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INSIDE THE HOME THEATRE

The hyper-real world of television in India

This paper deconstructs the representations of state-of-the-art colour television sets in India through close textual analysis of print advertisements that appeared in leading national news magazines such as India Today from 1991 to 2001. It argues that the advertisements are indicative of the innovative strategies – such as the home theatre – that are being used by leading manufacturers in the Indian electronics industry to promote television as a technology capable of bringing the outside world inside the home.

In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) argues that Benedict Anderson's (1983/1991) influential notion of nations as imagined communities is a useful reminder that imagination is a very real and productive phenomenon in everyday life, and therefore should not be understood as something that is false or unreal. Although the central argument of *Imagined Communities* cautions us against reading imagination to mean false, Chakrabarty finds that Anderson takes its meaning to be self-evident. Yet, in European thought – which is Anderson's starting point in the history of imagined communities – the meaning of the word 'imagination' has a long and complex genealogy. For Chakrabarty, the historic debate over the status of imagination in European thought can be encapsulated in terms of the following question asked of the Spinozian tradition by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1815–1817). 'Was God a subject endowed with a (mental) faculty called "imagination", or did God exist simply in the ways of the world without being gathered into anything in the nature of a subject?' (Chakrabarty, 2000: 175).

Chakrabarty contends that in the modern history of Western thought – from Coleridge to Anderson – the notion of imagination remains a subject-centred activity of representation through the human act of seeing. The Spinozian tradition of imagination as a non-subjectivist vision of the divine and the non-human, however, has been relegated to the margins of Western thought. In the Indian context, however, Chakrabarty finds a 'family of viewing practices' that permeates the mainstream imagination, and has always been able to reconcile the (Western) split between subjectivist and non-subjectivist dimensions of imagination. One such family of viewing practices, he reveals, is *darshan*. A polysemic Sanskrit term that has been borrowed into many north and south Indian languages, *darshan* can be read to mean both (human) seeing and (divine or non-human) vision. In articulating of the double meaning of imagination as a representation of subjectivist sight and a non-representational, non-subjectivist vision, Chakrabarty suggests that *darshan* 'refers to the exchange of

human sight with the divine that supposedly happens inside a temple or in the presence of an image in which the deity has become manifest (*murati*)' (173).

Chakrabarty's insightful discussion of imagination (*darshan*) is restricted to viewing practices of literature in Bengali prose and poetry in colonial discourse. Yet, I find it particularly relevant to discuss the multiple meanings of imagination in relation to the family of viewing practices engendered by television in postcolonial discourse. After all, the development of the Indian national network, Doordarshan, has been one of the most imaginative attempts to articulate a family of viewing practices which reconciles the schism between the public and the private, the inside and the outside, the material and the spiritual, the human and the non-human in postcolonial nationalism.

However, before extending Chakrabarty's discussion of the polysemic notion of *darshan* to the viewing practices of, what I call, *door-darshan* in Indian television, it may be necessary to distinguish the electronic dimensions of televisual imagination from its meanings in print-mediated literatures. While technologies of print communication, such as literary prose and poetry, enable a family of viewing practices for the mediated exchange of human sight with divine vision (*darshan*), I argue that the technologies of telecommunication, such as broadcasting and cable television, engender an electronic family of televiewing practices for the immediate exchange of human sight with non-human vision (*door-darshan*).

Here, I draw attention to the prefix *door* (meaning tele or distant) in the term *door-darshan* which, quite literally, refers to electronic dimensions of the immediate exchange of (human) sight with (non-human) vision. As a technology of telecommunications, the television set thus transforms from being an idiot-box-in-the-corner to a secular temple of electronic images in which human imaginations and divine visions become manifest (*murati*). In making manifest the dual notion of human seeing and non-human vision, television thus engenders an electronic family of viewing practices that transforms the private space of the home into the public stage of the world.

In this paper, I trace the changing imaginations of the televiewing practices of *door-darshan* by critically evaluating advertisements for television sets made in the 1990s when growing competition between domestic and foreign companies was rapidly altering the cultural landscape of the electronic media in postcolonial India. I deconstruct representations of state-of-the-art colour television technologies through close textual analysis of print advertisements that appeared in leading national news magazines such as *India Today* from 1991 to 2001. I argue that these advertisements are indicative of the innovative strategies used by leading manufacturers in the Indian electronics industry to articulate the nationalist imaginations to the rapid transformations of globalisation by promoting television as a technology capable of bringing the outside world inside the home. In the first section, I focus on the advertising strategies used by the three leading Indian companies (BPL, Onida and Videocon) in the early 1990s, and critically evaluate the ways in which these television manufacturers link their respective brand images to the nationalist imaginations and the domestic concerns of their potential buyers. In the second section, I examine how nationalist concerns have been supplanted by globalist ambitions in television advertisements since the arrival of transnational corporations such as LG, Samsung and Sony into the Indian electronics industry in the mid-1990s. In the final section, I describe changing status of the viewing practices of *door-darshan* (television) in India in terms of a

hyper-real construct of the 'home theatre' that use new technologies, such as flat screens and surround sound, to radically transform traditional distinctions such as the inside and the outside, the domestic and the foreign, or the home and the world.

