

Cultural Industry and Visual Media: in The Milieu of Popular Culture.

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Abstract

Culture and popularity are terms which open up diverse possibilities in academic areas. Popular culture or mass culture is an increasingly important area of study in the broad framework of cultural studies. Popular music, film, television, radio, video games, popular books, comics, internet are all different elements of popular culture. Popularization has been regarded by critics as false democratization of market capitalism. Appreciation of art forms in today's world happens in such a way as to satisfy the needs of people and they are conceived and executed in such a way as to suit the sensibilities of the spectators. Many of the art forms, which were hitherto regarded as elite and authentic, now focus on providing only fleeting gratification to the viewers. Capitalism makes the maximum profit when art forms are popularized and commercialized. So this paper is an attempt to evaluate the diverse programs shown in the television which is the most popular medium for infotainment that provides information as well as knowledge but is an idiot box at the same time.

Key words:

- ii Culture-popular culture,
- ii Democratization- market capitalism,
- ii Commercialization of art forms- television and popular culture,
- ii Serials- reality shows- changing cultural milieu.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Praveen. K. R.* & Gayathri Narayanan**

Cultural Industry and Visual Media: in The Milieu of Popular Culture.

Journal Global Values,
Vol. VIII, No.2,
Article No. 16,
pp.125-130

[http://anubooks.com/
?page_id=285](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=285)

Introduction

Culture, popularity etc are terms which open up diverse possibilities of meaning in academic areas. Various critical approaches have attempted to fix the meaning of popular culture. In a common discursive approach popular culture can be regarded as 'that which is liked by many people or that which is made by people for themselves'. Frankfurt thinkers describe popular culture as 'mass culture'. In their opinion 'culture is the technology of identity or ready to get performs our own identity. Popular culture can be studied only through a network. They will not fit into a close knit structure. But the messages unraveled through network studies are very persuasive. They emerge from people and bring forth new creations. The Stuart thought that 'Whatever people do can be labeled as popular culture is certainly a significant statement.

Certain basic factors can be subjected to cultural studies. Important among them are fundamental discourses involving the readers number, value, aesthetic concept, superior-inferior divide. All these factors have their origin in the mind and thought processes of people. Marxian ideology, value centered market and cultural network based on consumer culture exerted great influence on popular culture studies. A new value system as well as a brand new outlook towards life was fashioned by the various advertisements and representations which have now become an essential part of the new television culture. Hence what became of primary concern in popular culture studies was the social revival of the middle class people.

According to Marxian Ideology there are two groups in our society, the capitalist and the proletariat. Though they agree with this view, the critics Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer disagree with the idea that capitalism will eventually be led to its own downfall. They introduced the term cultural industry in their work *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This school of thought known as Frankfurt school suggests that popularization is a false democratization of market capitalism. Appreciation of art forms in today's world happens in such a way as to satisfy the needs. Many of the art forms, which were hitherto regarded as elite and authentic, now focus on providing only fleeting gratification to the viewers. Capitalism makes the maximum profit when art forms are popularized and commercialized. So this paper is an attempt to evaluate the diverse programs shown in the television which is a medium for infotainment that provides information as well as knowledge but an idiot box at the same time.

Television became an inevitable part of living room space by the middle of the 1980's. In these past decades visual media has created many notable changes in the social and cultural life of Kerala. The regular viewers range from school going

children to aged grand parents. Statistics show that children below the age of 14 watch television for at least 3 hours on a regular working day and 8 to 9 hours on a holiday. There are more than 25 channels in Malayalam alone. Majority of programmes telecasted through these channels aim at providing cheap entertainment. Most important among these second rate programmes are serials or soap-operas.

