

*Review*

## Reinvention of Folktales as Teleserials

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In India, Television is so personalized and humanized that the space it occupies in the collective psyche is remarkably different from that of the other cultures. To describe the presence of mythical and traditional storytelling elements in television texts as mere residue would be to underestimate the power and presence of the oral literature in India. This paper explores the reinvention of folktale elements in television serials. This is made possible by examining and analyzing the two mediums as texts along with texture and content. The questions addressed include: what are the constants and variables in content and style of folktales and television texts? what is needed to make elements in a folktale serve practical and utilitarian purposes? How does the television maintain, create, reconstruct and transform traditional practices? These broad questions reveal the complexity of the interface of folktales with television serials that could be documented and analyzed through a handful of arbitrarily chosen, conspicuous examples. In short, the world view reflected in teleserials is defined by the culture, society and value system of the viewers, and it is very similar to that expressed in myth and folktales.

**Keywords:** television, folktale, teleserial, reinvention.

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper explores folktales as secondary orality in selected electronic communication mediums like cinema and television. It dwells briefly upon folktale elements in cinema and then explores those in a popular television text, the soap opera. In India, cinema and television are so personalized and humanized that the space these mediums occupy in the collective psyche is remarkably different from those of other cultures. To describe the presence of traditional storytelling elements in these visual texts as mere residue would be to underestimate the power and presence of the oral in India. All electronic

communication mediums in India foster and disseminate storytelling in its various forms: folktales, tall tales, jokes, anecdotes, and so on. In other words, this chapter investigates the folk process of storytelling in the contemporary era of electronic communication.

### Secondary Orality

The oral residue occurs because people educated for oral expression will use those expressions in their writing.

Manuscript and even typographic cultures sustain traces of oral culture, but they do so to varying degrees. In addition to oral residue marking print culture, orality also returns as secondary orality in post-print culture.

“If I may use terms which I fondly believe I have originated, I would suggest that we speak of the orality of preliterate man as primary orality and of the orality of our electronic technologized culture as secondary orality. Secondary orality is founded on—though it departs from—the individualized introversion of the age of writing, print, and rationalism which intervened between it and primary orality and which remains as part of us. History is deposited permanently, but not inalterably, as personality structure” (Ong, 1971: 285).

The strands and habits of these oralities do not disentangle easily. The use of formulary devices, for instance, appears constantly in primary orality. These are mainly used to describe, to store knowledge, to compose utterances, and so on. Today’s electronic culture of radio, cinema and television still uses formulae but in different ways. The formulary device is no longer deeply grounded in practical living since it has now relatively limited use for knowledge storage and retrieval. Instead we use formulae as clichés or as starting and closing points, in plot, storyline, character, and so on.

### Folktale and Technology

A barber, while he is shaving the king, discovers that the king has donkey’s ears; the king orders him never to tell anyone about it on pain of death. So he keeps the secret, but the more he keeps it to himself the fatter he grows. His wife is alarmed and, after much trying, wheedles the secret out of him. At once she begins to grow round, looking more and more pregnant, till one day, unable to bear the burden any longer, she digs a hole in the ground and tells her secret to the hole and covers it up. Out of the buried secret springs a tree. One day the palace drummer breaks a branch of the tree and makes drumsticks for his drum. When he beats his drum in the palace assembly, the drum says, “dum dum dum, the king, dum dum dum, has the ears dum dum dum of the donkey”. Nothing is lost, says A.K. Ramanujan, only transformed. Flames and stories are never put off. They change shapes and rush to the temple for a gossip session (Dharwadker, 439; Ramanujan, 1987).

Today they are also resurrected as cinema or television texts. India’s age-old love for the oral found a powerful means of expression in the mass media, particularly in visual media like cinema and television. These are unmatched for the volume of popular cultural texts they

produce and the sheer size of the audience. For example, television as the traditional bard appeals to a much larger population group than ever before, in fact, to a much broader array of diverse social groups. The era of the video and cybernetic technology, the age of electronic reproduction, has developed new forms of visual simulation and illusionism with unprecedented powers. The fantasy of a pictorial turn of a culture totally dominated by images, has now become a real technical possibility on a global scale. We are eyewitnesses to a new era in which folktale has gained unprecedented reach through electronic dissemination.