Bringing home the world

Although television was introduced to India in September 1959, for many years transmission services were restricted to areas in and around the nation's capital, Delhi. It was not until 1972 when transmission was extended to Bombay in the west, and in 1973 when the network was further extended to northern cities Amritsar and Srinagar that the television set became more of a mass commodity in India. Some would argue that television did not capture the public imagination in the nation until 1975 when the government of India, with the help of the United States, launched the countrywide Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) to broadcast developmental programmes to 2400 villages in six dispersed states. For others the landmark year would be 1982 when colour transmissions of the prestigious Asian Games reached most of the country via the indigenously developed satellite INSAT-1A. Many others would perhaps mark 1991 as the transformative year when global satellite networks like STAR TV and local cable operators revolutionized the mass-mediated arena of television in India by breaking the broadcast monopoly of the state-sponsored network, Doordarshan.

In January 1991, when an international alliance of forces led by the United States attacked Iraq in response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the American cable news network CNN was on scene in Baghdad to telecast the war live all around the world. As Douglas Kellner (1992, 110) reminds us, the Persian Gulf war was 'perhaps the first war ever orchestrated for television'. CNN's production of the TV war was, Kellner argues, 'highly dramatic and riveting' and viewers across the world could hear 'exclamations of "oohs" and "oow"' as loud explosions from bombing interrupted the CNN correspondents' live reports in Baghdad (111). In India, several hotels, business houses and high-rise apartments in major cities like Mumbai and Delhi, which had dish antennae to receive satellite channels tuned in to CNN's live coverage of the war from Baghdad in Iraq.

According to Madhu Jain (1991), a reporter for *India Today*, many five-star hotels which had satellite dishes on their roof-tops found a sudden increase in calls for room reservations. Hotel Maurya in New Delhi even imposed a cover charge of hundred rupees to gain access to their bar which provided customers access to satellite television. Hotel Asrani International in Hyderabad reportedly had to hire an additional 12 rooms a day to accommodate customers who wanted to watch the Gulf War on the hotel's cable television system. Jain also found that over 100 people were watching CNN at midnight in an office room at the Silicon Valley Corporation, which manufactures dish antennae. After watching CNN, a viewer complained that Doordarshan's coverage of the Gulf War was 'like a Scud missile that failed to explode – a real damp squib' (quoted in Jain, 1991: 38).

After the Gulf War ended in February 1991, the intense interest in CNN slowly began to wane among those who had tuned into its Gulf War coverage for over month. However, in May 1991, a little known network called Satellite Television

Asian Region, or STAR TV, started broadcasting over Asia from Hong Kong using a leased satellite called Asiasat. Initially, there were four channels on the STAR TV platform: STAR Plus, an entertainment channel largely made up of Euro-American programming; STAR Sports, once again a channel with largely Euro-American sporting events; BBC News, the British Broadcasting Corporations worldwide news service; and MTV, the American music channel's joint-venture with the Asian satellite network.

Soon, a number of enterprising cable operators – or *cablewallahs* as they came to be called – hastily assembled satellite dishes in their backyards, and offered to connect homes in their middle-class neighbourhoods for a modest monthly fee of 60–100 rupees (approximately US \$ 2–3). In less than a year after the first dish antenna was realigned toward CNN, a modest satellite and cable industry was born, and television viewers suddenly found themselves exposed to a variety of hitherto unheard voices and unspoken messages (Bhatt 1994; Ninan 1995; Saksena 1996).

The emergence of foreign and domestic satellite and cable channels since 1991 provided a vast new potential for the production of new television sets in the Indian electronics industry. Since many of the black-and-white and colour television sets sold in the 1980s had a capacity to receive only 8–10 channels, and they did not have the S-Band tuner to receive the satellite networks now available through the local cable operator. Moreover, many of the low-end budget models manufactured in the 1980s did not include a remote control since most viewers did not find it a necessity when the state-owned Doordarshan was the only network they could tune into at home. However, as cable television spread across major cities and towns across India, many viewers were now ready to buy a new model with a remote control that would enable them to flip through the various satellite channels without getting up every time to turn the dial on the television set.

By the end of the 1990s, the Indian television industry estimated that there were at least 22 million cable television households in a national population of over 70 million homes with television. These national figures, when multiplied by an average of five individuals in each household, suggest that there at least 110 million viewers with access to satellite and cable television in India. This makes over 350 million viewers who can tune into the state-sponsored network, Doordarshan which has the potential to reach 87.6 per cent of the population, and can cover 72.9 per cent of the national community in terms of its geographic area (cited in ddindia.net).

