

**FROM SMALL WONDER TO BIG BOSS: A HISTORICAL TAKE ON LOCALIZATION
OF TRANSNATIONAL TELEVISION CONTENT IN POST LPG INDIAN TELEVISION**

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Abstract

Contemporary Indian television is on the verge of a cardinal paradigm shift with the increasing penetration of New Media. However, while zooming out the television landscape in India, the impact of the launch of LPG policy in the early 90's is found to be a significant game-changer as far as Indian television content is concerned. With the advent of satellite television in 90's, the broadcast industry witnessed the entry of many foreign players in India; resulting some fundamental changes and innovations in television content. Transnational Television Content (TTC) is one such area where this impact left a concrete and long term footprints. However, observations shows that Indian television industry (or audience, in other way) was somewhat redundant to accept TTC in its original form and preferred the Localization of such content. Localization of TTC included the overt and covert adaptations of popular foreign television programs and the program formats, recreating characters with indigenous treatment, regionalization of programs, re-scripting & dubbing of shows etc. As the television industry started involving high degree of financial investments, the investors & producers started expecting assurance of returns. After the LPG (i.e. Liberalization-Privatization-Globalization) era, Indian economy opened up and content producers/creators became more aware of the socio-cultural media products from outside world. Since, particular program had received larger success in other societal settings, it involves low risk of failures for producers regarding its replication for Indian audience. As these phenomena blended and triggered the Indian producers or content-creators to replicate such programs, the TV shows like Karishma Ka Karishma, Kaun Banega Crorepati, Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahi, Comedy Nights with Kapil, Sachh Ka Saamna and Big Boss were launched. Interestingly, these shows were the Indian adaptations of popular international programs Small Wonder (American); Who Wants to be a Millionaire (British); Yo Soy Betty, La Fea (Columbian); The Kumar's at No.42 (British); Nada Mas Que La Vardad (Columbian) and Big Brother (Netherlands) respectively. This research paper, within its limited field of reference, is an attempt to trace the journey of TTC in India so as to be able to historicize the Localization dimension in post privatization India. For this, the secondary data sample of 35 foreign TV shows having their Indian adaptations was collected and synthesized in order to generate a rational interpretations using the blend of both qualitative as well as quantitative inquiry.

Keywords: *Indian Television, Localization, LPG, Television Adaptations, Transnational Television Content.*

1 Introduction

The fore-fronting of television in India happened not before than past three and a half decade. But last decade have taken this trajectory to the new scales. Television in India has been in existence for more than four decades now. For the first 17 years, it spread haltingly and transmission was mainly in black & white. The thinkers and policy makers of the country, which had just been liberated from centuries of colonial rule, frowned upon television, looking on at it as a luxury Indians could do without. In 1955 a Cabinet decision was taken disallowing any foreign investments in media which has since been followed religiously for nearly half a century.(Prakash & Ravi, 2011) The introduction with increased penetration of television in India caused due to the two cardinal points or two major historical events; first is when the state owned broadcaster 'Doordarshan' introduced the colour television for 1982 Asian Games which was hosted by India and the second one is when the then government under the leadership of P.V. Narsimha Rao launched the series of new economic reforms and laid down the foundation for privately owned and foreign owned broadcasters to start their operations in a limited manner.(Prakash & Ravi, 2011) The neoliberal financial policies then