Old stories are not lost. They are being reinvented, restructured, retold. If researchers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century foretold the demise of folklore, and sought to preserve the remains of a glorious past, our generation is a witness to the dissemination of folklore through technology, with more vigorous circulation, gaining more significance than ever. It is made all the more vibrant and visible in contemporary cultures through the voice of the electronic mediums.

### Folklore and Media

The development and institutionalization of culture studies has long been intertwined with that of media studies. It is not enough to recognize that the mass mediums play a significant role in folktale transmission and dissemination; it is closer to the truth to admit that they have become a part of storytelling. An observer of emergent folklore may be able to decipher the meaning of basic human ideas that continue to recur in myriads of new interpretations through the accessibility of the modern media. The electronically reproduced folktale retains all the criteria by which we judge what folktale is and what it is not: it is socially relevant, based on tradition and addresses current needs. In a 1990 address, Rudolf Schenda, a pioneer in western folklore studies asserted that “Never did folklore fare better than under the flag of mass culture” (As quoted in Degh, 1994: 2). In fact, folktales reproduced and placed in new contexts produce new versions proving that mass mediums contribute to the maintenance and the creation of folktales.

Folklorists and media scholars have dwelt extensively on their respective disciplines, and there is no dearth of literature on folklore or media. But studies on folklore in media are very rare. To name a few, Degh (1994) explores the multitude of appearances of folklore elements in the American mass media. Herman Bausinger (1990) examines the dissemination of folklore through mass media in industrial and corporate contexts. *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia* (1997) edited by Lawrence A Babb and Susan S Wadley constitutes a series of essays on folklore, mythology, and

classical literature in cinema and television. Philip Lutgendorf (1997) makes a study of Ramanand Sagar's Ramayana on Doordarshan. The theme of the January 2005 issue of the journal *Indian Folk life* is folklore and media: some of the topics explored here are documentation, copyright issues, mythmaking in the media and construction of tourist destinations. Sheila Nayar's articles explore oral and literate elements in Hindi cinema. For many critics Propp has become the Aristotle of film and television narratology (Propp, 1968). The thirty one functions or type-episodes which every folktale combines have been extended to films (Wollen, 1982; Sheila Johnston, 1986; Propp, 1968). For narratologists like Greimas, Propp's schema, suitably revised, forms a universal model of narrative organization. Many narratives share a structural morphology with folktales. Propp's method can reveal the underlying structure of narrative in cinema and other media. Although such analogizing has come in for criticism by scholars such as David Bordwell, it continues to fascinate critics.

### Folktale and Television/Cinema

Television and cinema liberated folktales from their earlier confinement to the so-called lower layers of society and from the prejudice that stigmatized them: Traditional storytelling consists of silly superstitions and meaningless tales told by the illiterate, the uncultured, and the uncivilized; the folk are the marginalized rural dwellers and peasants who are considered as not possessing refined tastes. Cinema and television, like the traditional storyteller, are also looked down upon by society. Within a framework that seeks to polarize high culture and low culture, cinema and television are seen as being part of the latter whereas forms such as classical music are seen as part of high culture.

Television is the idiot box, and the television viewer, a couch potato. There is a certain moral policing that appears to colour such a polarization. Cinema and television are routinely attacked for being "bad" influences, especially on children. Yet the power of folktales, cinema and television as effective tools and instruments of influence is well known. Come elections, and the television becomes an instrument for propaganda. Several major political parties and religious groups float their own channels. Indian cinema is full of social and political satire. Similarly, the falsification of folklore served the purposes of capitalism in America, and its distortion served the purposes of dialectical materialism in Russia and China (Dundes, 1962: *Essays* 11).

Dundes remarks that whether folklorists like it or not, the evolution of man is moving in a direction towards more, rather than less consciousness and awareness of culture. He makes a distinction between folklore revivals

and survivals. A survival, by definition, is marked by a continuity of tradition. It is the result of an unbroken historical chain through time. A revival, however, may well follow a break in tradition. It may even occur after the particular item has, for all practical purposes, become extinct. The point is that folklore revival is a conscious and artificial phenomenon. The revival, of course, occurs with no conscious assistance (11). Both the survival and the revival of folktales find ample representation in the texts of electronic mediums.

Folktales and cinema/television are mutually dependent on each other. Folk, classical and mythical stories continue to enrich Indian cinematic and television texts. Most of the films that were made in the first few years of Indian cinema were taken from drama centered on mythology. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata have been filmed as abridged whole and in parts in almost all Indian languages.