The three leading television manufacturers in the Indian electronics industry, BPL, Onida and Videocon, developed a range of cable-ready sets both for the economically concerned consumer and for the luxury-oriented buyer. In 1991–1992, Videocon emerged as the brand leader capturing 22 per cent of the Indian television market followed closely by BPL with 21 per cent and Onida with 20 per cent market share. Shishir Prasad (1997) finds that this trend continued until 1994 when Onida's share slipped to 17.5 per cent due in large part to the aggressive price-slashing strategies of Videocon and BPL to increase the sale of their low-end models, coupled with innovative advertising strategies to launch new models at the high-end of their price range.

In 1995, Videocon launched an ad campaign to further its standing in the Indian electronics industry by promoting its wide range of consumer electronics such as

televisions, VCRs, washing machines, refrigerators, air-conditioners and audio systems. While the headline proudly declared that Videocon is 'Exploring the most advanced technologies to give you the world's finest Consumer Electronics and Home Appliances', the slogan at the bottom of the advertisement invited readers to 'Bring Home the Leader'. The sub-heading below the headline, also highlighted in a bold typeface, proudly announces, 'Videocon. A household name.' Two other sub-headings, listed above the slogan 'Bring Home the Leader' declare that Videocon is 'Bringing the world to India' and 'Improving the quality of Life' (figure 1).

When read in relation to text under each of the three sub-headings in the advertisement, Videocon's slogan 'Bring Home the Leader' appears to be an ambivalent dual invitation to the reader. In one sense, the slogan invites the reader at home to buy Videocon's range of products since the company is, as the ad copy declares, 'the leader in Consumer Electronics and Home Appliances with 19-state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities all over India'. In another sense, the slogan appears to invite the reader to embrace a new nationalist strategy of bringing into India 'a wide range of quality products' made by Videocon in collaboration with world leaders in the electronics industry.

The ad copy informs the reader that Videocon's colour televisions, VCRs and VCPs are manufactured 'through a technical tie-up with Toshiba, Japan'. The rest of the advertisement describes Videocon's technical tie-ups with Matsushita, Japan for its washing machines, refrigerators and air conditioners, and with Sansui, Japan for its audio systems. The final section of the advertisement waxes eloquently on Videocon's corporate philosophy about 'Improving the quality of life' by 'bringing home the benefits of modern technological innovations to more and more people'.

In the centre of the ad is the image of a television set with a caption underneath identifying the model as 'The 32 Double Window Dramatic Wide Colour TV'. The obvious reference here being made to Videocon's innovative split-screen technology that enables viewers at home to see two programmes at once on their television sets. The screen on the television set is equally divided into two windows. In the window to the left of the reader is the image of a game of cricket, to its right is an image of the Taj Mahal. The two images on the television screen in the Videocon advertisement also capture the ambivalent fears and fantasies of imagining the nation as a community in the world of electronic capitalism.

On the one side, the split-screen effect of the advertisement can be read as the nationalistic ambivalence toward schizophrenic fragmentation of the social reality by technological innovations that consumer electronics and home appliances bring into households across India. On the other side, it also reveals the ambiguous potential of tie-ups between postcolonial nationalism and electronic capitalism that Videocon represents through its promise of 'Bringing the world to India'. For instance, the image on the left of the Videocon-Toshiba television screen – the game of cricket – depicts the ambivalent pleasures of assimilating the postcolonial into the world of the erstwhile-colonisers by playing on the patriotic desire to witness a nationalist triumph in the once imperial pastime. The image on the right of the screen, the Taj Mahal, represents, with all its Orientalist ambiguity, an essentialised identity that is exclusively 'Indian'. Never mind the technological reification, the ad hails the readers, thanks to the Videocon-Toshiba 'Double Window Dramatic Wide Colour TV', now Indians can at once partake in the world of electronic capitalism *and* retain their national identity while being ensconced in the comfort of their own homes.

Videocon. Exploring the most advanced technologies to give you the world's finest Consumer Electronics and Home Appliances.

Videocon. A household name.

Videocon is today the leader in Consumer Electronics and Home Appliances, with 19 state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities all over India, manned by skilled, dedicated employees.

* Washing Machines in technical collaboration with Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Japan.

* Refrigerators, manufactured in technical design and drawing collaboration with Matsushita Refrigeration Co., Japan, manufacturer of the National Refrigerator.



The 32 Double Window Dramatic Wide Colour TV

* Air-conditioners manufactured under a design & drawing agreement with Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Japan, owners of the brand 'National'.

* Audio Systems from Sansui, Japan.

Bringing the world to India

Videocon produces a wide range of quality products through its tie-ups with world leaders:

* Colour Televisions, VCRs and VCPs through a technical tie-up with Toshiba, Japan.

Improving the quality of life

The growing world of Videocon. A world led by technology. And a philosophy aimed at bringing home the benefits of modern technological innovations to more and more people.



VIDEOCON
BRING HOME THE LEADER

iB&W/VIL/DS/95/096

FIGURE 1 Source: *India Today*, 29 February 1996: 85.