led to the paradigm shifting era which is known as LPG era i.e. Liberalization-Privatization-Globalization. Many domestic as well as international privately owned channels started satellite broadcasting like Star TV, CNN TV, Sun TV, Zee TV and many others. The novelty of this newly formed media products attracted exponentially increasing eyeballs and these channels were started getting increased profits. Like a snowball effect, this process then led to the entry of many other foreign as well as domestic players to the Indian television market. The creation of world's one of the biggest television market, consisting of increasing Westernized, middle-class audience of more than 300 million, with growing purchasing power and aspirations to a consumerist lifestyle, have heavily attracted transnational media corporations into India (Thussu, 2007). In an important study on transnational television in India, Melissa Butcher writes that *Star TV's* programming and marketing strategy has resulted in a new kind of cultural change in India in the 1990s. During this period number of global cable television and satellite television channels, entered the Indian television market, vying for audiences and consumers and bringing with them predominantly western values and aspirations in the cultural commodity form. One of the most significant influences on the broadcasting scene in India during this period of unprecedented growth has been Rupert Murdoch, chair and chief executive officer of News Corporation, whose pan-Asian network Star (Satellite Television Asian Region) has transformed news and entertainment on television in India, as elsewhere in Asia (Butcher, 2003). He was responsible for introducing the first music television channel in India (Channel [V]); the first 24/7 news network (Star News) and the first reality TV series (*Lakme Fashion Show*).

The advent of satellite television in the 1990s is landmark in the history of television broadcasting in this country as it changed the television landscape. Indian television suddenly became much for entertainment driven. Gone are the days of Indian television serials with which the people could relate. The journey from Doordarshan to Zee, Sony and Star plus has been a long one. The popularity of satellite television was not confined only to metropolitans but it also became popular in small towns and villages of India. The private channels changed the very mandate of broadcasting in India. The aim of education and development through television was made to seem outdated, and rural India was no longer a viable constituency to cater to. Western programs and Indian-produced programs on the private networks conveyed consumerist and material values (Singhal & Everette, 2001). It created wants and desires that were not always synchronous with the needs or financial resources of the people (Sevanti, 1995). In the space of two decades, the media in India has become the vanguard of consumerism. All this is done at the expense of difficult stories and issues such as poverty, exploitation and the dark sides of globalization. Contemporary Indian television is criticized by many for having shifted from its humanitarian goals and becoming a medium for the urban middle class. It is this class which owns and operate most of the television industry in India. It is the same class which is transmitting its own values, principles, and opinions to the rest of India (Johnson, 2000).

The western influence India has had is not limited to social cultures, dressings and languages. Apparently, an important source of the Indian TV industry's 'inspiration' is western as well (Kapila, 2017). Although transnational television networks come out with better technology, and better production quality with big investments, along the way, they also said to be bringing in an alien culture new to the region in which they are operating. And this has led to furious debates about the impact of transnational television content on Indian culture, and identity. In fact some sections of the civil society blame these television channels for polluting the 'Indian culture' and disturbing peace in the society. Television content across most of the Indian languages, influenced by Western program formats, has fueled sharp debates about the kind of cultural values it promotes. Television programs like *Sachh Ka Samna* (Indian version of *The Moment of Truth*), *Big Boss* (Indian version of *Big Brother*) and the like have attracted extreme reactions, both well-meaning and otherwise, from sections of the Indian society. While some set of people argue in favour of the freedom of expression, others are rooting for censorship of such programs by claiming that these shows

undermine the Indian values, and culture. Most of these programs are aired in transnational general entertainment television (GEC) channels (Prakash & Ravi, 2011). Hence against this backdrop, this research paper is an attempt to trace the journey of transnational television content in India and in the process to develop a historical perspective on Localization dimension of Indian television viewing.

Localization

The term 'localizing' underwent through a constant ramifications in terms of structure and presentation of TTC. As seen in the case of Marimar, the public viewing has embraced Mexican, South American, Chinese, Korean telenovelas. 'Dubbing of Dialogue' instead of subtitles which distract from a video, thus became the simplest form of 'localizing' an imported TTC. Another simple form of localizing a foreign material is deconstructing a show made up of a series of vignettes (ideally those with seemingly endless supply like World's Amazing Videos, Ripley's, Guinness, America's Funniest Videos), editing out the original host and substituting a local talent who threads the show together in the vernacular or in Taglish. (Daffon, 2006)

Today "localization" has gone beyond the basic. Now, we're doing official versions of international formats. Where some Asian countries enjoy lucrative exports of telenovelas, other Asian countries have been quick on the uptake of western formats, including the mega bucks mega hits. Fact is, for good or bad, branded entertainment has grown into one of the hottest "in" things in Asian TV, with broadcasters and producers doing licensed versions of hits and not quite hits: from the decades-old game show formats Price Is Right, Family Feud and Wheel of Fortune, to the latter-day hit Who Wants to be a Millionaire and The Weakest Link (Philippines); Fear Factor (Malaysia, Indonesia, India) to Big Brother (Thailand, Philippines), to Brand Idol which has cut a wide swath across the Asian region.