### Visual Literacy in India

The electronic mediums have redeemed not only the voice that was silenced by print and writing, but also the visual. But we have seen how the oral element continued to dominate the Indian psyche through the chirographic and typographic stages of human communication. With the advent of the electronic communication mediums, there are emerging debates on visual literacy. In India the visual element has been as dominant as the oral. A casual observation of the representation of gods and goddesses, temple murals, and traditional storytelling techniques would reveal how intimately and intricately intertwined are the oral and the visual. Multiple storytelling episteme co-existed and even interacted then as of now. The iconic representation of Lord Siva with his matted hair and half moon, three eyes, adorned by a snake and a trident, are each symbolic representation of narratives associated with him.

Telling stories with the help of paintings are still popular in many parts of the country. Picture storytelling of the past has survived to this day, and provides curious analogy to film art. *Padam katha* is a variation of the art of itinerant storytelling that uses both pictures and performance to unfold the tale. Native to Andhra Pradesh, the art form uses minimal props to tell the story, with painted scrolls taking centre stage. The storytellers and scroll painters, curiously enough belong to different communities, with the art passed down over generations (Ramachandran, 77). In Rajasthan, large-scale horizontal paintings on cloth portraying the epic lives of local hero-gods are popularly known as *Parh* or *Par* paintings. While the story is narrated using song and dance, the visual impact is provided by the *par*. Filled with figures and pictorial incidents, these paintings form a kind of dramatic visual backdrop of different episodes to

epic storytelling performances. These paintings are customarily opened or unrolled only after sundown, in conjunction with the all night performance. During the performance, the principal performer's assistant illuminates certain parts of the paintings with an oil lamp, and the performer recounts the epic with song and dance to the accompaniment of musical instruments. The *par* tradition is old, though it is not possible to determine the exact age of this art form (Natarajan, 81). *Pata* (word derived from Bengali word *pat* meaning cloth) paintings, from Bengal, are essentially pictures that accompany the tales that are narrated by the *patuas*, or the artists, who are also bards. Themes include tales from mythology, religious stories, nature, everyday happenings, historical events and satire (Sarkar, 2002: 85). Chitrakathi is a storytelling tradition practiced by the Thakars of Maharashtra, a nomadic tribe from Pindguli. Using pictures to tell the story is called chitrakathi. The storyteller uses lyrics and local dialects to tell the story and uses sequential painted pictures as illustrations. Around forty to sixty pictures are usually bundled together in a compilation called the *pothey*. The pictures are scrolled down in the course of the narration (Srinivasan and Philips, 65).

Visual narration is ingrained as deeply in the Indian psyche as is the oral. This could explain the Indian audience's participative response to films, their adoration of stars, numerous fan clubs, and so on.

### **Akam-Puram Spectrum**

This brings to mind Ramanujan's *Akam-puram* or domestic-public spectrum of folk performance (Dharwadker, 488): *Akam* means interior, *puram* is the exterior. *Akam* also means house. The grandmother's folktale is told within the house or its backyard. She is a housewife, the audience is the family. The language of the domestic tale is close to ordinary speech, heightened or lightened occasionally by the talent of the granny. The style is swift, the diction racy and dialectal. The stories and songs in the *akam* spectrum are mostly told/sung by women and revolve around female characters. Draupadi, Sita, Kunti, Amba, Rukmini, Urmila, and even Shurpanika are the protagonists in the tales told here. For example, the Telugu Brahmin women's version of the Ramayana is narrated with Sita as the centre, and the Mahabharata is the story of Draupadi, Kunti, or even Amba. The *puram* narration is formulaic, professionally learned, formal, varied and complex.

This *akam-puram* dichotomy can, by extension, be applied to cinema and television. The television is the *akam* spectrum, and the television audience is usually family or friends. Like the *akam* folk performances, it is interior, private and familial in terms of teller and audience. The cinema is more of a *puram* performance,

and the audience may comprise of a large group of different people from different sections of society. The teleserials revolve around women characters and target women as audience. Cinema, on the other hand, is male dominated, and the women are mostly show pieces. While the hero dominates the screen in films, the small television screen is sprinkled with ideal daughters-in-law, villainous mothers-in-law, sacrificing wives, suffering mothers and so on. The stories in the *akam* spectrum were mostly told at bed-time or meal-time. In a survey I conducted for storytelling in families most of the women said that they fed their children before the television during their favourite programme. The few families, who did not permit this habit, said that it was part of their enforcement of discipline.