While Videocon celebrated its 'tie-ups with world leaders' in the electronics industry as a corporate philosophy for 'improving the quality of life' in India, BPL pursued an alternative strategy of recasting its internationalist ambitions in nationalist terms to capture the imagination of the domestic markets. 'India's Pride, Britisher's Prize', proclaimed an advertisement for BPL colour televisions. In an obvious attempt to tug at the patriotic chords of the Indian consumer, the advertisement hails the reader to take pride in a domestic company that not only triumphs over competing foreign brands at home, but also accomplishes an hitherto unheard feat of bringing international acclaim for the national community in the fiercely competitive world of electronic capitalism. As the advertisement elaborates:

BPL Color Televisions. The pride of millions in India. Now exported to Britain. And even awarded the 'Best TV' in Britain by the prestigious 'What video' magazine. After gaining approval from the British test house for compliance with British standards. BPL is the only Indian Company to have exported over 25,000 sets to Britain, in just a few months. Today BPL is all set to double this export sale from 5,000 to 10,000 per month. Go for the internationally proven BPL quality in India too. The pride of Indians. That's prized by the British.

The creation of brand identification through invocations of nationalist pride and internationalist ambitions is central to the corporate philosophy of BPL. Anand Narsimha, the head of corporate brand management at BPL, admits that the 'BPL brand name is worth more to the company than anything else that figures on or off the balance sheet' (quoted in Povaiah, 1999, 38). In a survey conducted in 1997, BPL was ranked as 'the most admired marketing company' in the consumer durables segment of the Indian market, and listed as the sixth most popular brand overall (Srikanth 1998).

Onida, which had established high brand recognition in the 1980s with its slogan 'Neighbour's envy. Owners's pride', also fought hard to stay in the reckoning by recasting its popular campaign featuring the devil as a mascot, with a new nationalist slogan, 'World's Envy. India's Pride'. The change of slogan in the 1990s clearly represents an acknowledgment by Onida that television envy is longer a domestic affair between neighbours within the national community, but rather a transnational phenomenon where Indians now have to compete on the global stage of electronic capitalism. 'Ominous signs speak of unquenched thirst for global competition', declares the headline in this ad for Onida's state-of-the-art KY Series colour television sets. With dark clouds looming in the background, the advertisement imagery depicts Onida's mascot, the devil, staring down the Eiffel tower in Paris, which is swaying precariously after being snapped from its moorings on one side. The following text provides a glimpse into what the devil Onida is up to in this advertisement:

The hour has come. Face the chilling truth. The thirst for competition has reached raging new heights.

You can hear the signs. The exclusive G-Horn Theatre Sound with Power Bass makes others quietly tremble.

You can see the signs. An exclusive high resolution, black tinted, Flat Screen that creates perfect colours, sharpest pictures, making others go pale with fear.

You can control the signs. The super-intelligent Master Command with Menu-driven Full Function Remote gives you the power to control every aspect of the most envied TV in the world.

Indeed, the signs are ominous. For neighbours who may have settled for less.

(*India Today*, 31 January 1997, 125)

The 'unquenched thirst for global competition' that the Onida ad speaks of as an 'ominous sign' of things to come was, in fact, a pressing concern for all the major domestic companies in the electronics industry since the government of India announced new policies for greater deregulation of the television manufacturing business in November 1996. During the early to mid-1980s, the government of India unveiled a set of deregulatory policies with an eye toward increasing technical collaborations between domestic and foreign companies. In this context, Subhrajit Guhathakurta (1994) summarizes the developments in the Indian electronics industry during the decade between 1981 and 1987 as follows:

(1) An overhaul of the duty structure and relaxation of capacity limits. Most restrictions on entry were removed and many large private-sector enterprises were allowed to compete with small-scale and public-sector concerns; (2) the introduction of colour TV transmission and provision of licenses for assembling imported colour TV kits; (3) deregulation of subscriber-end telecommunication equipment for the private sector (ending the public-sector monopoly in this industry); (4) preference for fiscal controls (duties, taxes) as opposed to physical controls (total ban on importing some products); (5) import of technology was allowed subject to a 'phased manufacturing programme' for quick indigenisation; and (6) most electronic components for which substantial indigenous capacity was not developed were allowed to be imported freely. Besides these measures, specific policies were formulated for some products that were expected to grow significantly in the future (e.g. colour TVs, computers, and computer software). In all cases, the policy package included substantial deregulation and delicensing. (849)

Although the liberalization policies of the 1980s summarised by Guhathakurta in the above-cited passage were a significant departure from the protectionist policies of the previous decade, the deregulations and delicensing procedures initiated by the government were not 'a complete turnaround, opening the borders for free trade' (850). Rather, it was a 'selective and cautious' process for determining what foreign imports were vital for the development of the Indian electronics industry. For instance, Guhathakurta finds that 'no imports of consumer electronic products were allowed except as personal baggage with a 240% duty' while 'for those components that were not available indigenously or were available in limited quantity, imports were automatically approved' with import duties ranging between 75 and 150 per cent (850).

