

“The Global Link”: Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) and its Impact on People of Indian Origin in Durban, South Africa

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KEYWORDS Diaspora. Media. Program Bouquets. India. Religion

ABSTRACT This paper examines how the various Indian programs screened via Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) have emerged, become household topics of conversation, and impacted various Indian families in Durban, South Africa. The globalization of digital media and the introduction of cable channels such as Zee TV, B4U, Al Jazeera and NDTV have created a new impetus and encouraged South African Indians to take stock of their culture, customs, fashion, cooking and rituals. It has become a driving calling for People of Indian Origin (PIO's) to travel to India to view the locations that are included into the making of the soaps and movies and participate in pilgrimage within the diasporic spheres that facilitates a sense of belonging with the Indian continent. This study is based on interviews with males and females in four different locations in Durban and explores the impact that viewing of the different programs bouquets on DSTV has on the lives of Indian population.

INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this paper came about after several family get-togethers over the past few years when the researcher would hear her siblings, aunts (and even uncles), debate, discuss, become emotional and even predict the outcome of different movies, “soapies” or serials that they were watching on television. They would discuss food, fashion and entertainment. At times the discussions would become so intense and poignant that one would assume they were discussing a real life situation within the immediate family. Furthermore, when an aunt of the researcher died a few years ago, her uncle, who lived alone, stated that “had it not been for the Indian programs on television he does not know how he would have passed his days alone”. These comments provided the researcher with the impetus to pursue in a more formalised investigation the impact that cable channels (both North Indian and South Indian) such as Zee TV, B4U, Al Jazeera and NDTV had on Indian families in Durban, South Africa and whether this impacted on their sense of belonging to the Indian subcontinent. This paper also examined how the various Indian programs screened via Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) have emerged, become household topics of conversation, and impacted the social and political lives of its viewers and various Indian families in Durban. The main purpose of this research

was to focus upon the links between being South African and being Indian South African in a post-apartheid context, and how People of Indian Origin identify with India as their land of origin. In order to comprehend the identification of South African Indians with Indian cinema and television programs, one must first understand the initial arrival and inhabitation of Indians in a foreign land, South Africa. It helps to demystify that India-South Africa relations goes beyond economic trade and has consequences for the complex diasporic community in the emerging democracy in the South of the African continent.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Durban, Kwa-Zulu-Natal which has the diverse Indian population in South Africa concentrated in this area which is the largest city and has the most substantial Indian population in sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa as a whole also has a substantial Indian population, with over 1.3 million people of Indian descent (Census 2011). Therefore, Indian influences have contributed to the multicultural diversity of South Africa. This study is based on a three pronged approach. Firstly email communication and telephonic interviews with staff of Multichoice in Johannesburg and Kwa-Zulu-Natal were conducted in January 2014. Secondly 100 questionnaires consisting of both qualitative and quantitative questions were giv-

en to respondents in three different areas in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal; the South, North and Central areas. Sixty-seven of these questionnaires were completed.

Thirdly interviews and discussions with both males and females in different locations in Durban focused on Indian television programs and whether this has grown in popularity and appeal since its initial introduction 12 years ago. The interviews also explored the impact that the viewing of these different programs on the North and South Indian bouquets on DSTV had on the lives of the Indian population in Durban, South Africa.

RESULTS

The Table 1 represents the distribution of respondents according to gender.

Table 1: Gender distribution of respondents

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	34.3
Female	65.7

Females comprised almost two-third of the study sample whilst males comprised a third. Majority of the male and female respondents were between the age categories of 22 to 65 years.

Table 2: Gender distribution of respondents by faith group

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Christianity (%)</i>	<i>Islam (%)</i>	<i>Hinduism (%)</i>
Male	6.0	11.9	16.4
Female	1.5	20.9	43.3
Total	7.5	32.8	59.7

Given the religious composition of the diaspora the study sample comprised an almost fair distribution of faith groups. For all three faith groups, the age range was between 22 to 65 years which is in keeping with the demographic trends within the diaspora (Table 2).