Television viewing usually takes place in familiar surroundings, most often at home. Such an environment encourages audience participation. This is reinforced by the fact that members of the audience usually constitute a group who know each other intimately. In other words, the television fits neatly into the established social structure of the family. There is no mass viewing as in the cinema context. Each family audience negotiates their own stance towards the message of particular television texts, thereby modifying their meaning. This creates a bond between the viewers and the medium.

### **The Oral Episteme in Indian cinema**

Indian cinema has not deviated severely from the oral tradition unlike its western counterpart. Rosie Thomas observes that with regard to Indian cinema, a form has developed in which "narrative is comparatively loose and fragmented, realism irrelevant, psychological characterization disregarded, elaborate dialogues prized, music essential and both the emotional involvement of the audience and the pleasures of sheer spectacle privileged throughout the three hour long duration of the entertainment (1995: 162). According to Babb Films of all kinds are shaped by the conventions of folk drama, which traditionally presents mainly religious material. The punctuation of plot line by song and dance, the extravagant speeches, the utter predictability of plot, the black and white moral oppositions between characters—these are all well-known features of Hindi cinema, and they derive from various traditional dramatic genres. But more important yet...characterization in secular films draws heavily from Hindu mythical stereotypes: women appear as dutiful and long-suffering Sitas or vengeful Kalis, men as virtuous Ramas or villainous Ravana and so on. (13)

Commercial Indian films that are largely characterized as "social" draw on a repertoire of folktales and myths that offend neither conservative Hindus nor government censors. Steve Derne in his study on religious themes in

commercial Hindi films, observes that “filmmakers create a ‘film religious culture’ that develops around a standardized repertoire of mythological images presented as merely part of the ‘mix’ of rousing fights, provocative dances, slapstick humor, nationalist sentiment, and family dynamics that makes up secular Hindi films” (191). Mythological male models of the courageous Rama, the hot-headed but loyal Lakshmana, the playful Krishna, the evil Ravana, the scheming Shakuni, the wicked uncle, Kamsa, are constantly invoked in Indian cinema. Shobha Sadagopan notes that in every third film the image of woman as Sita, “demure, passive, self-sacrificing sister, mother, daughter, or wife” is balanced with the “vamp that smokes, drinks, and wears pants” (47). There is more of dialogue than emoting, more of action than visual depiction of emotion.

Plagiarism is a major accusation leveled against Bollywood cinema and extended to regional cinemas. Most of the so-called super hits like *Sholay* are an indigenous remake of Hollywood films. Despite this accusation of plagiarism, Indian film makers are undeterred. To examine this trend more closely through the lens of oral storytelling would show that it is not plagiarism so much as retelling. Like folktales, stories get retold, and each telling becomes a text of its own. In short, Indian cinema is a three hour long festival, mimicking, reproducing and disseminating the lore of the region.

Indian cinema can be lucidly explained when examined in the light of recent scholarship on orality and literacy, and folktales. Nayar argues that what significantly distinguishes art cinema generally from popular movies, and by extension high art from popular culture, are characteristics of a decidedly literate or oral nature, with respect to narrative and performance (Nayar, 2001). Popular film, not unlike the Homeric epic or the Mahabharata, has been fundamentally contoured by the requirements and desires of an oral-privileging audience. The characteristics of oral narrative and oral performance that are reflected in commercial films are summarized by Nayar in a table that is reproduced below:

#### Oral characteristics of visual narrative as evidenced in Bollywood cinema

##### Structure & Form

- Episodic narrative form, including flashbacks and digressions
- Repetition, recycling, and formula-privileging
- Spectacle (i.e. flat surface narrative—a ‘cinema of attractions’)
- Narrative closure (i.e. no ambivalent or open endings)

##### Visual, verbal, and aural tone

- Agonistically toned (e.g. Amplified violence, melodrama)
- Heavy amplified characters and setting

