Family, Politics and Popular Television

An Ethnographic Study of Viewing an Indian Serial Melodrama

Priya Raghavan

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School of Communication, Culture and Languages
Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development
Victoria University

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Abstract

This thesis explores the popularity in India of a contemporary prime time television serial, *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Because Mother-in-law was Once a Daughter-in-law) which is now the longest running serial in India.

Locating the emergence of this new genre of 'family serial melodrama' in light of the commercialisation, fragmentation and diversification of the Indian television marketplace, the thesis outlines public concerns about this generic development, and analyses the textual hybridity of this serial. In the context of these interrelated industrial, social and textual developments in television, the thesis then drawing on ethnographic perspectives illuminates the micro-social dynamics involved in the appeal of *Kyunki*, especially within a broad understanding of the nature of family viewing. Through its case study of the serial, the thesis quite explicitly demonstrates that appeal of even the apparently most 'trivial' television lies in the ways in which television contributes to political constructions of society through the discursive space it forms for viewers to forge social meanings and negotiate structures of social power. The 'multidimensional' approach the thesis appropriates and develops upon in pursuing this investigation, contributes significantly also to the emergent and evolving field of 'third generation' audience studies, particularly in its focus on family, more so in its observations of family dynamics and discourses.

In addressing questions specifically about audiences' relationship with the serial, the thesis drawing on the ethnographic interviews with viewers and their families, argues that for audiences the serial offers a representation of India simultaneously in notions of family and transcendent ideas of womanhood. Analysis of these notions further reveal how realms of the ideal, real and unreal form an important conceptual spectrum through viewers make sense and negotiate meanings, and contribute in politically constructing society. In this way demonstrating that appeal of this seemingly 'trivial' television programme is also in the space it provides for political negotiations, the thesis conclusively suggests that study of popular narratives, especially feminine narratives, must invariably be considered within the frame of 'politics' while also customarily with 'pleasure'.

Declaration

I, Priya Raghavan, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Family, Politics and Popular Television: An Ethnographic Study of Viewing an Indian Serial Melodrama* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

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   Priya Raghavan   Date

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Introduction

This thesis explores the popularity in India of a contemporary prime time television serial, *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, which translates as 'Because Mother-in-law was Once a Daughter-in-law' (hereafter *Kyunki*). Introduced in 2000, this serial has kept audiences captivated ever since and it has now become the longest running serial ever in India. Its arrival has coincided with some dramatic changes to the nature of television, both in programming and reception, while the serial itself has founded a distinctively new television subgenre that I call the 'family serial melodrama', or popularly *saas bahu (mother-in-law daughter-in-law)* serials. Such has been its instantaneous and unprecedented appeal that it has spawned a wave of imitations that now dominate narrative offerings on television. Whilst owing a generic debt to the Western soap opera, *Kyunki* is a distinctively Indian hybrid form, and represents a development in Indian television that merits academic study.

Kyunki, together with its near identical twin, *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki* (The Story of Every Household, hereafter *Kahaani*), which debuted less than a year later in 2001, have together led a significant shift in Indian television. Commissioned and broadcast on Star Plus, a private satellite channel of Rupert Murdoch's Star Network, television ratings have shown record viewership for both serials. They have consistently featured amongst the top five viewed programmes on cable and satellite television in India over the past seven years, with *Kyunki* more often than not topping the charts.[1] Together they have even redefined prime time in India: where previously primetime concluded at 10.00pm, they are scheduled between 10 pm and 11 pm in half hour slots. Remarkable also about their success is the fact that it has occurred in an 'era of plenty' for Indian television, where a wide repertoire of programme choices is available via the booming cable and satellite industry (Ellis 2002).

Unsurprisingly, such tremendous popularity has attracted intense criticism and debate, particularly of the progenitor *Kyunki*. At the heart of such debates have been concerns about the trivialising of television culture, in respect to the serial's compulsive focus on the domestic sphere and its rather fanciful or 'unrealistic gilt-edged portrait of the

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[1] See ratings archive on http://us.indiantelevision.com/tvr/tamarchyear.php4.

Great Indian family' (Banerjee, 2003). A particular thread in this critique concerns the portrayal of women.

