televisual
discourse. The spectator-self is capable of setting its own agenda tran-
scending that of the text, whereas the malleable and impressionable
'other' succumbs to it, transforming itself irreversibly.

What comes out as primary in viewers' accounts is this notion of
agency: although the spectator-self is not devoid of constraints, there is
a sense that within this space there are choices to be made. Moreover,
the effects of television on the spectator-self are seen as under its con-
scious control. It is precisely this sense of agency that facilitates the
incorporation of the spectator-self into the consumer culture of the

postliberalization period in India. Many television commercials play on this theme of the active discerning consumer, making the consumption of products a hallmark of privileged selfhood.

With the growing commodification of everyday life, there is a tremendous obsession with the packaging and presentation of the self. Aishwarya Rai, Sushmita Sen (Miss World and Miss Universe, respectively, in 1995) and their ilk have become icons of modern Indian womanhood and national honor.

Daughter A: . . . I think overall attitudes have changed—like more youngsters are working now—even young girls—even the look is changing. I mean now people are more concerned about their look and how they present themselves while going to work—they are changing. . . . (family discussion 3)

These technologies of the self (Foucault, 1986) operate in an age where beauty queens in skimpy swim suits wax eloquent on how they want to save the children of the world or become like Mother Teresa. Appearance becomes paramount; giving the right answers, the key to success. This preoccupation with self-presentation pushes young people into streamlined modes of being.

K: There is a sort of competition . . .
L: It's like how many girls are looking at me . . . or even girls tend to think that way . . . how many boys are looking at us . . . [laugh]
J: I can say about cosmetics . . . girls do tend to . . . even if there is no money or they cannot afford it . . . they want to look good . . . have good nails . . . use something good on the face. (youth group 1)

Given this apparently all pervasive global consumer culture and the media institutions that reproduce it (refracted and rewritten, no doubt, in indigenized terms, but consumer culture, nevertheless), where are the spaces for resistance and what forms does this resistance take? On the one hand, the televisual discourse appears, by and large, to be reiterating and facilitating consensus formation in terms of the larger relations of power that make for ruthless, uneven growth of a capitalist market economy.[19] On the other hand, viewers appear to be invoking aspects of the

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[19]There are strands of resistance to consumerism and the redefinition of community and familial spaces, engendered by the media, which emerge in the accounts of older, first-generation working-class migrants.

against the power flows of their familial space, thus invoking a sense of agency in this process of resistance. Mass media representations are being employed by the spectator-self to legitimize its enactment of the imaginary: young people relating across religious and caste boundaries, women creating spaces for themselves within the confines of their homes, children resisting parental authority, and so on. The televisual discourse offers a site to mark and redefine the limits of the normal, the dominant, and the real, in opposition to what is imaginary, the other, the not-self.

Q: *Do you think that films have influenced you?*
Son: I don't know whether films have influenced us, but we have
          influenced films. . . . After seeing "Rangeela" [a Bollywood
          blockbuster] I felt that films have started adopting our styles
          of speaking. . . .
Mother: The film has imitated them. They have shown reality. . . .
          What is real in society. . . . (family discussion 8)

APPENDIX 1: PROFILE OF DISCUSSION GROUPS

1.   Youth group, four males and one female, age group 20-25, all unmarried and currently unemployed, living in a slum in North Bombay. Education: High school to bachelor's degree. Discussion in Hindi.

2.   Youth group, five males, age group 16-17, all students, living in a relatively affluent housing colony in Central Bombay. Discussion in English.

3.   Two families: family A, consisting of mother 36, two daughters, 13 and 15; family B, consisting of father 44, mother 41, daughter 20 and son 15. Both families are related and run a joint family business, living in a relatively affluent housing colony in Central Bombay. Discussion in English.

4.   Two women, M, housewife, with two young children, bachelor's degree in law, husband owns a travel agency. D, undergraduate, runs a business in fashion designing from home, two young children, husband is also a business man. Both living in a relatively affluent housing colony in Central Bombay. Discussion in English.

5.   Youth group, seven girls, in their teens, all students, living in a relatively affluent housing colony in Central Bombay. Discussion in English.

6.   Husband and wife, left-wing trade unionists and political activists, 46 and 43, three children in their twenties, living in a slum in North Bombay, Husband has a Ph.D., wife middle school. Discussion in Hindi and English.

7.   Family of husband, wife, and two sons and a daughter, husband runs a petty business, one-room tenement, in a slum in North Bombay. Discussion in Hindi.

8.   Family of mother in her mid-40s, two daughters and one son, all in their 20s, father owns small business, three-room tenement in a slum in North Bombay. Discussion in Hindi.

9.   Individual interview with retired blue collar worker, 65, first-generation migrant from South India, living in a slum in North Bombay. Discussion in Hindi.

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