- Syntagmatic kinesthesia
- Plenitude and redundancy (e.g. Visual, material, and dialogical excess)
- Use of rhetorical devices (e.g. Clichés, proverbs)
- Non-interpretive, unambiguous meaning (e.g. Privileging of oaths, anti-symbolic)
- Worldview and orientation
  - Manichean worldview (i.e. Black and white)
  - Non-psychological orientation (i.e. extropective)
  - Non-historical (i.e. synchronic, synthetic, experimental telescoping)
  - Non-self-conscious (e.g. Parody)
  - Fulfillment of audience expectations
  - Participatory
  - No anxiety of influence (i.e. imitative, no concept of plagiarism)
  - Focus on social suturing, on preservation of the status quo
  - Collective-social orientation (i.e. ‘we’-inflected) (2005: 65)

#### Television

Ever since television became pervasive in Indian homes, this mass medium has played a crucial role in the dissemination of the folktale. Like cinema, television and its narrative conventions are not far removed from that of traditional folktale content and narration. There have been Proppian analysts for television texts as well (Silverstone 1981; Kozloff, 1987).

The questions that this section addresses are: what are the constants and what are the variables in content and style of folktale and television? This is made possible by examining and analyzing the two mediums as texts along with texture and context. What is needed to make folktales serve the purpose of a television text? How does the television maintain, create, reconstruct and transform traditional practices? These questions do not strictly allow a linear development but rather open a space in which the complexity of the interface of folktale with television can be documented and characterized through a handful of arbitrarily chosen, conspicuous examples that I was able to explore.

This study explores the constants and variables in content, construct and style of television texts and folktales. This is made possible by examining and analyzing the two mediums as texts along with texture and context. Henrie Glassie observes that “text means textile, something woven together out of distinct threads” (*Indian Folklife*, 2001: 45). Alan Dundes elaborates that text is a single telling of a tale, a recitation of a proverb, a singing of a folksong. Texture is the language, the specific phonemes and morphemes, rhyme, alliteration,

stress, pitch, juncture, tone, onomatopoeia, and so on. The context is the specific social situation in which that particular item is actually employed (*Interpreting Folklore*, 1980: 23-24). Media scholars have also outlined a similar method of study for television. According to Chris Barker, television needs to be understood in terms of texts (programmes), the relationship between texts and audiences (audience research), political economy (organizations/industry) and patterns of cultural meaning (Barker, 2000: 259-60).

### The Soap Opera

A soap opera is a television or radio serial drama. The term "soap opera" was coined by the American press in the 1930s to denote the extraordinarily popular genre of serialized domestic radio dramas, which, by 1940, represented some ninety percent of all commercially-sponsored daytime broadcast hours. The "soap" in soap opera alluded to their sponsorship by manufacturers of household cleaning products; while "opera" suggested an ironic incongruity between the domestic narrative concerns of the daytime serial and the most elevated of dramatic forms. In the United States, the term continues to be applied primarily to the approximately fifty hours each week of daytime serial television drama broadcast by ABC, NBC, and CBS, but the meanings of the term, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, exceed this generic designation (Robert C. Allen, 1985).

The defining quality of the soap opera form is its seriality, says Allen. A serial narrative is a story told through a series of individual, narratively linked installments. Unlike episodic television programmes, in which there is no narrative linkage between episodes and each episode tells a more or less self-contained story, the viewer's understanding of and pleasure in any given serial installment is predicated, to some degree, upon his or her knowledge of what has happened in previous episodes. Furthermore, each serial episode always leaves narrative loose ends for the next episode to take up. The viewer's relationship with serial characters is also different from those in episodic television. In the latter, characters cannot undergo changes that transcend any given episode, and they seldom reference events from previous episodes. Serial characters do change across episodes: they age and even die, and they possess both histories and memories. Serial television is not merely narratively segmented, its episodes are designed to be parceled out in regular installments, so that both the telling of the serial story and its reception by viewers is institutionally regulated (Allen, 1985).

The general features of soap opera as a genre are summarized by Chris Barker thus:

--Open-ended narrative forms: Soap opera, as a

long-running serial, has a potentially unlimited time period in which to tell its stories. There is not the sense of closure to be found in the feature film or the thirteen episode series.

--Core locations: Most soaps establish a sense of geographical space that the audience can identify with and to which the characters return again and again.