The dominant theme in both serials is family values and family relations, particularly within the framework of the traditional joint family structures, wherein three to four generations of a family and their extended kin live together in one home under one roof. Both serials appear to nostalgically revere this age-old system of family living, which is eroding in India increasingly with the forces of modernisation and globalisation. In *Kyunki*, the plot concerns five generations of a wealthy business family – the Viranis – who live together somewhere in Mumbai, in an imposing mansion named Shantiniketan, which means 'abode of peace'. The opening credit sequence literally enacts an invitation to the audience into this family home. Daughter-in-law Tulsi waves to the camera, greeting, welcoming and establishing a personal relationship with the viewer. This sequence is devoid of dialogue, but the lyrics of the signature song addresses the shifting nature of human relationships, signalling prominent themes of the serial. Tulsi beckons, and with the camera assuming the position of a guest, she leads a tour of the different spaces of their home, meanwhile 'happening' upon other family members who reinforce the welcome. This warm, intimate and comprehensive tour establishes vicarious inclusion in the Virani home and world.

The house name Shantinikentan stands in place of narrative equilibrium, for there is no peace in this family. Instead dramatic events of all orders—from the socially relevant issues like widowhood or rape, through to melodramatic plot staples such as sudden revelations concerning lost relatives and dramatic reversals of fortune—are the grist to the series' mill, five episodes a week, fifty two weeks a year.

Threats to family cohesion and their subsequent resolution are the essential drivers of the serial's narrative. Principal problem solver is the serial's hero, Tulsi, who is one of the daughters-in-law of the family. Her fundamental role is preventing familial disintegration; she is at the centre of the narrative process through which the serial seeks to restore 'equilibrium'. *Kahaani* contains very similar narrative and plot concerns in respect to the Agarwal family, where daughter-in-law Parvati, is the protagonist. These two characters, who for many represent the epitome of Indian

womanhood, feature at the centre of both the appeal and the contestation that have made these serials such a television phenomenon.

Certainly, what they represent has been deeply contested, amongst critics, industry and audiences. Feminist commentators have expressed concern that by idealising women who have little life beyond the four walls of their homes, the serials have 'turned the clock back in time and tradition' (Wadia & Unnikrishan 2002: 2). They insist that these serials traffic in regressive representations of women. Seven years of demonstrated popularity has only heightened such concerns: 'Sari clad women, worshipping husbands and raving about family values' (India 360, 2007), is how one television news channel recently described the serials, when trying to facilitate a renewed debate about the influence of these serials in mid 2007. Igniting this round of commentary was the much-reported sudden departure of the much beloved actor – Smriti Irani – who plays Tulsi in *Kyunki*. One news daily expressed relief with the headline: 'The End of an Error' (*Indian Express*, June 6 2007). Evident in these comments is the deep concern and resentment on the part of media critics about *Kyunki* and family melodramas. Convinced that the representations are nothing but detrimental for women, they also deride Ekta Kapoor, the prolific producer of *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* (and others), and decry her as a traitor to her sex.

The role of Ekta Kapoor has been a central thread in the reception discourses of the *saas-bahu* serials. A young woman—now in her early thirties—Kapoor is the founder of Balaji Telefilms, the production company that produces these two serials and now specialises in this genre. She established the company in 1994 when she was nineteen, and the spectacular success of her company and their products is a story that has evoked much awe and wonder in India. Now a public listed company, Balaji Telefilms is one of the biggest television content providers in India. According to their annual report they had '20 television serials on air aggregating to 85 episodes a week as on 31st March 2006' (Balaji Telefilms Annual Report 2005/6: 39). Ekta Kapoor's peculiar penchant for titles beginning with the letter K, as for example *Kyunki* and *Kahaani*, also gave another nickname to her serials: the K-serials. Her serials now dominate not only the Hindi speaking television markets—where they originated—but have also expanded to regional language markets, offering

programmes in Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu. Recently, some have been also sold to Pakistan and Sri Lanka, including *Kyunki* and *Kahaani*.

