

Satellite Tv is a Liberator

Satellite TV is a Liberator or the first time in history, India's Republic Day was seen live all over Asia on Star TV, and the fuming politicians and intellectuals of Pakistan could do nothing about it.

The budget speech of Dr Man Mohan Singh ;will be broadcast all over Asia by Zee TV, and once again the censors in Pakistan, Burma and elsewhere will be helpless to prevent their countrymen from tuning in. What Doordarshan and the external affairs ministry could never have accomplished, in spreading the message about India's economic Renaissance, is being done through the purely commercial channels of satellite TV.

Whatever else you may call this, this is not cultural imperialism imposed by the west on India. On the contrary, it is the spread of cultures of all Asian countries to one another. The new liberalism means the Indians can see Pakistani programmes, and Pakistanis Indian programmes. For decades Pakistan refused to allow the import of Indian films on the ground that Pakistan's film industry will be ruined by the competition. Today, Zee TV and Jain TV are beaming down umpateen Hindi films to Pakistani audience. Yet Pakistan's film industry has certainly not been destroyed. Only the monopoly of Pakistani rulers and vested interests has been broken.

Indian viewers can now see excellent plays on Pakistan TV beamed down by satellite, which are generally far superior to the stuff dished out by Doordarshan. This has dismayed self-righteous Indians who think Indian viewers are gullible fools who must be protected from Pakistani propaganda by wise Indian intellectuals. There is of course another possibility-that TV viewers are quite wise enough, and the self-righteous intellectuals are the gullible fools.

NOT DECULTURISED: Indian viewers have now been exposed for a long time to TV programmes from BBC and Pakistan, and India has not been subverted or deculturised in the process. It is evident that Indian viewers are quite capable of deciding what they wish to absorb or reject from foreign programmes, and neither need nor want protection from the self-righteous crowd.

Indeed, this follows from democracy itself. In a democracy, ordinary people, illiterate or otherwise, are deemed wise enough to select their rulers. And yet the self-righteous intellectuals would have you believe that the same voters are not wise enough to choose their TV programmes. It is no accident that many of these intellectuals are (or have been) Marxists, who have long peddled the theory that the washed masses must be protected from their personal preferences by golden-hearted leftists, who have the moral right to shoot those who disagree.

Democratic governments can claim to represent the people of their country. But many also claim the right of determine what their people can watch, which is not democracy but monopoly. Democracy is about the freedom of people to choose, not the freedom of politicians and intellectual goons to impose their views on the masses. Earlier, technology enabled governments to exercise a TV monopoly. But satellite TV has broken that monopoly, and allowed people to choose what they wanted to see. This is not imperialism but liberation.

Imperialism implies that a foreigner is using force to enter India against the wishes of Indians. Satellite TV is not and cannot be forced on viewers, who have the option to tune in or not. Those who complain about cultural imperialism are in fact cultural monopolists, wishing to imprison the minds and tastes of viewers in pre-determined cages. Fortunately satellite technology has destroyed those cages. That is a tragedy only for the self-appointed guardians of culture.

UNPARALLELLED VEHICLE: Satellite TV should be seen as an unparalleled vehicle for spreading Indian culture, ideas and views to the rest of Asia, and eventually to the whole world. Programmes like The India Show and India Business Report of Star TV do far more for India's image than anything that Indian embassies or All India Radio ever could. Stat TV and Zee TV beam many advertisements of Indian companies all over Asia, but carry virtually no ads from Pakistani or Bangladeshi companies. This shows how satellite TV has transformed India's clout as an audience into international commercial clout of national importance.

From Amjad Ali Khan to Baba Sehgal, from Sonal Mansingh to Jasmine Barucha, Indian performers are now visible all over Asia and Indian films and TV shows have an unparalleled foreign audience. Because of the language barrier, many such programmes have a limited reach in South East Asia. But there is no language barrier in the case of Pakistan, with whom satellite TV is building cultural bridges, which politicians and intellectuals oppose.

India and Pakistan will not reconcile their political differences in the near future. But when that day comes, I believe the reconciliation will owe a debt to the cultural cross-fertilisation that satellite TV provides today regardless of religion or nation.

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