2 Methodology

Since the very nature of this research is moreover historical, the data obtained for research is secondary data in nature. The fine and convenient blend of both qualitative as well as quantitative methods were used. The very first step involved was to collect the data about such TV shows from foreign channels which (or their formats) were later on adapted/ copied/ inspired (?) to Indian television. By using internet and primary interviews with key persons through snowball sampling, I collected the data of more than 30 such TV shows, which statistically can be considered as large sample. The data consists of the original title of original TV show, its country of origin, genre and name of Indian adaptations; year of first episode and the channel on which it has been aired in India etc. After data collection, the quantitative or qualitative, as the case may be, analysis has been done to be able to answer following research questions,

RQ1. Which TTC were used in post 1990 India and what is its chronology?

RQ2. What was the collective thematic appeal of the TTC in Indian television?

RQ3. How was the performance of these TTC in their original land and that of in India?

RQ4. What are the dominating factors responsible for their import?

RQ5. Why the need of 'localization' was felt?

RQ6. What areas, factors, structures were localized and how they were influenced by Indian realities?

Following is the data table for gathered for TTC with details,

Sr. No.	Original Title	Origin	Genre	Indian Adaptation	Year	Channel
1	F.R.I.E.N.D.S.	USA	Sitcom	Hello Friends	1999	ZEE TV
2	Who Wants to be a Millionaire	UK	Game Show	Kaun Banega Crorepati	2000	Sony