While Ekta Kapoor has attracted a great deal of personal criticism, Star Plus the commissioner, promoter and distributor of the serials, has been seen as a great success. It is widely recognised that the K serials, particularly *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* have been influential in turning around the fortunes of Star Plus. Before the launch, the channel was trailing significantly behind the domestic rival Zee Television in terms of viewing shares. *Kyunki,* scheduled to follow the much anticipated *Kaun Banega Crorepati—*the syndicated Indian version of the international game show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire—*initially helped in the channel's revival. Both commenced on the same day in 2000 and garnered high viewership ratings, but to the surprise of many commentators, *Kyunki* was soon outdoing the high profile show.[2] Thereafter, while this popular game franchise has had uneven success,[3] the K serials have underpinned the pay network's resurgence and success story. In a paradox that foreshadows the fraught discourses around gender that this thesis reveals, CEO Sameer Nair who is widely credited for turning the channel around, is usually spared the kind of critiques levelled at Kapoor.

This overview of the significance and popularity of, and public disquiet about the K serials, establishes the value of research that seeks to work through and account for this complex media development. In this endeavour, drawing on ethnographic perspectives the thesis reveals the micro-social dynamics involved in the appeal of *Kyunki* in particular, locating the emergence of these serials within the history of Indian television and contextualising the serials' appeal within a broad understanding of the nature of family viewing. The analysis emerging from this study suggests that studying the appeal of even the apparently most 'trivialised' television offers quite exceptional insights into the ways in which popular television contributes to *political* constructions of society.

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[2] See 'Zee falls behind Star and Sony; *KBC* loses out on *Kyunki Sas…*' in the *Financial Express*, January 9, 2001.

[3] There may be other factors of influence. The game show went on a hiatus between 2001 and 2005 when its host the legendary Bollywood superstar, Amitabh Bachchan, could not renew the contract due to other professional obligations. And when the show returned, despite its popularity was forced off air again to only return in 2007, with a new host Shahrukh Khan, who is one of Bollywood's current favourites.

Criticisms and debates in the press tend to reveal more about the low esteem in which women's pleasures are held (Gledhill 1992; Brunsdon 1997), than they do about the nature of the appeal of the serial for their many viewers. I sought ethnographic answers to the following questions raised by its popularity: how do viewing families interact with these family narratives? Do women actually find pleasure in gender stereotypes and backward representations? Do women identify with their subservient status in society? To what extent does appeal operate at an emotional, nostalgic level, evoked through its portrayals, Indian values and heritage, family orientations, and aspirations of affluent lifestyles? Do men respond positively to the serials' patriarchal discourse? What part does the melodramatic narrative form or other formal qualities play in the serials' appeal to men, women and family units?

Overview of Thesis Approach and Argument

As I have indicated in introducing the serial above, this thesis considers that the *saas-bahu* serials represent the emergence of popular feminized programming as part of the relatively recent proliferation of cable television in India. By feminized, I mean that these serials' focus on interrelations between female characters usually sidelining men, attract debates that are gendered, and appeal primarily to female audiences. In unravelling the dimensions of the serials' popularity, I argue that such a study requires a 'multidimensional' approach (Morley 1999) where ethnographic work and broader empirical research is located within an examination of formal textual properties, as well as social, political, economic and industrial contexts of reception. Thus while drawing on and locating itself within a cultural studies perspective, the thesis distinguishes itself from other audience reception studies by attempting to study audience activity both in its relation to content as well as to domestic frameworks of reception. It responds to the lament and criticism of audience reception studies heard especially after the mid-nineties when focus on audience and reception contexts grew dominant, about their lack of focus on text or content, and for the inadequate attention paid to ideology in examining media audience relationship, (Hartmann 2006).

