

NOTIONS OF FAMILY, GENDER AND NATION

The Case of Indian Television Serial Kusum Lata

The study analyses the notions of 'family', 'gender' and 'nation' in Hindi serials on state-owned Doordarshan and the private satellite channels. There has been a considerable change in the treatment of these notions over time and space; especially in terms of these two broad institutional rubrics: the state-owned Doordarshan and the private satellite channels. The study reveals that there is a direct relationship between the larger socio-economic scenario and notions of family, gender and nation in serials. The socio-economic-political scenario got reflected in the changing patterns of story lines, hence the notions of family, gender and nation. In Indian context, the simultaneous emergence of two forces i.e. Hindutva and market, especially since 1980s, become the predominant factors to hegemonically characterize these notions.

A substantial portion of the study revolves around the argument that the notions of family, gender and nation in serials carry the colonial dilemma of modernity and traditionality. For this purpose the historicity of the Indian serials is traced within the broader purview of the Nehruvian agenda of modernity and the fall back to tradition in the wake of globalisation-privatisation-liberalisation (GPL). In this context, a detailed discussion is on the re-emergence of an old idiom *swadeshi* which was, though, used in the economic sphere in 90s but soon began to represent the debate on the moral controversies, especially with regard to the 'satellite revolution' and the 'rhetoric of cultural invasion from skies'. This is linked with the fall back to tradition and rigid gender roles in the *saas-bahu* serials.

Since 1990s when the "satellite television revolution" began in India the demand and pressures of both modernity and tradition again took centre stage in the public discourse in India. The opening of the economy to multinational corporations combined with the transnational broadcasting, generated much debate about the sustainability of Indian culture in the face of perceived rampant westernisation. The sudden changes brought by the liberalisation of the economic policies and the westernised television images being broadcast have created an atmosphere of uncertainty and a fear of neo-colonisation. The Hindu nationalists, capitalise on this fear of colonisation, fostering an atmosphere of fundamentalism and calling for a return to the 'golden age'. In fact, this rhetoric of a return to the 'golden age' received noteworthy visibility in 1980s. This point is explained in detail through tracing the history of a nexus between the market economy and hindu nationalists. In this backdrop, this study analysed the notions of family, gender and nation through an exploration of the ideology of market economy and Hindu nationalism. This study has investigated that since 1980s the meaning of 'Indian culture and tradition' and 'morality' was provided by Hindu nationalists. This was exemplified in the television of two Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* on Doordarshan. This television

conflated the Hindu identity that with Indian identity. Hence, the Hindu Right began to be seen as the reference point for defining Indianness or Indian tradition.

The discussion of a particular genre and that too on television is incomplete without the engine of the television industry, i.e. advertisements. Advertisement, in this study, is taken as representing the ideology of the market economy. In this context, a major portion of the discussion is on how there is a representation and construction of family, gender and nation under the agenda of globalisation and simultaneously how the images of 'new Indian woman' are within the purview of 'tradition'. Here again the nexus of market economy and cultural nationalists come into the picture. This implies that the agenda of modernity was articulated in terms of consumerism and in this regard television serials played a significant role. It is not only through the advertisement that consumerism is promoted, but the serials themselves have become the tool of advertising. They are doing two things concurrently – retailing hindutva image of an Indian womanhood who is militantly and aggressively 'good' or 'bad' (quite similar to the shifts in the iconography of Rama, the Hindu god); and 'selling' the products especially accessories, jewelry and outfits. The makers of soap opera have been harping on this through the use of Hinduised narratives. The market will sell only the saleable products. So one sees the reproduction and reconstruction of hegemonic notions of family, gender, sexuality, morality and Indian culture.