HINDUPHOBIA IN TAMIL TELEVISION: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to map the obscure visual text and the visual discourse of spiritual leader Paramahamsa Nithyanantha and Ms. Renjitha's News telecast by Sun Tamil television channel. The unusual visual language discourses traverse multiple levels of ethical considerations, during the prime time telecast. The narrative discourses reveal the ideological stance of the television Channel and the wrong approach to news of religious matter. The ideological and power structured, visual discourses spread a pessimistic and perverse image of the overall Hindu culture. This study employs qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of telecasts visual content available on internet. The CDA is a very peculiar theory and method to uncover the invisible and biased communicative religious discourse.

Keyword: Spiritual leaders, Visual discourse, Power, Ideology, CDA, Sun TV, Nithyanantha .

1.INTRODUCTION

Television is one of the most important communication mediums, having power to influence the minds of people easily and quickly. Research has proven the intensity of the impact of modern television. The important characteristic of the media has been towards informative entertainment, though in recent times the media visibility is changing from informative to sensationalism in Tamil Nadu, this State which is strongly rooted in the Dravidian tradition. The highly reputed and important television channels are run by the lineage of Dravidian driven ethos. From the side of Dravidian tradition there is a different and unique vision of Hindu culture. However, in the matter of religious discourses that appear in the television there is strong sense of neutrality in programme production. But, when it comes in the matter of Nithyanantha, television channels have muted neutrality, particularly Sun TV to disseminate vulgarity in the narrative discourse. This particular event was telecast in a highly erotic sense, as well as with unethical logic. From the beginning itself this channel has gained credibility among all classes of viewers across age, caste, and religion. Commonly in all house hold not only parents but also children, adult, and evening all family members sit in front of the television, when suddenly erotic content appears in the name of breaking news and everybody becomes confused. (Prof. Ravindran, from the discussion) Everything went wrong in the air and people were left wondering. This unethical narrative discourse is not possible in the name of news dissemination in any other country. This remarkable incident shown as historical allegory traverses the code and esthics of Tamil Television. "Virtually every 'fact' used in business, political life and every day human relations is derived from other 'fact' or assumptions that have been shaped, deliberately or not, by the pre-existing power structure" (Toffler: 1990,18.p). This issue has been telecast and made very notorious by ideological constraint.

As visual media Television is the most powerful means of mass communication in the world, the magical narrative mesmerizes and creates a great impact among the people. Television channels, serve as a medium of information, education and entertainment and thus television has become an essential part of our everyday life." Television is a combination of technology and cultural forms" (Williams: 1975) and this industry also finds itself at the heart of all kinds of commercial and industry strategies. Television is a medium which is used to express social concern and political views creatively. In India it is one of the largest industries which has thousands of programmes in different languages and about 50 percent population of every house owns a

television (Essay: 2013). Television viewing in recent times has grown tremendously because of the new markets, and because of its cultural impact. It has become a challenge even to the government when they desire to bring unfamiliar images to the audience.

Over the years Television has become a central dimension of our everyday lives. The idea was to boost education and gain access to vast rural populations. From 1991 onwards, after the proliferation of cable and satellite TV channels, they have penetrated all corners of the country cutting across demographic and geographic barriers. In this context, TV has enabled a level playing opportunity and has become a homogenizing factor leveling socio-economic differences, unlike any other policy instrument of the state. Today over 10 million Indian houses have cable and satellite connections. The viewer has access to information at local, national and global levels. The sheer number of channels gives an individual a plethora of options. Today TV is a powerful medium with extraordinary reach. No one can doubt its potential as a catalyst of social change (Das: ND). According to A. C. Nielsen, in l985 the television set was on in the average home for seven hours and seven minutes a day. The average viewer watched about four hours and thirty minutes each day.1. This amounts to 31.5 hours per week, or considerably more than one full day and night in every week of every month, year after year (Fore: 1987). Television usage and its impact, in the case Tamil Nadu visible after the DMK victory the free distribution of Television sets made a huge reach into society. The state of Tamil Nadu has the most biased media in the whole of our country India. To achieve a balance an individual has to watch minimum 2 news channels. To be aware of the negative side of the DMK one should watch Jaya plus and to know the negative side of AIADMAK one should watch the Sun news. Sun TV functions as a tool and campaigning for the DMK party to promote and influence people about their ideologies. However, the Sun group is one of the largest conglomerates in India which was started in the year 1992. It is owned by Kalanidhi Maran, who is the Chairman and the Managing Director of the Sun network group one of the most profitable television networks in the world. It has 32 power packed television channels in different regional languages. When it comes to the Tamil Nadu this channel has a very large

viewership and its credibility is intact. Despite, its popularity this reputed channel fails on multiple counts.