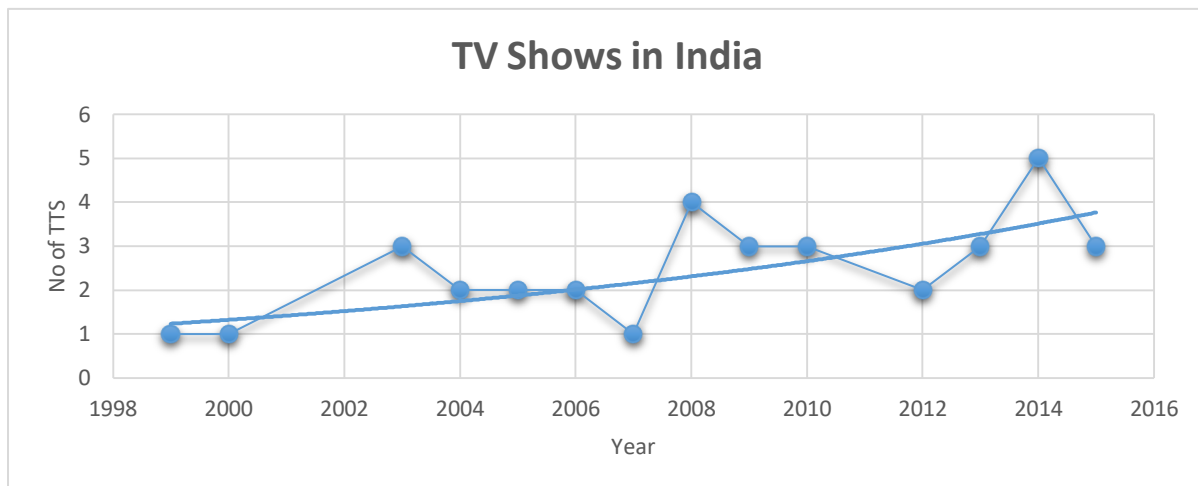
3	Small Wonder	USA	Sitcom, Science Fiction	Karishma ka Karishma	2003	Star Plus
4	Yo Soy Betty, La Fea/ Ugly Betty	Columbia/ USA	Family Drama	Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahi	2003	Sony
5	Road Rules	USA	Cult Show	MTV Roadies	2003	MTV
6	Pop Idol	UK	Talent Hunt	Indian Idol	2004	Sony
7	Rebelde Way	Argentina	Romance, Teen Drama	Remix	2004	Star ONE
8	Miljoenenjacht/ Deal Ya No Deal	Dutch/ USA	Game Show	Deal Ya No Deal	2005	Sony
9	Strictly Come Dancing/ Dancing with the Stars	UK/USA	Reality	Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa	2006	Sony
10	Big Brother	Netherlan ds	Game Show	Big Boss	2006	Colors
11	Grey's Anatomy	USA	Medical Drama	Ek Nayi Ummeed Roshni/ Dil Mil Gaye	2007	Star Plus
12	Fear Factor	USA	Stunt based Game Show	Khataron Ke Khiladi	2008	Colors
13	Are You Smarter Than A 5 th Grader?	USA	Game Show	Kya Aap Paanchavi Pass Se Tej Hain?	2008	Star Plus
14	Sense and Sensibility	UK	Family Drama	Kumkum Bhagya	2008	ZEE TV
15	The Flavor of Love	USA	Dating Game Show	MTV Splitsvilla	2008	MTV
16	Britain's Got Talent	UK	Talent Hunt	India's Got Talent	2009	Colors
17	Nada Mas Que La Vardad/ Moment of Truth	Columbia/ USA	Game Show	Sachh Ka Saamna	2009	Star Plus
18	I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!	UK	Game Show	Iss Jungle Se Muze Bachao	2009	Sony
19	The Vampire Diaries	USA	Mystery Thriller, Romance	Pyar Kii Yeh Ek Kahanii	2010	Star ONE
20	National Bingo Night	USA	Game Show	National Bingo Night	2010	Colors

21	The Wire	USA	Crime Drama, Action	Powder	2010	Sony
22	The Suite Life of Zack and Cody	USA	Sitcom	The Suite Life of Karan and Kabir	2012	Disney
23	I Dream of Jeannie	USA	Fantasy Sitcom	Jeani aur Juju	2012	Sony
24	The Kumars at No. 42	UK	Sitcom	Comedy Nights with Kapil	2013	Colors
25	The Bachelorette	USA	Dating Game Show	The Bachelorette India: Mere Khayalon Ki Mallika	2013	Life OK's
26	24	USA	Action, Crime Thriller	Time Bomb 9/11	2005	ZEE TV
27	24	USA	Action, Crime Thriller	24	2013	Colors
28	Boss/ Breaking Bad	USA	Thriller	Yudh	2014	Sony
29	Wuthering Heights	UK	Romance	Meri Aashiqui Tum Se Hi	2014	Colors
30	3rd Rock from the Sun	USA	Sitcom	Badi Dooooor Se Aaye Hai	2014	SAB TV
31	MTV Punk'd	USA	Reality	MTV Jhand Hogi Sabki	2014	MTV
32	Revenge	Suspense Thriller	Suspense Thriller, Crime Drama	Ek Hasina Thi	2014	Star Plus
33	The Newsroom	USA	Fiction	Reporters	2015	Sony
34	The Middle	USA	Sitcom	Tedi Medi Family	2015	BIG Magic
35	Everybody Loves Reymond	USA	Sitcom	Sumit Sambhal Lega	2015	Star Plus