Analysis of Telephonic Interviews with MultiChoice

Literature study on the impact of Bollywood DSTV in influencing Indian diasporic communities is uncommon. The only known study in the

case of South Africa is the one undertaken by Prof. Anand Singh titled *Reculturation through the Old Media – Contribution of Zee TV towards the Rise of Ethno-nationalism amongst PIOS in Durban*. DSTV Indian is South Africa's only 24-hour Indian television entertainment offering and catering to the viewing preference of both North and South Indian communities. According to latest TV audience research, Zee TV secures the number one position in viewership under the Indian TV channels available in South Africa-over 7 day period (Ferreira 2010). TV channels such as Zee TV, Sony Entertainment, and Star Plus telecasting travel documentaries, overseas location shooting of its soaps and cookery shows, as well as talent quests help to "sustain the triadic relationships that migrants forge between their countries of birth or ancestry, countries of settlement and the wider settlement" (Dudrah 2005).

On 20 January 2014, the researcher wrote an email to MultiChoice requesting any information pertaining to how the Indian series screened on both the North and South Indian bouquets have impacted on lifestyle, how people watching these series and movies will not give up on these channels, and what gap this has filled within the community – the role television has played in bridging this gap. On the 27 January 2014, the researcher received an email from Multichoice (names are withheld due to confidentiality) stating: *"We haven't any recent qualitative research (last I am aware of was about 6 years ago). Even DSTV (which is just viewing, not what people are thinking and feeling) does not cover the Indian packs. So unfortunately I am not aware of anything that we can assist with"*. After numerous telephone calls to Johannesburg and KwaZulu-Natal, going through various departments within MultiChoice that deals with the promotion and screening of the programs on DSTV, the researcher received the following email on the 28 January 2014: *"I am so sorry to be the bearer of bad news, unfortunately the people that I thought could assist will not be able to do so"*. The researcher thereafter decided to concentrate on the qualitative research in the questionnaires that were distributed and the interviews conducted.

Analysis of Questionnaires

A number of questions were asked of the respondents, some of which were:

- *Has watching these programs impacted on your family life?*
- *Has watching your choice of bouquet/programs given you a better understanding about the Indian subcontinent?*
- *Watching bouquets on the Indian subcontinent, how do you see yourself as a South African Indian?*
- *How has viewing of these bouquets /programs impacted on your cultural life as a South African Indian?*
- *Has watching of these programs impacted on your religious values as a South African Indian?*
- *Does watching Indians in India celebrating cultural festivals inspire you to want to practise the same?*
- *Does events in India as depicted in these bouquets/programs impact on the way you think? Elaborate on certain of the events that have impacted on your way of thinking*
- *What are some of the positive and negative impact of viewing these bouquets?*
- *Has the viewing of these bouquets/programs increased your consciousness as an Indian?*
- *Do you find any similarities on some of the programs on the bouquet with the South African way of life?*
- *Do you watch NDTV or Al Jazeera? If yes, how has these news/talk show channels impacted on you as a South African Indian.*
- *Watching these bouquets/programs, has it inspired you to visit India?*
- *Do you enjoy the advertisement's in-between the programs?*

A holistic analysis will be given based on the responses to the questions asked with the main focus being on the links between being South African and being Indian South African in a post-apartheid context, and how People of Indian Origin identify with India as their land of origin. Many South African Indians find comfort in TV programs that reasserts their socio-religious value systems that have their origins in a faraway land, India, and connects them to more the news and events that belong to this geographically distant country than to the one in which they are permanently resident (Singh 2012: 477).

What emerged with followers of Zee TV about the content of the programs was that they were visibly passionate as they often conversed

about either the way actors played their roles or the lessons that the stories have to teach to the wider public about morality, responsibility and honesty, among a wide range of other related issues of familial and social obligations. But interspersed among several of these conversations was the ethno-nationalistic hint about what artistic talent India produces and what pride that they feel about it because of that.

The familiarity in culture, language, and social norms that the Indian cable channels offered Indians did not necessitate an adjustment period. For many Indians, the advent of the Indian bouquets has been an opportunity to rediscover their heritage and culture that had otherwise become diluted or had faced adjustment under pressures of assimilation into mainstream South African society.