The imposition of severe import duties were aimed at protecting small-scale manufacturers and public-sector companies but, Guhathakurta argues, the government's liberalisation policies 'allowed all Indian companies, regardless of size (including those with foreign equity participation of 40% or less), to operate in

any field of electronics', including the television manufacturing business. Moreover, he argues, any company that had more than 40 per cent foreign equity was allowed to 'set up manufacturing facilities for electronic components and sophisticated "high tech" instruments' (851).

The political rationale for the government's 'selective and cautious' embrace of deregulatory policies in the 1980s was partly driven by an economic calculation that the rising demand for television sets in India would lead to an increase in the indigenous production of electronic components, and subsequently decrease the domestic manufacturers' reliance on foreign imports. However, with the explosion of satellite and cable television channels since 1991, and the growing demand for new cable-ready television sets across the country, the government of India had to abandon its cautious approach toward deregulation, and embrace a more market-driven system despite the obvious threats it posed to the domestic electronics industry.

'Taking the tele out of television'

As part of its new deregulatory policies announced in November 1996, the government of India decreased the import duties on colour picture tubes, and allowed for greater competition between foreign corporations and domestic companies in the television manufacturing business. L.G. Electronics of Korea, which made two unsuccessful bids to capture the Indian markets in the early- to mid-1990s, re-entered the fray under the new deregulatory regime along many other transnational corporations such as Sony, Samsung and Thompson.

Between 1998 and 1999, the colour television industry in India witnessed a 30 per cent growth rate, due in large part, to the successful crop yields for many farmers in the agricultural sector, the announcement of pay-raises for all employees in the government sector, and the enthusiastic response of viewers across the nation to the World Cup Cricket matches in 1999. During the period when the World Cup matches were being telecast in India, there were reports about the sale of colour television sets increasing by a phenomenal 40 to 50 per cent. L.G., the official sponsor of the World Cup, strategically used the popularity of the event to promote its brand around the country, and the company witnessed a staggering 95 per cent growth in 1999 (Indiainfoline, 2000). 'Do you see a revolution here?' asked the headline for an advertisement for L.G. Flatron monitors and color television sets. With the close-up of an on a large flat screen on one side, the copy on the other side explains,

Many a people have seen apples fall down. But when Newton saw it, he saw gravity in it. A discovery that set the Space Revolution rolling. Just that added passion to see different. And a revolution is on hand.

(*India Today*, 9 April 2001: 4–5)

The revolution that the L.G. advertisement anticipated had little to do with Newtonian revelations about a falling apple and more to do with the visual representation of that apple on flat screen monitors, such as L.G.'s Flatron television, which had become all the rage in the Indian electronics industry. Industry experts estimate that flat-screen technology is the fastest growing segment of the market, and is

expected to account for 10 per cent of the colour television sets sold in India by 2004. With every major domestic and foreign company in the Indian electronics industry eyeing this new segment in the television manufacturing business, the end of the 1990s witnessed a spate of advertisements promoting the latest in flat-screens and surround sound technologies.

Since the transnational brand names like LG, Samsung and Sony are not identified as 'Indian' by the consumers or by the corporations themselves, the advertisements often celebrated the foreignness of their components by emphasizing the higher quality of their imported state-of-the-art technologies. Therefore, unlike the ads for television sets made by Indian manufacturers such as BPL, Onida and Videocon in the early 1990s, the ads for flat screen monitors introduced by the transnational corporations in the late 1990s do not claim a sense of 'authenticity' by tugging at the nationalist chords of the consumers. Rather, by highlighting the innovative and high-quality foreign components, the advertisements for the transnational brands argue that their flat screen television sets provide a more authentic representation of the outside world than do the curved screen monitors that most Indian viewers use in their homes. Yet, at the same time, many of the foreign brands were careful not to ignore the necessity of customising their television sets to suit the domestic needs of the Indian consumer – particularly in the low-end and the middle-range models.

L.G. Electronics, for instance, embraced a strategy of 'Indianising' its products by unveiling its much-publicized 'Sampoorna' colour television sets in 1997. Aimed at Hindi-speaking consumers in the semi-urban and rural areas of North India, 'Sampoorna' is the first colour television set capable of displaying text on the screen in Devanagari – the script used to write in Hindi and other north Indian languages. However, in a comprehensive survey of the color television industry, *Indiainfoline* (2000) found that the marketing strategies used by television manufacturers like L.G. to create product differentiation for urban, semi-urban and rural consumers went completely awry in the late 1990s. As the *Indiainfoline* survey puts it,

All these years, it was felt that the rural markets could not afford premium products, but models specially designed for the rural markets have found more takers in the urban markets while premium models have sold more in rural areas.

