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POLITICS OF LANGUAGE IN THE DOORDARSHAN ADAPTATION, *BHARAT EK KHOJ*

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ABSTRACT

Since the advent of Doordarshan, the only national television broadcasting channel in India, the late 1980s period witnessed an emergence of numerous adaptations of classic literary works on Doordarshan, such as *Malgudi Days* (1986) *Katha Sagar* (1986), *Feluda* (1986), *Tamas* (1987), *Shrikant* (1987), *Ramayana* (1987), *Mahabharata* (1988) *Bharat Ek Khoj* (1988), *Mr. Yogi* (1988) *Vikram Betal* (1988) and others. These shows can not only be understood as adaptations but can also be seen as 'intersemiotic translations' and as what Lefevere terms as 'refractions.' According to Lefevere, refractions are governed by systemic constraints like patronage (which includes factors like status, ideology and economy) poetics and natural language. Along with patronage and poetics, natural language is also a significant constraint in shaping or refracting the source text into the target text.

As Doordarshan was working under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the ruling class had absolute power to control and manipulate the broadcasts on it. The immensely popular adaptations of the late 1980s were not just adaptations of literary pieces but, in subtle ways, were quintessential metanarratives of 'nation' constructed by the then ruling class of Indian society. This class emphasized Hindi as the language of expression in the adaptations for the television series irrespective of the source texts' languages.

So, theoretically using Lefevere's concept of 'natural language' constraint governing a refraction, the paper attempts to analyze and historically situate the 'natural language constraint' during the process of refraction for Jawaharlal Nehru's English work *The Discovery of India* (1946) to be reproduced into Hindi as *Bharat Ek Khoj* (1986) for a different medium. The paper would also try to question why Hindi was thought to be the language understood by the target audience of this TV show. The paper would also inquire the connections between the source and the target languages of these works vis-à-vis their socio-historical and socio-political contexts.

Keywords: *Adaptation, Refraction, Hindi, Doordarshan, Hegemony, Nation and Ideology*

Having a 5000 year old civilization, nearly 70 years old democracy, a union of 29 states and 7 union territories, India is a unique blend of geological, climatic, geographic, cultural and linguistic diversities. It is a nation full of contradictions yet united by composite policy framework. Moreover, Indian media networks are also very complex, as its society has varied ownerships, distribution dynamic and linguistic markets. Most of the communication mediums in India are as old as in the world. Print, Films, Radio, Television, Internet all began in India as it happened in the other parts of the world. Press, Film and Internet owed it to the private players but Radio and Television in India took off under the government leadership.

Institutionalized television in India has now spent almost six decades and scholarship on Indian TV studies has provided valuable insights into structural, textual, narrative forms and its reception vis-à-vis its socio-historical contexts. However, significant television series adapted from important literary works still remain unexplored. Post 1970s India was heading towards decolonizing and making itself as a confident nation. And television was evolving as an instrument for governance. There were only government sanctioned broadcasts on television during the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, as the television medium was working under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, it had the power to decide what was good or bad for the nation.

The paper questions how Hindi becomes the language that can shape stereotypical linguistic notions about India and how the *Bharat Ek Khoj* establishes hegemonic linguistic patterns. I argue that a larger politics was involved in having Hindi as the language for educating or training the target Doordarshan audience. It follows the discussion, how the English source work *Discovery of India* which narrates the nation, is being translated into Hindi as *Bharat Ek Khoj*. Another question to explore would be how the constraint of 'natural language', as defined by Andre Lefevere, works in reshaping Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* into Hindi as *Bharat Ek Khoj* by Shyam Benegal.