This thesis provides an overview of what Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998) call the 'incorporation/resistance' paradigm and critiques of this dominant thread in textually and ethnographically oriented studies. In light of these critiques,

this thesis, supporting the growing body of work in cultural media studies which argues that media and audiences are formed through an integrative frame of discourses (Alasuutari 1999), suggests that the power of the text lies in its activating of discourses, and the power of audience lies in negotiating through these discourses. With reference to *Kyunki*, the serial activates a complex set of cultural and political discourses, primarily about gender, and viewers engage with these discourses by attempting to situate them within their own social locations and experiences. Proposing that discursive frameworks, that bind popular texts and audiences, are representations and articulations of dominant social anxieties and aspirations, this thesis makes an important contribution in demonstrating the complex processes through which textual and contextual discourses intersect in shaping reception. Consequently, this thesis offers a counter argument to those who dismiss the serials as trivial, in revealing how the social anxieties and aspirations of a wide cross section of viewers are addressed and articulated in its broadcast and reception.

The research then suggests that the serial forms an important space where viewers forge social meanings and negotiate structures of social power. In understanding how viewers engage in this, the research finds that production of meaning and processes of negotiation are intricately bound up with notions of the real and reality, as mediated through the everyday patterns of television programming and reception. The realms of reality and unreality form an important coordinate through which text and social reality intersect in viewers' interaction with the serial and the production of meaning. However, whilst the reality-unreality dimension is highly significant in the serial's reception, it is at the same time also highly variable and unstable. For each family and individual viewer the context varies in terms of their lived experience, social practices and discursive frameworks organising ideologies of gender and family respectively. What is considered real and unreal similarly varies and even the grounds for determining judgements about reality and unreality are variable – incorporating generic, moral, formal, ideological and referential bases for evaluation.

Analysis of the dimensions of the reality-unreality axis of viewers' readings also reveals how powers of structure and agency function discursively through this process. For example, the *collective* context of family assumes structural power in the way audiences define meanings, and individual engagement produces agential

powers, particularly when an individual departs from collectively held views. The struggle to locate meanings in the realms of the real and unreal also reflects what Kim Schroeder (1988) refers to as the 'liminal processes' through which society makes sense of and constructs itself. In the process of meaning production, viewers tend to reproduce or cede to hegemonic ideologies at times, while at others, they show a desire to challenge or change certain ideologies.

My research suggests that these serials function as an important site where the vicissitudes of feminine knowledge and experience are explored, collectively and individually in viewing families in their discussions and reflections about the serials. This interactive process of viewing and reflection, the thesis finds, configures and reconfigures the many moral, familial, religious, romantic and sexual aspects of gendered experience.

My study finds that *Kyunki* does not evoke responses structured along rigid or dichotomous gender lines (for example male disapproval and female endorsement of the serial). But *gender* nevertheless forms a key *axis* organising perspectives on and responses to the serial, enabling formulations about the gendered dimensions of reception. Whereas television critics, as I noted earlier, regard the serials as perpetuating nostalgic or regressive stereotypes, setting up expectations that are unrealisable in female viewers' own lives, I found that for women, the serial's appeal often lies in the way it ruptures gendered morals. By collapsing reality and fantasy, particularly in constructing the ideal of Tulsi, the serial offers a 'liminal space' where women can reflect, and seize upon the contradictory and fraught imperatives operating in their own gendered situations. For men, the serials often provoke anxiety and hostility as they potentially prompt a desire in women to challenge gendered morals, or at least provide a charged reference point from which women are able to negotiate their lived realities. The variations in the lived and discursive contexts in which viewing audiences are situated by membership to their families, demonstrates the complex processes through which viewers negotiate meanings and pleasure in the serial.

Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first section seeks to define the theoretical location and methodology of this study. It includes two chapters. Chapter One reviews the dominant theoretical paradigms that have defined audience studies and through the review shapes and articulates the approach embraced in this thesis. It traces the 'three generations' (Alasuutari 1999) of audience studies offering a fairly comprehensive review of the second generation of studies, in the process contributing to the development of the third generation, which is still in an emergent and evolving stage. Drawing on calls to study media within an integrative framework of discourses of 'media culture as a whole', the chapter attempts to define the particularities and complexities involved in realising this call through my ethnographic study. Thus, while the approach of this thesis remains within the paradigm of 'audience ethnography', the study distinguishes its approach by attempting to examine the relationship between textual and contextual discourses in audience activity. Also, in ethnographically examining the domestic contexts of viewers in the appeal of the serial, the study focuses more on the family of the viewers (which includes non-viewing family members too) and broader discursive environment, rather than simply focusing on interpretations and discourses only viewers of the serial find in it. Chapter Two outlines the particularities in the methodology employed in this study. It provides a description of the study location, the tools and methods included in the study, and discusses the challenges and complexities faced in evolving a framework of analysis. It also addresses questions of subjectivity and its influence on the outcomes of this research.