2. HINDUPHOBIA AND MEDIA

Most Hindus deny Hinduphobia, and many interpret the negative pitching of Hinduism episodes as positive markers of tolerance. Since many Indians as well as NRI (Non Residential Indian) feel lucky to be able to enjoy lifestyles which their parents lacked, they do not wish to rock the boat. Hence, they prefer to hide their Hindu shame behind complicity or outright support of Hinduphobia (Malhothra: 2016). A Google search on "Islamophobia" gave 27,300 hits, by contrast, a google search on the category of "Hinduphobia" gave only 29 hits. This shows the complex understanding Indian society has towards Hinduphobia. The Washington Post were horrified at the thought of unintentionally spread Hinduphobia. For instance, The Washington Post's front page article was entitled, "Wrath over Hindu Gods: U.S Scholar's Writings Draw Threats from Faithful". This misrepresents the topic by failing to highlight the central issues being debated, namely, the systematic ideological biases within academia, caricaturing the community's dissenting intellectuals in ways that approach Hinduphobia. Furthermore Hindu Character on American Television will most likely not be a realistic representation of Hinduism. According to Pari, a telecaster in CNN television came to Varanasi, India to do a show about Hinduism. CNN did not show something that was more representative of all Hindus like the fact that Hinduism is the most pluralistic culture on the planet, with thousands of faiths, practices, spiritual traditions, customs, languages, attires, cuisines, etc. And if you really want to showcase a practice how about showing something practiced by almost all. But what was most dangerous, was that the host was being extremely deceptive in fact he spoke an outright lie when he tweeted that this was not about Hinduism, but about Aghoris. This was in contrast to his starting words which stated that he "came to Varanasi, India, to do a show about Hinduism", and insinuated serious distortions of Hinduism (Pari: 2017). According to Professor Kanakaraj Eswaran, in Tamil Nadu anti Hindu sentiment is widespread across the various spheres of life. Half a century Dravidian rule has directly and indirectly contributed to the spread of hatred towards Hindu beliefs, values, deities, Vedas, Sanskrit, Brahmanas and priesthood. The interlocked network of Christian

Missionaries, leftists and dravidianists is reproducing and perpetuating this contempt for Hinduism through academia and media and depth of it Hindu Phobia could be located.

3. RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION

According to Mitchell (2003), "Analysis of religious representation, caricaturing and stereotyping of religious traditions and figures is an important part of developing any multi religious approach to media, religion and culture" (Mitchel 2003:342). That, in short, should be the goal of sociologists of media and religion: to become aware of which religions receive representation, how they are portrayed, and what ideologies are being sent to us over the air. "Once we have a sense of how that cultural object fits into its context, we are on our way to understanding the culture as a whole" (Griswold 2008:16). The ideological messages we receive about religion are produced by a "cultural industry system" (Horkheimer and Adorno: 1975) that transforms spiritual, philosophical, and ethical messages into products for consumption (Griswold 2008:75). Similar to the way religions are marketed to certain racial, ethnic, gender, or class groups, to appeal to the prevailing religious ideology of the society they are produced within. Regarding religious discourse and its representation in media a few question arise: to what extent does the mere presence of a religious character influence an audience's attitude toward that religion? Does a kind hearted, heroic Christian make us feel better about Christianity? Does a lying, atheistic drug addict arouse negative attitudes about atheism? Essentially, what power does a cultural object have to instill via association? The culture-producing abilities of media are manifold. Media consumers' views of religious groups can be reinforced, weakened, or altered through representation. Stout and Buddenbaum have argued that cults and new religious movements (NRMs) often work their way into cultural consciousness by inserting themselves into popular culture and the media (Stout and Buddenbaum 2001:42). In the observations of religious discourse and its ideology in mass communications, critical scholars often introduce the concept of propaganda. Harold D. Laswell defined propaganda as "the manipulation of symbols as a means of influencing attitudes on controversial matters" (Lasswell 1942:106). The

Nithyanantha related content has hidden propaganda aimed at the general public: these hidden texts are inbuilt into the visual production. This has been evidence and very fine matter of denouncing the religious notions through the media discourse.