Rise of Doordarshan

Ever since the advent of visual media, literary works were adapted not only for two-hour movies but also for TV. To understand adaptation, according to Linda Hutcheon, 'we need to examine the forces that have changed culture'(2006) hence it becomes pertinent to consider the seismic shifts happened in India for the mediums of mass communication particularly television. So tripping back to the history of television in India, it was Doordarshan, a free satellite national channel. It was a major milestone for emergence of TV viewership culture in India. Before Doordarshan, television in India began on 15 September 1959 on experimental basis under All India Radio. During those times there were only two one-hour educational programs a week generally meant for school children and farmers. It was a time, when not all in the country could afford to have TV sets in their homes. With the recommendations made by the Asok Chanda Committee in 1966 to expand the reach of broadcasting, gradually by 1970s, several community television sets were installed in rural and urban areas and also in schools for wider dissemination of information. This move of the government proved to be one of the important landmarks in the history of Indian television. However, it was in the year 1976 when Doordarshan, a government public service broadcaster, came into existence as a separate department independent of All India Radio. In the year 1978 Varghese Committee had made recommendations to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for the organizational restructuring of broadcasting in India. The then Indian government used ATS-6 American Satellite for broadcasting but from the year 1982, Doordarshan started providing coverage through the national satellite INSAT 1A and then for the first time the transmission was in colour. It also started providing content from other countries. Slowly, apart from educational shows about agriculture, news, health and family planning; entertainment, in the forms of dance, music, drama and folk arts, was also included in the telecasts.

Emergence of TV series during the 1980s

In 1983 government sanctioned a huge expansion of setting up the transmission throughout the country. Consequently from the year 1984 came an era of TV series on Doordarshan such as *Humlog* (1984-85), *Ye Jo Hai Zindagi* (1984), *Rajani* (1985), *Karamchand* (1985), *Buniyaad* (1986), *Malgudi Days* (1986) *Nukkad* (1986). *Katha Sagar* (1986), *Feluda* (1986), *Tamas*(1987), *Shrikant* (1987), *Ramayana* (1987),

Mahabharata (1988) *Bharat Ek Khoj* (1988), *Wagle ki Duniya* (1988), *Mr. Yogi* (1988) *Vikram Betaal* (1988) and others. All the Doordarshan TV series gained huge popularity and most of them were adaptations.

By the late 1980s, the broadcasts had a greater-wider reach across the nation and the response to it was far-fetched. Doordarshan, the national public television network of India had become a mass phenomenon in all parts of India. And they were the adapted literary works which were dominating the Indian television during that time. The TV series during that time were the pioneers in building a TV viewership culture in India unequalled to any other time in India. All activities in the country slowed down during their transmissions. The shows went directly to lives of Indians and to their collective thought and imagination. Moreover, as Doordarshan had the monopoly on Indian TV broadcasts, the TV shows not only educated masses but also brought the Indian traditions, culture and history in the forefront in such a way that could enrich minds and make people think. Out of those adaptations came a pioneering work *Bharat Ek Khoj*, which was dedicated fully to narrating the nation to the audiences through the two-fold perspectives of; one Jawaharlal Nehru and two Shyam Benegal. So it becomes prudent to analyze the phases in history to answer the questions of why and how, using Hindi language *The Discovery of India* (1946) transforms into a work *Bharat Ek Khoj*(1986) of TV, a different medium, during the time that had a significant impact in the history of India for creating a viewership culture. So a study of the transformational processes at the core of this adaptation practice can help us comprehend better, the relations between adaptations and history.

***The Discovery of India* (1946) and *Bharat Ek Khoj* (1988)**

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) one of the chief architects of modern India and the first Prime Minister of independent India is best known for his ideals of 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam' (whole world is a family), democracy, secularism and socialism, and his ambitions for creating modern India free from disease, poverty and ignorance. Nehru is not only known for his political career, but also because of his contribution to literature. He was a writer and thinker whose works *Letters from a Father to his Daughter* (1930), *Glimpses of World History* (1934), *An Autobiography* (1936) and *The Discovery of India* (1946), testify his originality of thought and command over English language. He is considered as a major figure in Indian literature in English.