For instance, the *Indiainfoline* report found that L.G.'s state-of-the art Flatron monitors (along with Onida's KY Series color television sets with 'G-Horn Theatre Sound') were more popular among rural and semi-urban consumers, while the Sampoorna model created for the rural markets by L.G. found more buyers in urban areas. One of the reasons, *Indiainfoline* argues, is that rural rich see television sets as a long-term investment, and are therefore, more willing to consider premium high-end models as replacements for their old black-and-white television sets. Meanwhile, the urban middle-class consumer is more interested in utilizing the long-term financing options and the price-slashing discount schemes on the low- to mid-range models provided by both manufacturers and retailers who want to make room on their shelves for the newest products in the market.

Sony, which aims its latest innovations at the high-end of the television market, launched its Wega series with three 21-inch TVs and a top-of-the-line home theatre system in May 1999. Sony's television sets are priced 20–25 per cent higher than

other brands because the company imports its picture tubes, and its television sets have very few components that are indigenously produced in India (indiainfoline.com). Therefore, the advertising campaigns for Sony's Wega television sets also revealed a shift in emphasis from the strategy used by other television manufacturers who explicitly link their brand names and corporate identities to nationalist imaginations; as seen in the above-mentioned ad for LG's Sampoorna TVs.

'It takes the tele out of television', Sony proclaimed in the headline of an advertising campaign promoting its WEGA DRC flat-screen technology 'with 4 times the normal picture density' available on other television monitors (*India Today*, 21 May 2001: 21). The image under the headline shows a couple sitting together in front of an oversized flat-screen that appears more like a large cinema screen. On the screen is an extreme close-up of a ferocious-looking shark with its jaws wide open, as if ready to devour the couple sitting in front of it (figure 2).

Another variant of the Sony Wega ad depicts the oversized flat-screen, this time depicting a high-speed bicycling race (*India Today*, 4 June 2001: 61). Once again, simulating a sense of high-speed motion, the lead cyclist on the screen appears almost to run over the couple watching the sporting event. After providing this tantalizing glimpse into the viewing experience of Sony WEGA monitors, the two ads end with the following invitation to the reader: 'Welcome to the real world'. The text at the bottom of the page is identical in both the Sony television ads, and presents in detail, the considerable technological innovations of the WEGA DRC flat-screen monitors:

Presenting the WEGA DRC with 4 times the normal picture density.


To take you 4 times closer to the action. 4 times closer to reality. That's the magic of Digital Reality Creation, Sony's unique digital-signal processing technology. It doubles the vertical lines and horizontal density, eliminates all visible scanning lines and removes flicker. Even text remains super still, giving you a high definition visual experience that's about 4 times better, richer, and up so close, it couldn't be further from television.

The objective of the Sony Wega ad appears crystal clear: to overwhelm the reader with as many technological innovations like 'Dual Exhaust 3-D System', 'DVD Component Input Terminal', 'Vertical Compression Technology' and 'Eco Mode' to provide 'a high definition visual experience' of the world of television that, paradoxically enough, 'couldn't be further from television'. Samsung, which entered the Indian markets in December 1995, also released an ad campaign to promote its version of 'television reality' on a flat-screen monitor with its trade-marked DynaFlat digital technology. 'Amazingly life-like', was the slogan that Samsung embraced in proclaiming the technological virtues of its Plano Digital Flat TV monitors (*India Today*, 2 April 2001: 22–3).

The advertising imagery makes the point abundantly clear by showing a family hiding behind a bunker of sand-bags and a barbed-wire fence in their living room that separates the couch from the television set with an image of two military men firing a round of bullets from a machine gun. The headline above their heads announces the television schedule that would enable the family members to turn their living room into a war room: '8:00 pm "Guns of Navarone" on Samsung Plano, The Digital Flat TV' (figure 3).

SONY


It takes the tele out of television.



Presenting the **WEGA DRC** with 4 times the normal picture density.

To take you 4 times closer to the action. 4 times closer to reality. That's the magic of Digital Reality Creation, Sony's unique digital - signal processing technology. It doubles the vertical and horizontal density, eliminates all visible scanning lines and removes flicker. Even text remains super still, giving you a high definition visual experience that's about 4 times better, richer and so up close, it couldn't be further from television.

IMPROVED PICTURE QUALITY IMAGE

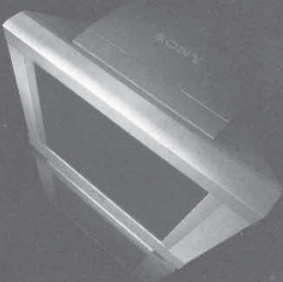


Normal TV

4 times the density on WEGA DRC

The DRC 1250 has a unique digital - signal processing algorithm that doubles both the horizontal and vertical density in real time. So that picture density improves tremendously and visible scanning lines are virtually eliminated.

- Dual Exhaust 3D System: With large 160mm woofers for rich, powerful bass effects and lifelike sound.
- DVD Component Input Terminal: Allows input of signals from DVD players giving far superior picture quality than composite S-Video signals.
- Vertical Compression Technology: To enjoy 16:9 wide screen format pictures.
- Eco Mode: To save energy while watching TV for a long time.
- Models: KV-EX29M97/67 (74 cm), KV-EX34M97/67 (86 cm).