In section two, which consists of two chapters, the thesis provides an overview of television in India. It seeks to locate the social, cultural, political and institutional contexts within which the serial emerged and found popularity, and also describe the textual profile of *Kyunki*. Chapter Three focuses on the development of television in India, tracing shifts and changes that have marked broadcasting structures and simultaneously of audiences, developing an understanding of the political and institutional contexts, in which the serial and the genre has emerged and is now received. Chapter Four describes the themes, structure, narrative of *Kyunki*, and attempts to provide an understanding of the aesthetic properties of the serial. Examining the closeness of the serial to the genre of Western soap operas, the chapter

also takes a careful look at the form and structure of the serial, identifying the particularities in its hybrid format. The discussion in this chapter, particularly on its melodramatic form, begins to locate the political significance of the serial, while also helping to develop an appreciation and sympathetic consideration of viewers' engagement with the serial, which the thesis examines further in the subsequent chapters.

In the last and final part of the thesis, titled 'Reception', the thesis focuses on the empirical and ethnographic findings of the study. This third part of the thesis is divided into three chapters, including a short section on the findings from the empirical survey. The empirical section provides a preliminary sketch of the social profile of the study participants and an overview of domestic viewing contexts. Chapter Five, examines the dominant discourses the serial activates for the viewers and investigates how the serial and its textual and ideological frameworks contribute to the mediation of discourses. Developing upon the argument emerging in this chapter, Chapter Six focuses on the role of cultural and discursive frameworks in families in shaping reception and the meanings viewers make from the serial. Defining such micro-cultural frameworks in families as 'family ethos', the chapter demonstrates how this framework shapes reception and, in turn is, shaped by reception. The last chapter of the thesis, Chapter Seven, returns to questions about the role of formal and generic features of the serial and demonstrates how these features contribute in negotiating viewing of the serial when it raises intense ideological concerns in the family. The conclusion, while offering a summary of the findings of the thesis, also identifies the distinguishing elements of the thesis, and addresses some of the methodological and epistemological concerns relevant to contemporary audience studies.

PART I

Theoretical Location and Methodology

CHAPTER 1

Understanding Popular Television: Defining the Framework and Approach of the Study

The objective of this chapter is to define the theoretical framework in which the thesis locates itself, in its goal of studying the popularity of *Kyunki*, the contested status the serial finds in India, and the structural as well as socio-cultural elements of the serial that together contribute to its appeal. To this end, the chapter traces the development of the field of audience studies so far, identifying some of the dominant paradigms that have structured this field. It then looks at some feminist studies of soap genres in seeking to confirm the validity of the study of 'trivial' television and in starting to identify the cultural significance of *Kyunki*. The literature reviewed here shapes the approach my study will follow, and I focus on identifying and developing the paradigms most suited to the interest and purpose of the thesis.

Audience Research Paradigms

The three broad schools into which Dennis McQuail (1997) categorises audience studies present a helpful introduction to understanding the concerns and interests that have dominated the field. His three categories are: 'the structural tradition' of measuring audiences; 'the behaviourist tradition', concerned with the effects and uses of television; and 'the cultural studies tradition' focusing on the influence of social and cultural contexts of audiences in the processes of reception. It is within the latter—the cultural studies tradition—that media and audience studies has predominantly developed in the last few decades, though of course, structural ratings research has also continued to extensively serve commercial research enterprises. As noted, the stated aims of my research led to its location in the cultural studies paradigm.