Nehru wrote *Discovery of India* in the Ahmednagar Fort prison during April to September 1944 which was a time when India was abjected of its slavery and concerned for the challenges of future. However, there was also an emergent possibility of freedom that Nehru envisages hence his work also determines his vision of free India. It has been regarded as a monumental work that deals with India's rich and complex history covering philosophy, art, religion, economy, science, society, culture and its movements. It is a realistic and philosophical work that unfolds India's culture and history. It also analyzes the *Vedas* to the *Upanishads* and the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Nehru glorifies personalities like Buddha, Chanakya and Mahatma Gandhi. Even though the book is not a complete account of historical events in India, it tries to create pathways for the idea of 'India' that can connect the past with the (then) present and the present with the future. Through its ten chapters, the book dives into the past, traces the roots of the Indian civilization and examines the evolution of its civilization, comprising of multiple cultures, religions and ethnic identities.

Bharat Ek Khoj, the target adapted text, directed by Shyam Benegal (born 1934), first appeared on Doordarshan in the year 1988. The television adaptation, unlike any other TV series, was sponsored by the Doordarshan. The TV series was made up of fifty three episodes based on various chapters from the source text, which explored the five thousand years of Indian history till its independence. The TV series adopts both documentary and drama techniques to portray the socio-historical, socio-political and socio-cultural scenarios on the plane of television. Even though it did not follow the linearity of the chapters from the book but the episodes are historically created in the chronology of periods and events depicting the Indian history. *Bharat Ek Khoj* was not so popular as other adaptations but it certainly holds a significant place in historical dramas on television.

Significance of Language

Various anthropology scholars have developed significant concepts for language and its role in building understanding about the surrounding culture. Linguistic anthropologists Sapir-Whorf suggest that language conditions the habits of speech and can result into generation and organization of particular patterns of thought. They demonstrated a hypothesis which claims that the effect of language is determinative of culture and world view. They also argued that culture and worldview are largely psychological. (Jourdan and Tuite, 2006)

In his essay an Issue about language, Charles Taylor avers that “the boundary between agents and forces is fuzzy in the enchanted world; and the boundary between mind and world is porous, as we see in the way that charged objects can influence us. “ (Jourdan and Tuite, 2006) “Human beings use language to reflect and communicate what they know and feel about physical and social reality. Everything human beings say, write listen to or read is the result of the twin processes of cognition and communication.” (Albrecht and Shreve, 1992)

Linguistic anthropologists or cognitive anthropologists believe that language can modulate perception and can finally shape thinking. The feeding of the language for a given content can have cognitive significance as it results into ascertaining the sensitivities about the surroundings and culture at large. It not only facilitates the recognition of linguistic patterns but also of critical social patterns. So, language becomes an important part of the analysis to understand the dynamics of the politics for having a language like Hindi for a show like *Bharat Ek Khoj*.

Natural Language

Andre Lefevere, a well-known scholar in the field of comparative literary studies and translation studies, in his essay “Translated Literature: Towards an Integrated Theory” published in the year 1981, views that refractions are “texts that have been processed for a certain audience or adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology.” He goes on to elaborate the term by stating that refraction is “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads that work”. He argues that translations or adaptations per se are no longer reflections of the originals but they are products processed through ideological, poetological and linguistic constraints functioning in literary and social systems into which they are adapted, translated and rewritten. He claims that the process of adaptation of a text for different audience cannot happen in isolation; in fact these adaptations are significantly shaped by such constraints. He contends that refractions are obvious and they are dependent on authoritative political systems and historical changes that shape the adapter’s ideologies and poetics. These constraints occur from the elements of a literature and the components of the society surrounding it. These constraints are the systems of patronage, poetics and natural language of the ‘refracting culture.’ The three components work together to make refractions ‘acceptable’ for the people within and outside the literary system. They converge and diverge but still have a hand to hand relation. They may nullify the other constraint/s proving its own dominance, but cannot prove its absence.