4. THE HIDDEN DIMENSIONS OF TELEVISION AND NEWS DISCOURSES

"Television news is like a lightning flash. It makes a loud noise, lights up everything around it, leaves everything else in darkness and then is suddenly gone" (Carter: 1994). In the modern context sophisticated technology and the presence of very talented news anchors enable these news channels to give 24/7 live news updates about all that is happening around the world t. The style and content of news bulletins reflects the image of the television channel, and that is why they are far more important than other programming genres. The news bulletin is used as a vehicle to show the image of the channel to the viewer (Masouras: 2015).

With the development of the news media the News anchors have become the new celebrities in India. With Citizen journalism, live outdoor broadcast vans fitted with the latest technology, talk shows and discussions , analyses and reports, there seems to be no end to the goodies for a nation of viewers who until very recently were served only state propaganda as news (Batabyal: 2012). There is a hidden role of television which transcends all of these surface effects. The primary, but hidden, role of television is to tell what our world is like, how it works, and what it means. Dean George Gerbner at the Annenberg School of Communication in Philadelphia points out that television acts as "the cultivator of our culture" (Gerbner: 1960).While it is true that television is having a profound effect on us as it succeeds or fails at entertaining, informing, and selling, somehow we have to back off and try for a broader perspective. For behind the entertainment the information and the selling, something there is far more. In some ways it is clear that the people choose news for TRP or need concern for society. This is very complex notion always among the researchers.

Recent studies from all around the world have proved that television has an effect on people as individuals and as a whole. There have been numerous studies on people of all ages from toddlers to senior

citizens on what effects television has. It is argued constantly whether television reflects society or society reflects what is see on television. Robert Durant is one of many people who believe that what children are exposed to teach them how they are supposed to act. He has studied how exposure to violence in the media results in fighting carrying a weapon and an intention to use violence (Essay: ND). The media has power to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues. This is an immense and well documented influence. Not only people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how important a topic is on the basis of the emphasize placed on it in the news. In other words the news reading can set the agenda for public attention to the same group of issues around which public opinion form (MaxWell and Shaw: 1972).

In the process, the programme contents have inputs that affect the fabric of Indian society, propagating certain moral values. The news channels emerging in India have resorted to exaggeration of news. Often unrelated content that needed to be ignored is blown out of proportion causing disruption among the population (Ravi 2013: pp.53-54). There should be strong screening of the aspirants entering into television media regarding their socio-cultural background and psychological proclivities. Removal of personal ideologies to suit organizational or community ideologies in the program is a must. Ensuring value basis in the practices and substance of content on television channels will help the portrayals be to credible. Extended studies on the topic undertaken here will add to the studies and practices in communication and contribute increasingly to Media Literature (Ravi 2013: pp.53-54).

Credibility depends on the culture- the practices prevalent in news rooms of television channels. Unless that changes for the better with strict code of ethics, credibility will be low. What is also lacking is a role model that begs to be emulated by others in the industry. In case of newspapers we have The Hindu but the beating NDTV 24x7 took after the revelations in the Nira Radia tapes episode has left a vacuum in the broadcast news industry. In all this the credibility factor seems to take a back seat as competition is driving the TRP wars. Everything is fine as long as you can get one more viewer to switch to your channel. Ethics is confined to the text books to be taught in J-Schools and not practiced in news rooms. Its impact is obvious in the news and views on news one gets to see on news channels. The more harsh, shrill and noisy the debates on primetime news the better for TRPs, or so is the perception among the news heads. The fact that more people in cosmopolitan cities like Bangalore are switching to national news channels is a point to be noted by the decision makers in the local news channels. But it is also true that audience for regional language news channels is increasing faster than that for English channels (Ravi: 2015). The television bring us closer to a deeper understanding of an event. As Mc Luhan put it, television has the ability to 'amplify' 'reality' (Crow: 20016). The ultimate power resides in the hands of a few, they can and do take liberties with the facts. This is often done by the tilted manner in which they: contextualize the issues, frame and brand certain individuals while placing others on pedestals pretending to be objective, and use a juxtaposition of unrelated data that is cut-and- pasted into a guilt-by association scenario (Malhotra: 2016).

5. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a branch of discourse analysis which, in the late1980s, has been discussed by many linguists such as Fairclough and Van Dijk. CDA may be seen as a reaction against the dominant uncritical paradigms of the linguistic theory. It requires a multidisciplinary approach and an account of intricate relationship between text, talk, social cognition, power, society, and culture. Van Dijk is regarded as one of the most quoted scholars in the field of critical studies especially in media discourse. As part of the discourse structure, he asserts the concept of production processes. Van Dijk (1988) contends the journalistic and institutional practices of news-making and the economic centered social practices.

The systematic analysis of language (visual), the medium with which the media, communicates and through which it creates meanings and gets messages across, has generally been absent from media education and studies. Since this study aims at examining the discourse of media, it is necessary to lay out a framework that provides not only the basis for understanding language but also its production and consumption dimensions

(Eldin: 2014). In this ideologically manipulated narration it hide some conscious notion regarding this event. In this particular concern the framework that meets such demands is critical discourse analysis (CDA). It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political, and historical contexts. Likewise, Fairclough (1993) defines CDA as follows: Discourse analysis aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes: to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power: and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (Fairclough: 1998a). It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political, and historical contexts.

When we consider ideological investment in the production of content (visual), CDA has the better lead, According to Van Dijk, a theory of ideology should be multidisciplinary. In this sense, Van Dijk's approach to ideology can be located in a conceptual and interdisciplinary triangle that relates cognition, society, and discourse. Primarily, ideologies are considered as some kinds of ' system of ideas' and hence occupy a place in the symbolic field of thought and belief, that is, in 'cognition'. Besides that, ideologies are clearly social and mostly (thought not always) associated with group interests, conflicts or struggles. In this respect, "ideologies are both cognitive and social" (Dijk 1998: 5). They may serve to legitimize or to resist power or dominance, or they may represent social problems and contradictions (Dijk: 1998).

If we want to explain what discourse is all about, it would be insufficient to merely analyze its internal structures, the actions being accomplished, or the cognitive operations involved in language use. We need to account for the fact that discourse as social action is being engaged in within a framework of understanding, communication and interaction which is part of broader socio-cultural structures and processes.... Critical scholars of discourse do not merely observe such linkages between discourse and social structures, but

aim to be agents of change, and do so in solidarity with those who need such change most (Dijk 1997:21 -23).

News media is something to which "members of more powerful social groups and institutions, and especially their leaders (the elites) have more or less exclusive access" (Dijk 1998:5). Scholars, including Said (1978, 1994, 1997), Sardar (1999), and Karim (2000), argue that orientalism is the dominant ideology of Western relations with the religious world. Orientalism employs a realistic narrative, which assumes a distinct social and cultural reality about the Orient, discovered by the efforts of Orientalists and assumed to be true: a reality that is different from its counterpart, the West (Said: 1994). It further states that the media skews information and manipulates its audience to serve its own purpose and to maintain its dominant ideology.

Stump and Dixit elaborate on Michel Foucault's interpretation of discourse, remarking that discourse is indeed "not natural and self-evident. It is something that the researcher determines based on empirical study" As such, one must acknowledge the limitations of discourse analysis and the biases inherent within such a methodological approach, both within the subject of analysis and the analysis in itself. Using a method so "unabashedly normative" (Dijk 1993: 253), the identified meaning will always be constructed.

Fields (1998), considers that a fully qualitative analysis of the different levels of messages may provide us with information about the elements that constitute message. This was made in an effort to isolate and classify the elements that constitute a televised news (Masouras: 2015). The following concrete statements, state that it is a very effective method to map the hidden ideology and biased discourse in narrative visual text in the concrete television content. This study adopt the Qualitative Critical discourse Analysis (CDA) of Existing You tube content regarding Paramahamsa Nithyananda and Film actor Rengitha's video content which was telecast by Sun Television Channel.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Every television content has its own sense of ideology that reflects their programme production especially in the news production. The ultimate ideology behind the Paramahamsa Nithyanantha's news coverage was to wreck the image of Hindu spiritual leaders in Tamil

Nadu. The visual content which was telecast focused a particular episode, the narrative logic being notorious, libidinal and highly sensitive. The anchor follows up the visual with some tensile, as well as psychologically influential language.