3 Findings

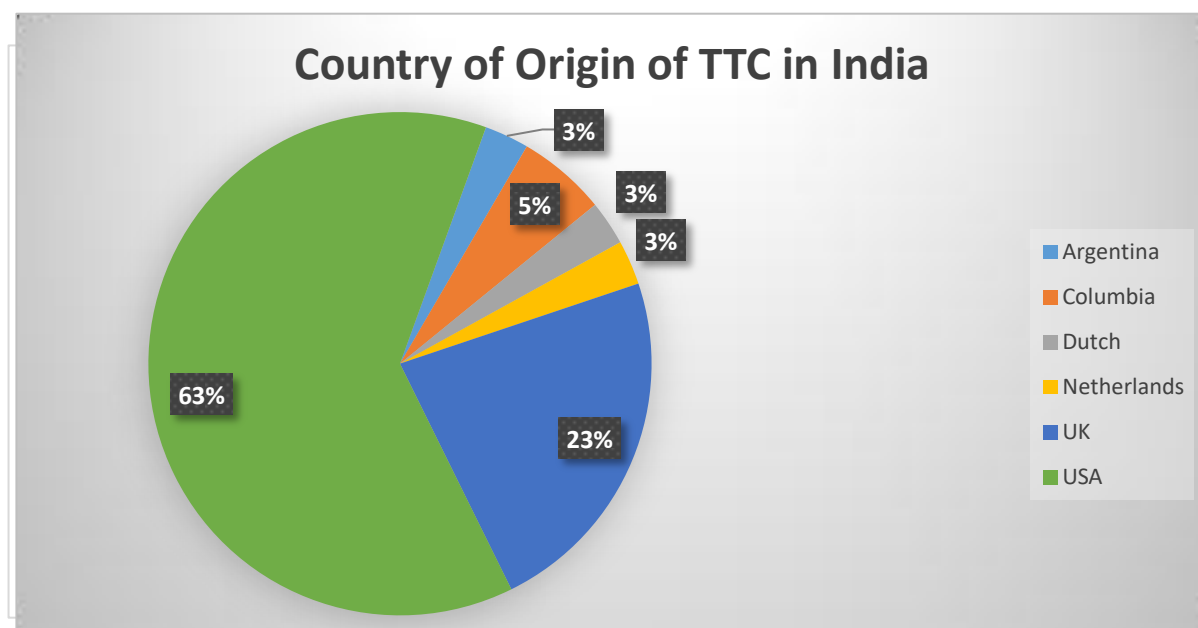
Here are some of the findings which are based on the quantitative analysis of data.

1. Right from the serial 'Hello Friends' of Zee TV in 1999 which is based on popular American sitcom FRIENDS to the serial 'Sumeet Sambhal Lega' on Star Plus in 2015 which is based on Everybody Loves Raymond; the data shows that there has been a continuous exponential increase in such localization of Transnational Television Content in India. The popularity of this televised 'Masala' is gaining more and more attention of content producers.



2. The Channel wise bar diagram shows that SONY Network is on the top of the list to use localized transnational content for Indian audience followed by Colors TV and Star Plus.