Members of the older generation have come to enjoy a re-endorsement of their value systems that while those of the younger generation have located their sense of connectedness to their ethnic communities through travel, fashion, and knowledge acquisition inspired by the constant engagement with the Indian bouquets. One response was: *"This has created new diasporic spheres that facilitate a sense of belonging with the homeland which was previously unimaginable in terms of fostering Indian identities and culture."* Another respondent indicated: *"They arouse the curiosity to travel, among Indians in the Diaspora, back to India in search of roots while the Indian outbound tourists travel to various spaces of the Diaspora to experience points of similarity and differences."* Besides an emotional and spiritual engagement with India through these bouquets, Indian channels have sparked a renaissance of Indian culture and fashion. The female characters in the serials are usually dressed in fashion accessories, the latest in sari designs; sometimes their hands are stained with fancy henna designs. Telephonic interviews revealed a similar pattern of adoration of the Indian programs.

Analysis of Response to Telephonic Interviews

The responses to the telephonic interviews were more insightful about the impact that viewing of programs had on the everyday lives within Indian households. One response struck the researcher as being rather drastic to the func-

tioning of the household. The researcher would refer to the respondents according to alphabets. Respondent A, who is a female aged 55 years stated: *"when I get home from work, I watch my programs from 6pm to approximately 10pm. I do not like being disturbed. To me it is my form of relaxation and connection with India. Besides the programs that I follow (and when I am not at home I record the programs to be watched over the weekend), I cannot get over the young talent that India has in the program SA, Re Ga Ma. It is unbelievable that children at such a young age can sing and dance like professionals."*

Interviewee B (female aged 40) stated: *"Many of the programs are very modern and realistic. It portrays family relationships and imparts specific messages, especially the message about the dowry system –The stories have a moral message in them especially about the abuse of females and children. I feel that some of the programs, especially those on Sony, portray contemporary life issues which one can relate to. From 8pm to 10.30 pm I watch my programs. All my telephone calls to family and relatives are made before my programs start so that I am not disturbed during my viewing. Although I do not speak the language (I understand a bit) listening to the language that is not spoken by many here is a way in which one can be in touch with India and our culture. Children are exposed to the Indian language via the programs which have English subtitles, so it's easy to learn. Furthermore I have a nephew (10 years) who watches many of the programs and we discuss the moral issues portrayed in the story. My impression gained from these serials is that Indian people are more tolerant, understanding, outspoken, don't hold grudges, and have respect (especially, youngsters for elders). I also love watching the latest fashion in traditional Eastern wear, shown that is, sarees and Punjabis-most are not available in South Africa and only become obtainable after many months."*

Interviewee C (female aged 75) said: *"After my husband passed away 5 years ago, and ZEE television has given me a reason to carry on with life. I watch television most of the day and from 5pm to 8.30pm I follow my specific programs. My day passes because the people from the programs have become a part of my life (more like my family because I watch them every day on the screen). I can discuss the programs with my daughters and family members (many of them who have lost their spouses and also follow the*

serials). It provides my life with meaning for I cannot drive and am basically house bound. One of the most important aspects that I observed on these programs is the respect that youngsters in India have for their elders. In South Africa, the current generation show very little respect towards their elders-this is lacking in our Indian society and I think that this is one of the factors that has contributed to the problems within many Indian homes." She went on to further indicate that: *"the food demonstrations are so similar and yet so different to what we cook in Durban. Often I experiment with some of the recipes portrayed on television. I have been to India many times with my late husband, even to his ancestral village in Harpurwa (which is on the border of Nepal). Although I love India, South Africa is my home."*

Indian cuisine has been part of the South African culinary fabric for so long that many have probably forgotten that some of their favourite dishes and snacks were originally introduced by their Indian compatriots: *samosas, rotis, biryani and curry.*

Interviewee D was a male aged 55 who did not follow the television serials but watched the NDTV news channel which is broadcast 24 hours of the day and seven days a week said that he was *"hooked on the news channel."* NDTV has an unmatched track record of launching the most successful news channels in India and abroad and is a clear leader in the English news segment. NDTV is credited with pioneering several broadcasting and programming initiatives in Indian television setting award winning benchmarks in reporting and producing a range of bouquets built around compelling news, as well as premium movies, documentaries and sports channels catering mainly to the Indian Diaspora in Africa. *"I can put on NDTV at any part of the day or night and listen to contemporary views on religion, art, Indian festivals and debates on the politics of the world."*

In light of the above it is imperative that a discussion on Indians in South Africa is given in order to contextualize the research.