--The tension between the conventions of realism and melodrama: Soap opera utilizes the conventions of realism and melodrama and can be differentiated in terms of the balance struck between them. Realism refers to a set of conventions by which drama appears to be a representation of the 'real world' with motivated characters, recognizable locations and believable social problems. The narrative techniques deliberately hide and obscure their own status as constructs, denying their artificiality in order to present themselves as 'real'. In contrast melodrama is constituted through a heightened sense of the dramatic, with a focus on emotions and 'life's torments' where characters have insufficient motivation from a 'realist' point of view. Reinforced by the use of a certain elevated acting style, dramatic music and lingering close-up shots, the story-lines contain a variety of twist and turn which would stretch the credibility of a realist narrative as viewers are propelled along a roller-coaster ride of emotional ups and downs.

--The pivotal themes of inter-personal relationship: Marriages, divorces, break-ups, new alliances, arguments, acts of revenge and acts of caring are at the core of the soap opera, providing the narrative dynamic and emotional interest. Given the stress in soaps on the personal sphere, it is understandable that the family forms the mythic centre of the soap opera. It is mythic because though 'family' is a major theme and most of the characters take up familial roles (available in plot terms for a marriage, divorce, relationships), only a limited number of characters actually live in a conventional nuclear family. The imaginary ideal of the family is constantly shattered by the arguments, affairs and divorces which are so necessary a part of soap opera. (Barker, 2000: 206).

### Indian Soaps

Indian serials first began with the introduction of television sets in Indian homes. The first soap opera was the highly successful *Hum Log* (Doordarshan, 1984)

closely followed by *Buniyad*, both of which are still considered two of the best serials on Indian television. Indian soaps do not severely deviate from the specifications outlined by Barker. Keeping with the *akam spectrum*, the emphasis is on the central woman protagonist who is identified with the mythological icons like Draupadi, Sita or Savitri. It is the ideal world in which values traditionally associated with women are given space and expression.

These serials with their utopian world have become extremely popular and occupy hours of prime time space on Indian Television. Several soaps in India have been extended elaborately due to the excellent audience response rating. *Ghar, Ghar, ki Kahani* and *Kyonki Saans Bbhi Khabhi Bahu Thi, Ye Rishta kya kehlati he* on Star Plus, *Sthree* and *Suryaputhri* on Asianet are examples of such extensions. The structure is that of continuing episodes maintaining a unity through a more or less permanent cast of characters, settings and group of themes or varieties of the same theme. The family forms the mythic centre of the soap opera. In the serials on Star Plus mentioned here we have a typical *Marwadi* or Gujarati entrepreneur family. Feuding families, extra-marital affairs, illegitimate children, wives forcing husbands to co-habit with other women to produce an heir, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law conflict, and so on constitute most part of such family dramas. These are some of the major motifs in Indian folktales (Ramanujan, 1994;1997).

Because of its leisurely pace, the soap opera is allowed time for development of character; but no such development takes place. Characters, unlike as in written literature, are usually flat representing one human characteristic such as wickedness, goodness, stupidity. They are, as in folktales, types like the cunning fox, stupid donkey, and wicked wolf: ideal daughter-in-law, spiteful mother-in-law, erring husband, wicked vamp, dutiful daughters, struggling elder son, playful younger ones, and so on. There are often contrasts in character cast—a good child versus wicked stepmother, young boy versus wicked ogre, and so on. Traditional values are upheld—the role of woman as wife, daughter, mother, importance of family, glorification of joint family, chastity, and so on. Infidelity and divorce abound in the soaps and are occasion for great agony and soul-searching. A floundering marriage is always to be saved; children are gifts of god and a close-knit patriarchal family is emphasised. Festivals are highlighted and often figure on the actual day of the corresponding festival in reality. Forgotten customs and rituals are raked up and highlighted, thus reviving and disseminating tradition, at the same time reinstating taboos, superstitions and conventional belief systems.

The time advantage is used to extend plot and create sub-plots. Just as in the chain story, several characters appear only to move plot from point one to point two, and

then vanish never to appear again. The slower than life pace and movement i.e. a single day in the lives of characters may require a week of episodes, works on the plot, but rarely on the character. They are episodic and several such episodes are sutured to go on till the audience rating falls.