FD Trinitron
WEGA
DRC-MF

Welcome to the real world.

P. A. SWAMY/BROOD SIL/PRINT

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FIGURE 2 Source: *India Today*, 21 May, 2001: 21.

Another variant of the Samsung Plano advertisement features the family members sitting on a couch in their living room and holding umbrellas over their heads as they watch a scene from a classic Hindi film, *Barsat* (Rain) on their flat-screen television set. The headline announces this family appointment with television as, '10:30 pm "Barsat"'. On Samsung Plano, *The Digital Flat TV*'. In both versions of the Samsung

advertisement, the slogan at the bottom of the page reminds the reader about the ‘amazingly life-like’ experience of viewing films on a flat-screen at home, instead of going out to the cinema theatre (*India Today*, 16 April 2001: 22–3).

Conclusion

By the end of the 1990s, what we witness in the Samsung and Sony ad campaigns is a bold invitation to immerse oneself and one’s family in the new electronic frontier of the ‘home theatre’ where ‘reality will hit you like nothing else has’. For instance, the Samsung advertising campaign seeks to emphasise the technological innovations of television in detail to convince the reader of the home theatre’s ability to create ‘an amazingly life-like’ experience of the outside world inside the living room. Outlining the sophisticated technology in Plano Digital Flat TV, the Samsung ad copy at the bottom of the page elaborates:

DynaFlat. Optimum curvature of the internal surface in the DynaFlat CRT helps realise perfect flat images without the concaveness of conventional flat CRTs.

Impact PORT Speakers. The Impact PORT adopts superior aerodynamics to maximize true sound. The result is a clearer high impact bass reproduction.

Super Pigment Phosphor. High brightness phosphors deliver vivid, life-like images.

Dolby Surround Pro Logic. This feature delivers ear-pleasing 360-degree surround sound. It is also equipped with external audio outputs for the total home theatre experience.

(*India Today*, 16 April 2001: 22–3)

The complete inversion of the principles of realism is the most striking thing about the advertising campaigns launched by Sony and Samsung for state-of-the-art television technologies in the Indian markets. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) argues, this is a characteristic feature of imagination in modern societies. To recall Chakrabarty’s arguments summarized at the beginning of this paper, realism refers to a subject-centred imagination of reality wherein the objective world outside is privileged as being authentic and real. Images or representations of that outside reality, on the other hand, are considered mimesis, that is to say inauthentic imitations or mimicry of the real. The aim of representational forms like art – or for that matter advertising and television – in modern realism is thus, to project an idealized mirror image of the reality outside.

However, in his analysis of realist representations in television and other cultural commodities in modern societies, Jean Baudrillard (1994) finds that even as an image emphasizes realistic conventions – use of mirroring and inside/outside distinctions – it begins to betray the ambiguity and the arbitrariness of the realist distinction between the subjectivist representation and the objective world. As Baudrillard (1994: 48) points out, the shattering of the mirror of representation by the medium of television require us imagine the outside world in terms of an ambiguous space of hyper-real simulations which has ‘no other territory than the one it destabilizes from within’. In this electronic domain of hyper-reality, Baudrillard (1994: 54) finds that television ‘makes everything credible (that is uncertain), even previous facts, even future

events'. As events, places and people around the world are represented as simulations, the act of imagination also becomes more ambiguous – 'immediately credible, but fundamentally undecidable', as Baudrillard, puts it (1994: 54).

Therefore, I argue that as the Samsung and Sony campaigns promise to take 'the tele out of television' by creating 'amazingly life-like' images of the outside world inside the home theatre, they invoke the discourse of hyper-realism; wherein an exaggerated simulation of reality is sold to the viewer as being more real than the real thing itself. In the hyper-real world of the home theatre, the relationship between electronic media and reality is established not through the promise of providing authentic mirror images of the outside world, but through an imaginative encounter with an electronic family of viewing practices that I have described as *door-darshan* (or tele-vision).

In the hyper-real world of the home theatre, the relation of television to reality no longer needs to be defined through tentative inversion of and a hurried return to realism through mirroring of the inside/outside motif. Mirroring the outside world is no longer adequate, for what television provides the consumer through its viewing practices of *door-darshan* is a world of its own – with a plethora of domestic and foreign channels available to the viewer at the click of a remote control. In effect, television now provides a total lifestyle for the willing consumer of electronic capitalism. What is inside the television set, the advertisements promise, is a reality in and by itself that no longer appears to need an outside reality for legitimisation.

As traditional distinctions of the outside and the inside, the foreign and the domestic, or the home and the world are blurred by the rapid advances of electronic capitalism, television viewers are induced to imagine the multitude real-life events represented on the screen much like the 'reel life' of cinematic events. The defining element of these on-screen events is the cut or an imaginary rupture which, as Arjun Appadurai (1997) reminds us, creates a disjuncture between cinematic or televisual frames even as it erases their differences to construct a seamless narrative that appears more real than off-screen reality it seeks to represent in the home theatre. 'Which is why', as the Samsung advertisement cautions the reader, 'reality will hit you like nothing else has'.