DISCUSSION

A Brief History of the Indentured Labourers who came to Natal from India: 1860-1911

The period 1860 to 1911 is an important and integral part of the history of South Africa as it was during this turbulent period when over

150,000 indentured labourers were imported to work mainly on the sugar plantations belonging to the colonial planters. In the 1800's, that is, the nineteenth century, the Industrial revolution made Britain a world superpower and it enjoyed world domination in the form of the British Empire. In 1843 Britain officially annexed Natal, and in 1856 it became a British or a full Crown Colony. However at that stage in India, the British Government had entrusted the rule of India to the British East India Company, which was a private merchant enterprise and their primary interest was to make as enormous an income as possible from the land it occupied or subjugated. The British Colonial farmers in Natal became aware that sugar cane grew exceptionally well all along the east coast of Natal and saw tremendous prospects for huge sugar manufacture and earnings. However they needed cheap labour urgently due to the fact that slavery was abolished by the British Government in 1833 with the passing of the Act of Abolition and all the slaves throughout the British Empire around the world were freed. Once freed, these slaves refused to be employed by their previous "masters" because of the ruthless experiences that they had as slaves.

During the same period in India (which had been under foreign rule for centuries), because of various factors, widespread poverty arose. There was famine in the North of India and many peasants became desperate for work. The local colonial farmers in Natal became aware of the availability of underprivileged peasants in India who were anxious for employment.

In 1851, a motion was passed to petition the Natal Government to introduce indentured labourers from India. However, nothing materialized in terms of importing labour was concerned until on the 28th April 1858, the local newspaper the Natal Mercury editorial column carried an article stating that "The fate of the colony hangs on a thread and that thread is labour" (Natal Mercury 1958). In 1859, the local farmers formally petitioned the Government to import indentured labourers from India. Thereupon Laws 13, 14 and 15 of 1859 were passed by the Natal Colonial Government to begin the importation of indentured labourers from India to work on the sugarcane fields of the colonial farmers in Natal. India had to however also pass laws allowing their citizens to go overseas to work in the British colonies. On 7th August 1860, India passed

Act 33 of 1860 the export of indentured Indians to Natal which received official approval and the importation into Natal began.

On 4th October 1860, the "Belvedere" left Calcutta (North East of India) with 342 passengers and arrived in Durban on the 26th November 1860. The "SS Truro" departed from Madras (South East of India) on the 12th October 1860 and arrived on 16th November 1860. For many reasons, including the dismal management of the labourers, importation was halted in 1866. After an interruption of 8 years, importation of labour recommenced when the "S.S Blenheim" left Calcutta on the 12th June 1874. Immigration thereafter continued unabatedly until 1911 when it was finally terminated (Sulliman 1997).

On 25th February 1910, Professor Gopalkrishnan Gokul, a member of the Legislative Council of India, tabled a resolution in the Indian Legislature to abolish the export of indentured labourers to the Colony. The Gazette of India published an official notice which prohibited "all emigration to Natal from 1st July 1911". The ship the SS Umlazi set sail from Madras on 30th June 1911 and arrived in Durban on the 21st July 1911 and the system which was described as a form of slavery officially came to an end in Natal after a period of 51 years. However it was not until 1917 when all indentured labour throughout the then British Empire ceased.