### Analysis

Two serials are analyzed to show how they appropriate folktale elements. *Wo Rahane Wali Mehalom Ki* (2007), the soap featured on Sahara One at 9 pm Monday through Friday, had a high TRP rating, and was extended to the second generation. The story began with that of Rani, a rich girl whose family undergoes a reversal of fortune, and who is married into a middle class family. After Rani's death, the story revolves around Pari, her daughter, who is married to Soumya, the son of Pari's father's (Prince) spurned love, Kamia. Kamia gets Soumya married to Pari because a Guruji predicts that Soumya's wife would die on the fortieth day of marriage. Soumya agrees to the wedding because he does not want his beloved to die. It is decided that he will marry her after the death of his first wife, as predicted by the Guruji. This makes it convenient for Kamia to wreak vengeance on Prince's daughter. The Guruji also prophesies that Pari will encounter a fatal threat from water on the tenth day, fire on the twentieth day, air on the thirtieth day, and sure death on the fortieth day. But Pari, the devoted, religious daughter-in-law, wins over the heart of her husband, overcomes the danger posed by the natural elements, and escapes death on the fortieth day (the 40<sup>th</sup> day was stretched to more than a week). The reason given by the Guruji is that he happened to bless Pari unknowingly with long life when she visited him at the temple with her husband. But, as in several soap operas, Pari's fortieth day accident imposes a dramatic amnesia, and she forgets all, including Soumya's hard won love. Now the story takes another melodramatic turn. Pari's family insists on divorce. But the grandmother decides to give Soumya a chance to prove that he loves his wife. She gives him forty days to bring back the lost memory of his wife, which of course he does successfully. The story then shifts to another plot which is that of Soumya's grandfather desiring to bring together his estranged sons. So Pari takes the initiative and helps to bring together the family. However, at the end of that particular episode, Soumya dies. This is almost like the Scheherazade phenomenon of story within story, that brings in new characters and plot that vanish once they have fulfilled their purpose.

Malayalam teleserials are no different with the same themes, motifs and character-types. Each episode (episode here refers not to the weekly episodes of the serial, but the various episodes in the entire story)

introduces new characters, withdraws those that have served their purpose, and may be considered complete in itself. It has all the elements of fantasy, flat characters, loose plot, predictability, temporary suspense and so on that constitutes a folktale. Conflict in human problems and human emotions keep the plot and subplot constantly at a boil. The emphasis is more on dialogue and less on action, probably reflecting the conversational nature within the family. The standard literary devices used are nemesis (good is rewarded, evil punished), interior monologues and dramatic irony, which are very common in folktales. The soaps are mostly comedies, and rarely end in tragedy. However, there is little humour in the lives of the characters. And wit, one of the main features of Indian folktales, is sadly lacking.

The Malayalam serial "Parijatham" aired on Asianet and which drew to a conclusion in April 1 2011 is a conglomeration of folktale motifs put together in such a way that viewers are subjected to the classic theory of willing suspension of disbelief for more than they can endure: identical twins-- one smart (Seema) and the other gullible (Aruna)--, the cruel stepmother (Auntyamma), the cunning fox (the hero, JP's personal assistant), twins substituting each other, impossible and improbable plot units, characters who appear like the ones in a chain story to move the story forward, and so forth.

The representation of women in soap operas has been pursued by a number of feminist writers since one frequently made argument is that the soap opera is a woman's space in which women's motivations are validated and celebrated. It has been argued by scholars like Ang (1985), Geraghty (1991) that the central themes of soap opera such as interpersonal relationships, marriage, divorces, children, and so forth, resonate with the traditionally domestic concerns of women so that the soap is a space in which women's concerns and points of view are validated. Paradoxically, though soap operas deploy a variety of strong and independent-minded women characters, these characters are ultimately subsumed within the family and its patriarchal order.

## CONCLUSION

Television is a highly visible medium and it does influence people's behaviour, if only to the extent that more people watch for more hours today than they did a generation ago. The hours that television fills today were previously filled by various activities like knitting, chatting, visiting or even dozing, with which the new medium seems to be able to co-exist quite comfortably. It has brought new stimulus into the home and created a demand for more rather than less entertainment of other kinds. "More books, magazines and newspapers are read, more music heard and more plays and films are

seen now than ever before—even if only on television. It brings a good many competitors into the living rooms of families who would otherwise be deprived of them" (Fiske, 1989,: 50; Fiske, 1978).

Folklore continues to manifest its characteristic traditional ideas, beliefs, attitudes and meanings in modern industrial society through the media. Folklore forms—traditional, emergent, new, and reconstructed—appear in innumerable retellings, varied according to the need of the accommodating media. It becomes necessary, therefore, for folklorists to address the issue of technological development and what it does to "folklore" and the "folk".

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