Serials: The Real Trouble Makers

At a time in Kerala there were thousands of readers for those magazines which were known as 'Ma' publications, namely Mangalam, Manorama, and Manchadi. When television became an inseparable part of Kerala living room space, these magazines lost their popularity and serials or soap operas took their place. The first ever serial to be aired on an Indian television was '*Humlog*' in Doordarshan channel. Each episode of it focused on themes like relationship between children, parents, grandparents, cousins and siblings. Nationalistic issues like patriotism, family planning, gender relations and communal harmony were also dealt with. With the arrival of satellite channels a variety of programmes began to be aired on television. Now eight to ten serials or soap operas are being broadcasted in each Malayalam channel. The dominating themes in these serials are domestic issues, adultery and criminal activities. The characters that have an extravagant way of life stay far away from life and are unrealistic. The mother –in-law and daughter-in-law are odd creatures who maintain a visceral hatred towards each other and the male characters are mere passive witnesses to their deeds. The serials with their unlikely plots and characters spoil the beauty of the evenings in households and create disquiet and agitation among the viewers.

Another category of serials which are totally different from these soap-operas are the ones with devotional themes. The epics and myths of Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions all have great market value in the current scenario of visual culture. The viewers watch these serials with utmost piety and even when they reach places of worship what they see are the faces of these serial actors. But these serials which bear no resemblance to the stories with which we are already familiar create an illusory atmosphere for achieving highest popularity for serials. It is an example for the commodification of even the fundamental values of religion for profit in the media landscape. These serials which run up to hundreds and five hundreds of episodes leave no better effects on the minds of the spectators. Another category of viewers are there who know that what they see on the television is all humbug are left with no alternative but to watch it because of an addiction to the Tele Vision.

Soap Operas: A Melodramatic Version of Emotions

Broadcasting through cable network began in Kerala during the 1960s. Due

to certain geographical difficulties the transmission through usual pattern was impossible in certain areas. After all these years when we subject the cable television culture we can see that what dominate the programmes are the serials. Apart from the serials comedy shows and musical reality shows are put on air under the label mega shows. The chief aim of all these programmes is capturing markets. Most of these serials are designed through the typical moulds that involve unending worries and tears. Ghosts, Black magic, Murder, familial conflict. Our National television channels that once featured quality serials like Tipu sultan, Humlog, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Chanakyan, thousand and One Nights has completely degenerated into a medium propogating certain values of only a substandard culture. These serials are also known by the name soap operas. Soap operas were actually programmes sponsored by American television companies for finding a market for their products. The most important purpose of these operas are to attract family audience.

Television Advertisements: New ways of Seduction

Advertisements grew out of their status as an interlude between programmes and they have now become a separate entity having its own features. The newly used term for advertisements is commercial, which explicitly states the commercial and consumeristic characteristic of the programme. The designers of these new era commercials are sure about the tactics to be used I their creation in order to lure those who watch it. Majority of advertisements aired in the Malayalam television are closely connected to the cultural milieu of Kerala. Natural beauty of the Kerala landscape, its traditions, customs and relationships between people are all commercialized here. New needs are created and new market possibilities are found for the existing ones.

The famous catch phrase in the advertisement of Kalyan Jewellers which goes like this, Physical beauty becomes an important element in the advertisements and that too of women. Women are degraded to being mere objects of commoditization. The softness of their body, beautiful hair and facial softness all become objects of great market value. The famous advertisement for a food-mixer that is aired in Malayalam channels shows an example. The husband, who eats the dosha made by his wife comments about it thus. "Soft like a flower, like my Pooja." Here what get the prime focus are the beauty of the actress rather than the taste of the food. The jewellery advertisements imply that a woman certainly needs gold if she is to be complete in every way and for a husband to be perfect he should gift his wife with a diamond, for her birthday or wedding anniversary. It is the advertisement that has in fact invented and nurtured celebrations like mothers' day, valentines' day and Akshya Tritiya.

Our Television gave more importance to music related programmes in the beginning. But later the value of music was degraded when they got the new coloring of reality shows. Instead of offering pleasure they worsen the mental stress of the viewers of these shows. A reality show known as 'Malayali House' in which many of the celebrities were featured opened up new market possibilities. With the advent of reality shows related to cooking, a new food culture itself is created. The very idea of kitchen is transformed; it also becomes a space for the commoditization of even our most intimate cultural aspect like food and cooking.

It can thus be concluded that the numerous television shows strengthen the consumerist mindset of the middleclass people and it satisfies the wishes of the people of the upper strata of society.

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Television is increasingly seen as 'infotainment,' not a credible source of information.