Preservation of Culture, Religion and Language of the Indentured Labourers

Notwithstanding extreme hardship, abuse, discrimination, deprivation and exploitation, the indentured worker by sheer indentation of hard work, resolve, perseverance, tolerance and pride coupled with humility (perhaps born out of the karmic belief that a person has come to earth to perform a duty), overcame seemingly insurmountable odds. Socio-cultural and religious dilemmas were also a major source of challenge. Given the diversity of languages spoken in the colony (Tamil, Bhojpuri, Gujarati, Telugu, Urdu, Konkani, and Meman—a dialect of Sindhi) (Mesthrie 1990) it restricted social interaction within certain linguistic groups and at the same time excluded others. However the migrants were self-reliant and observed their religion, customs and placed great emphasis on education. They built their own temples, mosques and schools with little or no help from the authorities. Amid

the harsh life on the plantations, Indian labourers made time for entertainment. During the evenings and weekends groups of labourers met to sing religious songs. Religion, drama and entertainment were closely linked and the Ramayana was enacted in order to keep the values of the ancestral homeland alive. Both North and South Indian dances and songs were preserved as a connection to the "motherland" India.

The Emergence of Television in South Africa

Television in South Africa was introduced in 1976 which was a state-controlled service by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Although television was introduced rather late in South Africa, broadcasting was very controversial with the then Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd comparing it with atomic bombs and poison gas, claiming that "they are modern things, but that does not mean they are desirable. The government has to watch for any dangers to the people, both spiritual and physical" (Time 1964). Dr. Albert Hertzog, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs at the time, said that TV would come to South Africa "over [his] dead body" (Richard 1978), denouncing it as "a miniature bioscope [cinema] over which parents would have no control" (Mpahlwa 2008). He also argued that "South Africa would have to import films showing race mixing; and advertising would make [non-white] Africans dissatisfied with their lot" (Cape Times 1967). However, many white South Africans, including some Afrikaners, did not share Hertzog's "reactionary" views and regarded the hostility towards what he called "the little black box" as irrational.

In South Africa, there exists an established history of Indian film exhibition. Jagarnath (2004: 212) noted that "It was not long after India started producing its own films that they made their appearance in South Africa" and that as early as 1936, the Indian government appealed against the high import taxes on films imposed by the South African government. The appeal was unsuccessful on the grounds that "Indian films appear to be purely a money-making matter and not for the education of the Indian community" (Board of Censors 1939, cited in Jagarnath 2004). The Indian film exhibition continued, although the segregationist policies of the South African government limited its exposure and appeal beyond the Indian population. Furthermore DVD

and video versions of Bollywood films are widely available. Large cinema chains like Ster Kinekor progressively show more Bollywood films.

In 1986, the SABC's monopoly was challenged by the launch of a subscription-based service known as M-Net, which was supported by a consortium of newspaper publishers. The first digital television implementation in South Africa was a satellite-based system launched by pay-TV operator MultiChoice in 1995. On 4 February 1996, two years after the ANC came to power, the SABC reorganised its three TV channels, so as to be more representative of different language groups (Norm 1996). MultiChoice provides leading television entertainment via its DSTV bouquets to many South Africans.

As post-apartheid South Africa began finding its way forward through the newly elected leadership of the ANC, attempts were unceasingly made to encourage political participation in the most inclusive ways possible. Radio and television acquired a significant role in the facilitation of this process, ascribing dual recognition to them as important mediums of political communication and as facilitators of nation building.

Given recognition in the ANC's initial blueprint for post-apartheid transformation, the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), radio and television broadcasting was expected to fulfill at least three roles viz. provision of unfettered information that breaks away from the myopic role of the apartheid era SABC; complementing the roles of state bodies in fostering economic growth and development; and presenting itself as a medium of national reconciliation and unification (African National Congress 1994: 133-135). MultiChoice also has niche bouquets in its DSTV Indian bouquets. "Indian Bouquet", as it was referred to when first offered in 2001, was a selection of several North Indian based channels offering through the medium of Hindi: music, dance shows, soapies, comedies, Bollywood movies, and the news in Hindi, until the introduction of an English medium news channel from India, NDTV 24/7. Although Indian languages are seldom spoken or understood by younger Indians, English-subtitled Bollywood films and television programs remain popular among South African Indians. These are broadcasted both by SABC 2 television channel for a few hours each week (Eastern Mosaic

on Sundays), and by the DSTV satellite television service, which carries Zee TV, B4U, NDTV and a Hindi-language Sony channel and many more. In addition, Tamil-language channels (South Indian), SunTV and KTV, were introduced in 2004.