Lefevere claims that **natural language** is an important constraint that cannot be neglected. He states that natural language is the language ‘in which a work of literature is written, both the formal side of that language and its pragmatic side, the way in which language reflects culture. Since different languages reflect different cultures, translations will nearly always contain attempts to “naturalize” the different culture, to make it conform more to what the reader of the translation is used to’(Venuti, 2000). He avers that, as different languages reflect cultures, the adapters make a conscious effort to customize the text from another language into the language of the target culture. The natural language of the target culture is much more influential in shaping the refraction. The foreign writer would only be accepted if the original work is adapted into a language not necessarily of the original but the natural acceptable language of the ‘target culture.’ This is the constraint that may bring a great variance in the literary work as different languages have their own unique cultural differences. Hence, examining the Hindi adaptation from Indian English can help us understand

the working of this constraint. So, natural language constraint, which is biased to the dominant target culture, cannot be neglected to analyze refraction.

National Language

It is essential to note that the pre- and post-independence Indian National Congress strongly supported the idea of Hindi to be made as the national language; India has no national language though. Moreover, Jawaharlal Nehru was an eminent leader of the Congress party. Furthermore, it was the Congress party under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi that ruled India during the late 1980s when Bharat *Ek Khoj* appeared on televisions. So, to inquire about the politics of the discovering India through the transformative practice of adaptation *Bharat Ek Khoj*, the central research question is whether the ruling class was trying to naturalize the national language? or was trying to nationalize the natural language?

The idea of Hindi as a thought national language goes back to the time of late nineteenth and the early twentieth century when eminent leaders like Seth Govind Das, M. K. Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, Frank Anthony, K.M. Munshi, Jawaharlal Nehru and others of the INC through its movements about national government, national education, national policies; wanted Hindi as a national language.

In 1918, the congress party aimed that Hindi should have a national status but provincial languages must also have their due place in the life of people. In 1925 at Kanpur session of the Congress this policy was reiterated. The sub-committee on the fundamental rights adopted "Hindustani written either in Devanagiri or Persian script at the option of the citizen shall, as the national language, be the first official language of the union. English shall be the second official language for such period as the union may by law determine. All official records of the union shall be kept in Hindustani in both the scripts and also in English until the union by law, otherwise provides." (Siwach, 1987) Such policy was adopted in the hope that even if Muslim league were a part of the constituent assembly would gain acceptance from both the sides, the Hindi speaking Hindus and non-Hindus as well as the Urdu speaking Muslims.

In 1947, Ambedkar stated that "Hindustani should be made the language not only of the union but also of all the units. If each unit is given liberty as the clause does not make any language an official language, not only the object of having a national language for India will be defeated but linguistic diversity will make Indian administration impossible." (Ambedkar, 1955)

There was a lot of controversy on the question of national language as the drafting committee did not put an agreed decision on the formula for an accepted yet uniting language. Whereas there were groups in the Congress party that were keen on making Hindi as the quintessential national language. After a long time of tension about national language the matter was taken up again in 1949 when the constitution was nearing its completion. The Congress party was evenly divided for having Hindi as official or national language. After a prolonged discussion and election Hindi won a status as a national language and the Congress passed a resolution.

Nehru stated that "In our various languages and more particularly in the language that you may choose for all India use... [and]... that language should be more or less a language of the people not language of learned coterie... that this language should represent the composite culture of India. In so far as it was the Hindi language it should represent the composite culture which grew up in the northern India where Hindi language specially held a sway; it should also represent that composite culture which it drew from other parts of India." But he also stated that "Any attempt to impose a particular language on unwilling people has usually met with strongest opposition." (Siwach, 1987) He also warned the Hindi supporters that "If you consider the question with wisdom, this approach will do more injury to the development of Hindi language than the other approach. You just cannot force any language upon people or group who resist that you cannot do it successfully. You know that it is conceivably possible that a foreign conqueror with the strength of sword might try to do so, but history shows that even he has failed. Certainly in a democratic context of India it is an impossibility. You have to win the good-will of these people, those groups in India in various provinces whose mother tongue is not Hindi. You have to win the good-will of those groups who speak, let us say, some

variation of Hindi, Urdu or Hindustani. If you try, whether you win or not, if you do something which appears to others as an authoritarian attempt to dominate and to force down something then you will fail your endeavour." (Siwach, 1987)