When I first began contemplating undertaking this study, my initial interest was centred on questions of appeal of the serial. The criticism the serial provoked, served to further stoke my curiosity about viewer loyalty. At that time, my understanding of television research was significantly derived from my experiences as a researcher with a private research firm in India. This work was largely within a quantitative frame, in which qualitative research was seen as a useful supplement to support and

augment the quantitative findings. Consequently, when I formally entered into this study, from a brief review of literature on audience research I found McQuail's (1997) 'pragmatic' model of audience choice, which was based on a structural-functionalist approach, as well as theories of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, perfectly suited to my initial aims. The pragmatic model appeared to be a fairly comprehensive framework as it took into account factors both on the 'audience side' and on the 'media side'. The 'audience side' referred to variables or factors such as: social background and milieu; personal attributes; media-related needs; personal tastes and preferences; general habits of leisure time media use; awareness of choices; specific context of use such as referring to sociability and location; and also chance as in the possibility of unplanned/unforeseen interaction with the media. On the 'media side' it included: the media system as in number, reach and type of media available; structure of media provision referring to the general pattern of media offerings; available content options of formats and genres; media publicity; and timing and presentation (1997: 76-77). This comprehensive model, in my initial planning, seemed to take in all aspects of the media and audience relations, and provide a perfect answer in unravelling the popularity of *Kyunki*. But as I began exploring the details and complexities entailed in each of the particular elements of McQuail's model, I found the cultural studies approach more amenable to answering my questions. My encounter with the cultural studies approach moreover, expanded my original questions, from simply that of appeal, to also exploring the social and political dimensions of the serial in its appeal.

Cultural Studies and Audience Research

In guiding media and audience studies into the cultural studies tradition, Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model of communication is recognized as fundamental. It emerged from a need, as Hall himself has explained later, to challenge the 'textual determinism' advocated by the *Screen* theory in its literary criticism approach which then dominated cultural studies. In this approach audiences were largely seen as susceptible and vulnerable recipients of the propagandist and capitalist manipulations of the media. With the groundbreaking encoding/decoding model Hall sought to challenge such a view of audiences by proposing that in the process of communication, message transfer was not necessarily identical in the processes of 'encoding' and 'decoding.' In other words, the model argued that the message

inscribed by the producer in any text, is not necessarily the same as that the audience/receiver 'decoded' from the same text. This argument served to redefine the process of communication in its proposal that, the social context of the receiver significantly influences the meanings the receiver makes or 'decodes' from the text. In contrast to the earlier 'passive' audience approach, Hall's model also implied that a single text might generate multiple 'decodings' and thus made an important contribution to recognising the active participation of audience in reception. The result was that in studying media, focus shifted from the study of texts to the study of audiences, a shift which significantly impacted on the future direction of media and audience studies. Since this theoretical model of communication and the empirical research based on it was initially developed within the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the research approach it advocated came to be known widely as the British cultural studies model.

In attempting to define the trajectory that audience studies has since followed, Pertti Alasuutari (1999) divides audience studies into three 'generations', where the first generation refers to birth of reception studies, dated from the momentous development of Hall's communication model. In the second generation of studies, Alasuutari refers to the range of empirical reception studies that developed from Hall's model, which shifted focus to actual audiences, leading to the rise of the audience ethnography approach. This approach now forms an overwhelming part of media reception studies, although the course it has taken can hardly be considered homogenous. David Morley, one of the eminent 'second generation' scholars, briefly summarises the changes from first to second, as involving

> ...a shift from a focus on factual to fictional media forms; from questions of knowledge to questions of pleasure; from programme contents to media functions; from conventional to identity politics; and not least, from matters of class to matters of race, ethnicity and, … [*centrally*] gender. (Morley 1999: 202)

In regard to the 'third generation' Alasuutari advises that it is yet not clear cut, but in fact still emerging. In this 'third generation' he includes and endorses those studies, whose,

> ...main focus is not restricted to finding out about the reception or 'reading' of a programme by a particular audience. Rather, the objective is to get a grasp of our contemporary 'media culture', particularly, as it can be seen in the role of the media in everyday life, both as a topic and as an activity structured by and structuring the discourses within which it is discussed. (Alasuutari, 1999: 6)