Synopsis of Famous Programs ‘Soapies’ Watched by South African Indians

Some of the most famous programs viewed by South African Indians were: *‘Ek Mutthi Aasmaan’* which captured the hopes and aspirations of a domestic worker alongside the trials and tribulations of her daily life. It showcased how domestic workers mortgage their own life to toil and tears so that their children can grow up enjoying the fruits of education and amenities they could only dream of and live life with dignity in the future. Another was *“Jodhaa Akbar”* which was based on a sixteenth century love story about a political marriage of convenience between a Mughal emperor, Akbar, and a Rajput princess, Jodhaa. Political success knew no bounds for Emperor Akbar. The most popular among all age groups was *“Pavitra Ristha”* (Innocent Love) which focused on the life of Archana who belongs to a middle-class Maharashtrian family based in Mumbai. Being the eldest daughter of her family, Archana chooses to take responsibilities of her siblings rather than focusing on education. All these programs had moral and values attached to them which is pertinent to society at large and more specifically Indian society because of the emphasis on the bond between members within an extended and nuclear family structure.

“Indian Night of the Stars”

Annually in Durban, South Africa, the Indian North and South bouquets host’s actors and actresses who are brought to the country to meet with their fans. These stars from the different ZEE, Sony and B4U programs are transported to South Africa to participate in a live concert where the adored stars of television are called upon to perform live dance, music and fashion shows to South African audiences and are presented with awards for their performances. The South African fans are given an opportunity to meet with their idolised stars from television that they adore. In one performance Ankita Lokhande (ap-

peared in a three-wheeler “tuk-tuk”), and Sushant Singh (rode his way to the stage on a high-powered motorbike). Sushant Singh received the most rapturous welcome of all, as several people argued, because the audience was dominated by women fans. Each of the appearances, by the respective stars, exemplified notions of identity and association with both India and South Africa in ways that requires a deeper understanding about what they meant to the identity of People of Indian Origin.

In this show Sushant (*‘Manav and Archana’* of *Pavitra Rishta* -2013) said, *“Actors often express discomfort at being mobbed... but to tell you the truth, it was absolutely overwhelming to see the love and warmth the crowd in South Africa showered on us. They just couldn’t get enough of Ankita and I on stage and heading towards the exit of the venue was next to impossible. We are both deeply humbled by the adulation!”*

CONCLUSION

This research paper examined whether the perceptions of the People of Indian Origin in South Africa are influenced by Bollywood DSTV programs and if this influenced their lives as South African Indians. Gender was used as a unit of analysis. The globalization of digital media and the introduction of cable channels such as Zee TV, B4U, Al Jazeera and NDTV have created a new impetus and have encouraged South African Indians to take stock of their culture, customs, fashion, cooking and rituals. The assessment of what and when people watch as part of their home entertainment has significant meaning to the statements that they are making to themselves and within their homes. As part of a community with whom they share a common geographical and ancestral heritage, language, religious beliefs and practices, and cuisine, they become an integral part of an in-group formation with a distinctive consciousness about preferred values and socialization patterns. While South Africa has undeniably become their home, India continues to represent their ideals in terms of their longing for socio-religious continuity. South African Indians retain a sense of cultural and social connection to India, and a concept of primary local and secondary ancestral identity is prevalent among people of Indian descent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The availability of cable networks and the proliferation of Indian media channels have led to a resurgence of culture, fashion, cuisine, custom, and ritual among the Indian communities in South Africa. This has also fueled the impetus for Indians to travel back to India to witness locations that have been included in the shooting of DSTV programs, shop for specific fashion items introduced via the cable, participate in pilgrimage locations, and donate towards political and social causes that affect India. The author recommends that more research be done on the effect of Digital satellite television on the people of Indian origin terms of their identification with India. Also research should concentrate on how programs affect South African Indian culture and lifestyles.

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Paper received for publication on May 2016
Paper accepted for publication on November 2016