In the year 1950 the part 18 of the Constitution through article 343 made Hindi as the English language for a period of fifteen years or till the next amendment. It seems that constitution did not support the idea of Hindi to be the national language but majority of the Congress leaders wanted it to be the one. In the early 1960s, post anti-protests from the southern part of the country, three language formula were adopted for the official languages. Hindi being the primary official language where as English and other 15 regional languages got the status of official languages and were used for administrative purposes. The constitution part 18 and the Articles 343-351 have been amended twice adding seven more regional languages whereas rest of the articles remain the same till the present times. Today there are 22 official languages in India. Political struggles for having separate states on linguistic basis during the 1960s and anti-Hindi waves in southern India have a significant impact on the mechanisms for the languages in films, television and publishing sectors as Hindi remained the most used language of expression in the mass-media.

The idea of national language according to a Nigerian critic A.S. Mustapha is that "a national language serves as a symbol of national identity of people and distinguishes them as an entity from others" (2010). National language, in my view, is the one that integrates the pre-existing ethnic and cultural peculiarities of the national but for a complex blend like India. It becomes really very tough to come up with an idea of a single national language. But I argue that the ruling class tried their best to make Hindi as the most used language. This can be observed through the article 351- which is a directive for development of the Hindi language, which states that "It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule, and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages" (2015).

One comprehends that Doordarshan during 1980s, adopted the linguistic patterns as guided in the article 351 which makes it a constitutional move. The show *Bharat Ek Khoj* not only used Hindi as its mode of expression but also prominently inclined to Sanskrit. It also incorporated Hindi translated Sanskrit Vedic verses for the cover title song. Through this adaptation, it portrayed a pattern of the society in India or the hegemonic idea of 'nation' thought by the then ruling party, Indian National Congress which was also constitutional. This pattern represents a limited Indian social milieu as urban middle class, upper caste Hindi speaking class. Unfortunately, when we refer to the adapted show, we understand that there are discrepancies in the implementation many of Doordarshan's set objectives. Uma Joshi writes in her book that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had set objectives for the channel of Doordarshan and they were: (1) To act as a catalyst for social change, (2) To promote national integration, (3) To stimulate scientific temper in the mind of the people, (4) To disseminate the message of family planning as a means of population control and family welfare, (5) To provide essential information and knowledge in order to stimulate greater agricultural production, (6) To promote and help preserve environment and ecological balance, (7) To highlight the need for social and welfare measures including welfare of women, children and less privileged, (8) To promote interest of games and sports, and (9) To create value of appraisal of art and cultural heritage (Joshi, 1999). Ironically, it portrayed contrasting images on TV from the objectives set for broadcasts on television. It could only bring out as a show which was either closer to the psyche of the upper class caste Hindi conversant classes of Indians or tried to shape in the psyche of the audiences as the former, neglecting the heterogeneity of people in India. Instead of being a catalyst for social change Doordarshan ushered as medium of majoritarian knowledge and practices.

Conclusion

Television as a medium has gathered academic attention and has given ways to significant theoretical concepts. Many critics have thought TV as 'an ideological state apparatus' (Althusser), 'a mind manager'

(Herbert Schiller), 'an instrument that maintains hegemony and legitimates the status quo' (Tuchman), 'that invents reality' (Parenti) and 'that manufactures consent' (Noam Chomsky). The television medium has been both thought and used as a dominant tool for brain training and for bringing social change (Kumar, 1994).