In examining 'media culture as a whole' in the third generation of reception studies, Alasuutari seems to endorse an approach that seeks to study media and audience relationship within an integrative framework of discourses through which media and audiences are formed. Jack Bratich (2005) in his support for this new direction and in further developing upon it, notes that such an approach while 'deontologising' audiences, seeks to examine audiences not as empirical actors but 'as discursive constructs, as effects of a variety of programs, institutions and measuring instruments' (2005: 243). In this light he declares 'to study audiences is to study the discourses that take audiences as their object' (2005: 243). It is this call, which asks for a focus on discourses and discursive practices through which we constitute ourselves, our society and culture, and recognition that the media forms an important part of this constitutive process that finds support in this thesis too. However, it may be noted that although it is towards a 'discourse analysis' that such an approach points, the reference is not to a linguistic approach, rather to a reference of discourse as both meaning and practice. It is within this approach that my study is also located, with discourse about family and gender emerging as the two main discursive arenas through which the appeal and contestations of the serial *Kyunki* can be studied. At the same time, when attempting to follow this new direction, the thesis is also in complete agreement with Morley's caution and suggestion, that

> …rather than thinking in terms of a linear succession of truths, paradigms or models, each displacing the previous one, in some triumphal progress, we may be better served by a multidimensional model. By this I mean to suggest simply that what is often at stake in intellectual progress is how to build new insights into (or onto) the old, rather than how to entirely replace the old with the new. (1999: 196-197)

Alasuutari too shares in this view insisting that it entails a 'broadened frame' where earlier paradigms, in particular audience ethnography, are not abandoned. Morley's suggestion also assists in productively explaining the relative vagueness of the 'third

generation' in contrast to the early phases identified. Thus, to enunciate what the approach of this thesis actually entails, it is imperative to take a historical look at the way audience reception studies has evolved.

As I have mentioned before and as is widely recognized, Hall's encoding/decoding model was an important turning point in the history of audience studies. When foregrounding the 'active role of audiences', it simultaneously introduced a combined semiological and sociological emphasis in studying media. However, eventually as the sociological focus grew stronger, audience ethnography began emerging as a dominant approach in understanding the practices of actual audiences and in investigating the processes of meaning making in audiences' interaction with media. In my study too, audience ethnography is defined as the central framework. But it also attempts to develop a semiological focus, by drawing on some important critical works on popular genres, based in other conceptual and methodological frameworks. Here I am referring to some influential studies on soap opera founded in textual and 'reader-response' approaches, and whose theoretical origins lie dominantly in literary and film studies. Textual analysis offers important insights drawn into the generic and structural features of texts, and 'reader-response' scholarship involves a critical analysis of audience engagement mostly by using an implied construct of audience rather observing an actual reader (for example Allen 1985; Brunsdon & Morley 1978; Brunsdon 1997 [1981]; Geraghty 1991; Modleski 1988). I will discuss the use of these works for my study later, but first I turn my attention to audience ethnography.

While I have noted the need to provide a historical background of audience studies, I am not claiming to provide an exhaustive account of the history, which can be better found in many other publications for example, Shaun Moores (1993), Morley (1992) or Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998). My purpose is to utilize these 'second generation' studies in defining my own approach within the 'emergent' third generation following Alasuutari's and Morley's view that new models are not about replacing earlier paradigms, but instead about building upon them.

Audience Ethnography

The importance of investigating the influence of class and social positions seen in the early reception studies in the British cultural studies tradition can be linked to the

influence of Marxism on the Birmingham school. For example, Morley's *The 'Nationwide' Audience* (1980) project, which attempts to empirically test Hall's encoding/decoding theory, uses education and profession as the primary independent variables. Seeking to correlate these variables to the differential 'decodings' audiences make, in terms of preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings, as Hall had proposed in the model, the project methodologically employs two stages, where the study participants are first shown the British current affairs programme *Nationwide* in groups, followed immediately by an interview discussion with participants about the programme. Although the project successfully deploys Hall's decoding framework, it importantly finds that correlating the framework to social class or social position is not easy. It finds that the way in which particular discourses position audiences (for example, race) further intersect in the meanings viewers make. The influence of multiple variables and discourses in audience decodings or readings, thereby reveals a major limitation of the *Nationwide* project, of studying reception outside 'natural' viewing contexts, thus urging audience studies for a focus on 'natural' contexts of viewing, which is realized in Morley's next project the influential *Family Television*, published in 1986.