The narrative television discourses opens up complex ideological notion among the general public. The ideology has, however to be brought back into the understanding of television recreated, as it were, but this is not to be done in any single unified way in which it represented. However, the people themselves never consider this as an individual concern and privacy of common people. As general people depend on news from television, the ultimate reason behind the thought is in the credibility that persuades them to rest their belief over the channel.

The visual discourse has broken the credibility at multiple levels, the first is skeptical. The actress Renjitha responds to the interview, without clarifying whether the visual are true or false. The highly reputed Sun TV fails to cross check the contents, even though the two victims are in some ways considered important personalities in the society. The people depend on the news basically disseminated via television. Generally they don't have the time to validate the content, because they depend on reputed channel like Sun TV. But in the name of prime news concern, they are made to believe this kind of libidinal material. Unfortunately they don't have the chance to validate. They feel this is not possible by the spiritual leader, but they cannot validate. "The promising growth and access of television for India, the issues of extreme commercialization have made it compromise its ethical standards" (Ravi: 2013). This discursive practice can, allegedly spoil the public image of an individual. In the content of religious matter it could have a very powerful negative impact.

The visual discourses are made as well as telecast in a very highly influenced approach to people. The visual narrations are created in a decided way to influence. Probably this visual content would have been created by professional technicians with a sense of local skill. This visual is narrated to communicate a spontaneous act. This technicality of narration offers and imbibes highly concrete statement towards the general viewer. For instance, this visual discourse suggests that the ill act portrayed had been continuous. The other visual technicality used here is to convince the viewer, that this is not other than real and so it could be possible. The background objects shows in the videos that are some of the everyday elements which psychologically convince the general audience to believe the story and convince them of the narrative discourse. These techniques are used to provide attractive credibility. The television channel cheated the viewer with unethical discursive practice of its contents. This is not possible in any other country or states in the world.

The visual language discourses are manipulated in a purposive manner and the video content is edited in a conscious and coherent manner which cannot be noticed by the general viewer. For instance, some narrative frames are similar like Nithyanantha and Ranjitha but when it is juxtaposed with the sophisticated Rotoscopic technic (Rotoscoping is the process of drawing animation over live-action film), it helps to create coherent narration without conscious notion. This narrative technique and the visual discourse is very complex so that it is difficult to accept reality from the false. The other important manipulated discourse is long and closed frame narration. When the closed narrative frame appears in the screen, it consciously place the un-clear notion within the narrative.

The power centered ideological narrative discourse, requires very specific apparatus to uncover the truth. This kind of narrative approach is more than the porn discourse. During the telecast of this video Sun TV, changed its face from regular TV to porn TV. It crossed the code and ethics of television channel. Moreover they telecast obnoxious frame in front of the general public composed of children, with their parents alongside. In the concern of sensationalizing they failed to recollect the basic citizen courtesy. Television is a unique medium of communication in the sense of verbal as well as visual. In particular case of the Nithyananda episode the news ethics has been deliberately broken. The visual is being narrated pulse by pulse by erotic visual evidence in spontaneous flowing libidinal discourse. In the content of news reading during news hour, video should not be coherent that is the general rule of news reading. Here all visual from the beginning to the end was at peak level resembling a short soft porn narration not like a credible news source. Finally, in the case of sexual scam, the victim face or other sexual kind of act is prohibited in the television broadcasting. This

visual content has failed to scrub the un-ethical visibility. But this visual followed the tactics of making exposures as much as possible. The ideological sense of the visual narration in the discourse is very complex but it would be easy to influence by the use of vulgarity. When we are exposed to this religious based content people suddenly connect religion and society with a complex question, 'How can this religious superior act in this way?' without giving us a space to think over its truth or falsity. The news is under the scrutiny of cognitive dissonance, and also create complete notion among the people.

7.CONCLUSION

Television is a peculiar and powerful communicative media in our society, which should have more concern to create powerful impact among the people. In this regard, channels which cover religious, caste and sex related issues should be very cognizant and unbiased. This study shows that the visual narrative languages are very stringent and manipulated discourses created with modern sophisticated morphing technology. Telecast by the Sun TV, this has gone under the deceptive name of news dissemination. And also this unethical textual discourse has been used to state a very complex notion among the people especially the people who believe in Hindu religion, and an attempt has been made to manipulate by using sophisticated techniques resulting in a negative pulse. This kind of unethical and invalid news discourses and channels are disturbing society as well as mankind in general with unscrupulous opinions.

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