Television with Doordarshan as its only channel during the late 1980s had a major role in generating perspectives of the audiences for nation. Moreover, *Bharat Ek Khoj* devotedly communicated the hegemonic ideas about *Bharat*, India. Even though having hegemonic position the Hindi programming of *Bharat Ek Khoj* took on extraordinary salience. As claimed by the linguistic anthropologists, language can shape thought and imagination, *Bharat Ek Khoj*, originally written in English was made into Hindi and narrated a history of India that could have established possible stereotypes and notions about India.

Also the initial period of Doordarshan broadcasts, people thought TV to be a medium closer to facts because it had already broadcasted live sports and matches (the 1982 Asian Games), news telecast and educational programmes (*Krishi Darshan* and *Gyan Deep*) in public interest. As a consequence, the viewers could have imagined about the country they lived in, India, as represented on TV. This imagination would have led to a social and cultural acceptance of the identities and influenced the people to adapt and live in such ways. Perhaps, the idea of 'nation' would have been broadcasted for the people who were seeking for the understanding of their own identity, and it was extremely influential as Doordarshan, being a state-owned channel, had the censorship. In subtle ways, its telecasts used the medium TV as an 'ideological state apparatus' as defined by Louis Althusser (2004). This TV series could have been created with due respect to language of the target audiences but it seemed that it was mainly for majoritarian Hindi speaking class. Moreover, this was a show adapted from canonical Indian writing. This text in clear ways dealt with the 'Indian' social and traditional values and its evolution vis-à-vis modern advancements, as thought by the state. It not only entertained the audience by appearing on the newer audio-visual medium of television but also subtly made them aware of their region specific socio-cultural identities, which were majoritarian and pluralistic through Hindi yet was constitutional. Stereotypical notion of Hindi with a touch of Sanskrit to be the national language, and one should know it in order to understand India through *Bharat Ek Khoj*, was being conveyed clandestinely. In Noam Chomsky's words, the broadcasts were 'manufacturing consent' of the audiences about the content broadcasted (2016). Also the role of article 351 to develop Hindi and also Sanskrit, the linguistic patterns adopted for the Hindi translation of *The Discovery of India* can be clearly observed. The natural language Hindi of the political class was thought to be made as the national language for the masses.

The attempt to nationalize the natural language or to naturalize the national language can be observed working in both ways. Hindi to be the 'natural language' of majority of Indians as thought by the makers and ruling class, made it to be the constraint for the refracting *The Discovery of India* as *Bharat Ek Khoj*. And the directive for development of Hindi for wider national purposes seems to play a major role in naturalizing the language Hindi for integrating the Indian audiences or subtly giving them a so called linguistic national identity.

It can be thought that the adaptation would have considered the constraints presided by the people involved in its production proving it to be a refraction. *Bharat Ek Khoj* would not only have been instrumental in entertaining the audiences but also would have spread the government's idea of 'nation building.' *Bharat Ek Khoj* was one of the TV shows that had created a culture of TV viewership which seemed to have a possible aim to achieve national identity and promoting modernization. They would have achieved these goals as it portrayed majoritarian common identity groups leading to just a 'unitary' nationalism on the imaginary plane of Television. And Hindi as the language for the audiences of Doordarshan would have been a deliberate political move to generate agreement about its significance in India.

While this may seem obvious but it has profound implications for research that can be utilized to provide useful insights about the understanding of the time-specific culture but it will also raise issues related to the mediated spaces of culture and everyday life on TV as they are highly problematic and force into a debate of binary category systems, such as 'virtual' versus 'real', 'rural' versus 'urban' and 'entertainment'

versus 'education', portrayed as culturally homo/hetero-geneous identities on ideologically determined terrain of media. A study of the transformational processes at the core of such TV adaptation practices and the adapted products can help us enhance our understanding of the relations between adaptations and history.

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