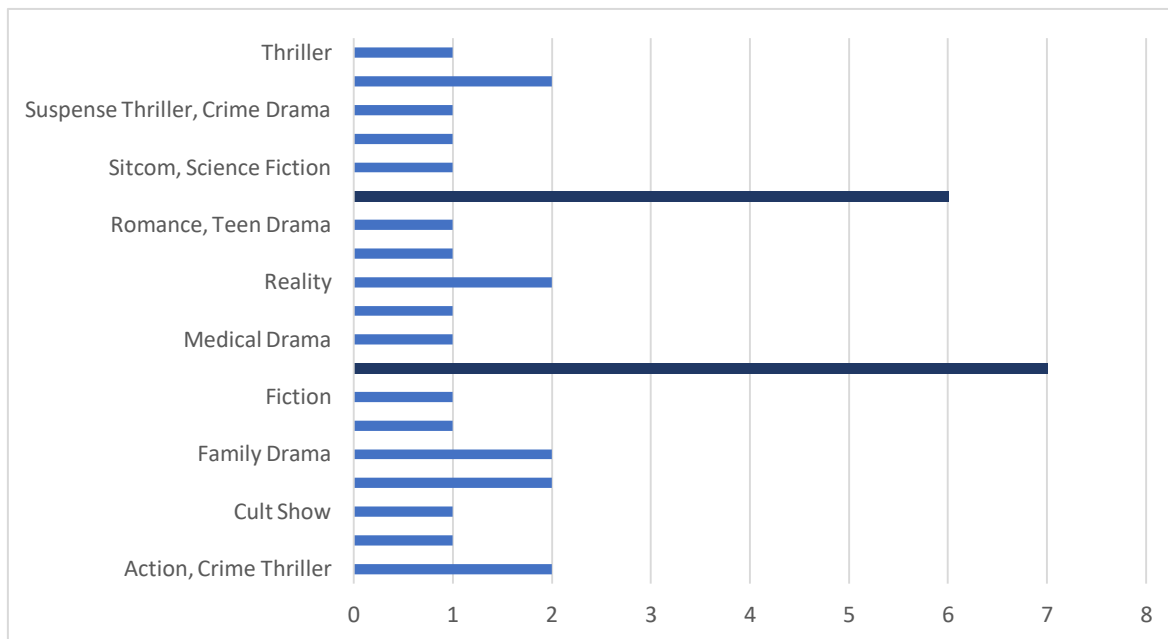
3. This bar graph clearly displays the dominance of USA based localization of TTC in India with 63% of total localization happened during the period. United Kingdom based localization is also gradually gaining its share in India.



With these two Grand Leaders, there are other countries also from where the localization happened. These include,

- Argentina: Remix 2004 - The Rebelde Way
- Columbia: Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahi 2003- Yo Soy Betty, La Fea, Sachh Ka Saamna 2009- Nada Mas Que La Vardad
- Dutch: Deal Ya No Deal 2005- Miljoenenjacht
- Netherlands: Big Boss 2006- Bog Brother

4. With this side bar graph, it is clear that the most preferred genre format for localization in India in Game Show followed by Sitcom i.e. Situational Comedy. Other genres like Talent Hunt, Reality, Family Drama, Action, Crime Thriller and Dating Game Show are also increasingly used to explore with the transnational localization.



4 Discussion

Indian television market is on the verge of major transformation also with the introduction and increasing penetration of New Media technology. Lot of choices is available to the audiences in the fiction as well as in the non-fiction genre. In fiction, viewers are lapping up shows which are filled with high emotional drama. There are also shows which have significant localization and are set in the regional milieu that have captured the attention of viewers. In the non-fiction category, shows that transcend genres are proving to be successful.

As reflected in the programming strategies of some of the above mentioned transnational television channels, there is a clear attempt at localization of the content. In pursuit of winning over the viewers to their fold, even international players are forced into making programs on core social issues. Even the new entrant Colors, despite of its transnational origin, has not taken the risk of putting the cultural spin on its programming. It has religiously paid heed to local culture and without hurting the local sentiments, have gone into innovative programming.

Leading transnational GECs Star Plus, Sony and Colors have all aired programs adopted from shows of American or European TV channels. Although Star Plus hit gold with Kaun Banega Crorepati in 2001, the channel faced severe challenge with its program Sachh Ka Samna, in 2009, as the anchor in the programme asked extremely personal questions on TV. The programme created furore in the Rajya Sabha³ and members alleged that the content appeared in the program was “obscene.” In July, 2009, the government issued show cause notice on Star Plus for “offending good taste and decency not suitable for unrestricted public exhibition, and for obscenity in words”. Even a show like Big Boss, aired earlier by Sony TV and now Colors has attracted ire from some sections of the civil society.

Although the paper might not have answered all the prepositions put at the beginning, it must have opened up the different aspects of localization of TTC. With this short study, it is also clear that the future of Indian Television market in definitely going to have TTC on its plate but the question of localization strategies and audience response to it will still be unclear or non-standardized one.

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