'Seeing bifocally', to borrow John Durham Peters' (1997) elegant formulation, becomes an essential ingredient of the viewing practices of *door-darshan* in the hyper-real home theatres of electronic capitalism. Commenting on the role of new media in changing the relationship between the inside and the outside, the domestic and the foreign, or the global and the local, Peters (1997) writes,

Our vision of the social world is bifocal. Institutions of the global constitute totalities that we could otherwise experience only in pieces, such as populations, the weather, employment, inflation, the gross national product, or public opinion. The irony is that the general becomes clear through representation, whereas the immediate is subject to the fragmenting effects of our limited experience. Our sense organs, having evolved over the ages to capture immediate experience of the local, find themselves cheated of their prey. (79)

Reading glasses, Peters argues, are no longer adequate to survey the diverse viewing practices of electronic media, which constantly circulate capital, people,

technologies, ideas and commodities around the world and into the home. Following Appadurai (1997), Peters (1997) suggests that the bifocal vision engendered by electronic media must be seen not as an extraneous influence on the work of cultural imagination, but as a fundamental ingredient for the interrogation, subversion and transformation of the national, the transnational and the translocal.

As Appadurai (1997: 3) points out, the bifocal vision of television is now pervasive 'through such effects as the telescoping of news into audio-video bytes, through the tension between the public spaces of cinema and the more exclusive spaces of video watching, through the immediacy of their absorption into public discourse, and through their tendency to be associated with glamour, cosmopolitanism, and the new'. In this context, Peters (1997) argues for a radical shift in our understanding of the role of electronic media in society. He writes,

We need to understand media (again, in the broad sense as machines for the representation of social life as a knowable whole) as the court painters of the global, as providers of a kind of sight that lifts our gaze beyond the immediate experience to distant, concurrent events, as key factors in the confused local-global cultures in which we students of culture find (or lose) ourselves. We must examine how the age-old link of locality and truth has been made strange for us, if not topsy-turvy. (82).

Without getting carried away by the unimaginable possibilities of losing ourselves in the hyper-real excesses of home theatres, or without being troubled by the social perils of living in a topsy-turvy world of electronic capitalism, it is important to remember that such utopian desires and dystopian fears have always been integral to cultural imaginations of new media in all societies. As Lynn Spigel (1992: 102) points out, given the electronic media's ability to bring the outside world into the home, it is not surprising that television has been often depicted as 'the ultimate expression of progress in utopian statements concerning "man's" ability to conquer and to domesticate space'. She finds that the concept of 'home theatre' has been central to debates about the role of electronic media in society, at least since the turn of the twentieth century. Citing an article published in an American magazine, *The Independent*, in 1912, which touts the arrival of 'The Future Home Theatre', she writes,

The magazine promised such dreams would come true through the development and application of two technologies. Sound and image could be transmitted through telephone wires 'instantaneously from a central stage' or recorded through a combination of film and disk ('talking pictures'), which in turn might be sent through the telephone wires. In case these elaborate plans seemed excessively strange for the home environment, the magazine promised that the new 'electric theatre ... will not seem a mechanical device, but a window or a pair of magic opera glasses through which one will watch the actors or the doers.' This window would open onto 'vistas of reality', illusions far better than the 'flat, flickering, black and white [motion] pictures of today', illusions produced through a combination of colour, music, and 3-D photography. Best of all, the

magazine predicted that these 'inventions will become cheap enough to be, like the country telephone, in every room, so that one can go to the theatre without leaving the sitting room.' (99)

What is now being promoted in television commercials for the home theatres of the twenty-first century is, therefore, not anything radically new in terms of the creative ways in which technological enthusiasts have always imagined the role of electronic media in society. This is not to suggest that the work of cultural imagination in electronic capitalism is merely the repetition of history. Rather, it is to argue, as Spigel does, that 'the discursive conventions for thinking about communication technologies are very much the same', but the historical contexts in which they operate change considerably (182).

As we have seen in the case of television advertising in India in the 1990s, the cultural themes invoked by transnational corporations such as L.G., Samsung and Sony to sell the latest innovations in home theatre technologies in the year 2001 are not unlike those used by national companies such as Videocon, BPL and Onida in advertisements for state-of-the-art colour television sets in the early 1990s. These in turn are based on the popular strategies used by technological enthusiasts and science fiction writers in years past. However, the historical contexts from which these cultural discourses emerge provide illuminating insights into the changing relationship between televisual imaginations – which I have defined in terms of the viewing practices of *door-darshan* – and the synthetic sense of reality that new electronic technologies engender through their constant mediation of the inside and the outside, the domestic and the foreign, or the home and the world in postcolonial India.

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