Family Television's attempt to investigate domestic contexts of reception is widely recognized as the earliest work to introduce ethnography into media and audience studies. It involves interviews with nineteen British families about their television viewing habits, conducted in their homes. Following the *Nationwide* project, it also seeks to investigate the role of class and social position of families in television viewing, but instead finds the important relationship is between family and television. Using the family as the unit of consumption, something never explored before, Morley presents a detailed account of how viewing is managed in families and finds significant differences in viewing based on gender and domestic roles, and power relationships in family. This study establishes gender as a more important structuring factor in families' television viewing than class or social position.

Many subsequent studies confirm this original finding of Morley's, the influential being Ann Gray's (1992) ethnographic study on video (VCR) use in families. But Gray additionally finds that gendered patterns in video use arise not from 'essentialist' notions of women's competence with technology as widely believed, but from

women's conscious reluctance to engage with it. Gray argues that women choose to avoid it, as they know it would become another additional household chore they would be expected to undertake for family needs, than for their own needs. The study importantly demonstrates the complex dynamics of domestic contexts in structuring media use; particularly by identifying that home is not an 'unproblematic site of leisure' (Storey 1999: 117) for women as it is for men.

When acknowledging the importance of some of these early projects in shaping audience studies, Charlotte Brunsdon (2000) also sees it as important to point out that it is Dorothy Hobson who first demonstrated the significance of gender in reception and also introduced ethnography into media studies. Brunsdon (2000) refers to some of Hobson's early publications of 1978 and 1980 where she had used ethnography to study the media experiences of housewives and young working class women, before her widely recognised work *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera,*—which uses a semiological/sociological approach,—was published in 1982. Brunsdon, noting that only Moores (1993) has so far acknowledged the significance of Hobson's early work, gives due credit to Hobson for first demonstrating with empirical evidence the complexities of television viewing for women, in relation to the demands domestic roles constantly place on them.

In this period when the gendered nature of reception was being increasingly recognized, two simultaneous and convergent developments also contributed to significantly shaping scholarship on audience ethnography. These related to the advancement of feminist interest in reception and the inclusion of popular texts in audience studies. Brunsdon (2000: 8), who was one of the members of the initial Birmingham media studies group, retrospectively reflects that the transition from study of 'factual' texts to popular 'fictional' texts was not easy. She recalls the resistance that came from the group when soap opera was initially proposed as an object of study. In this repudiation that the idea provoked, outside as well as inside the study group, Brunsdon notes not just the role of the 'traditional aesthetic judgement' that prevailed then, but also the symmetry 'feminist critique' shared with it, where both systems of judgement regarded soap opera as 'trash' (2000: 24). She thus usefully reminds scholars that in the conjunction of soap studies and feminist ethnography, feminism itself underwent re-evaluation. She investigates this idea

further in her book by studying how the encounter of soap opera and feminism contributed to producing the identity of the feminist intellectuals themselves, through a set of interviews with the feminist scholars who were then engaged in some of the early reception studies (Brunsdon 2000).

Feminist reception studies have played an integral role in validating and establishing the significance of the study of popular forms. Particularly valuable are their findings about the involvement of cultural and identity politics in reception of these forms, as for example in the works of Hobson (1982), Brunsdon (1981), Ien Ang (1985), Mary Ellen Brown (1987, 1994) and Ellen Seiter (1989) to name a few. What these studies and other subsequent studies on soaps concluded I will discuss in much more detail in a separate section later in this chapter, but for now I refer to these mainly for their contribution in shaping the 'second generation' of studies. Firstly I turn to their role in the emergence of the 'interpretivist' paradigm.

The Interpretive Paradigm

The 'interpretivist theory' in media and audience studies as Evans (1990: 147) has observed, is 'typified by assumptions of a) an active audience and b) polysemic and open media content.' Foregrounding the 'active' character of audiences and turning attention to the act of 'reading/interpreting', the paradigm wholly attributes power to audiences in conceptualizing the media-audience relationship and in the process appears to somewhat blindly valorize them. Also defining the paradigm has been its preoccupation with the audiences' power to 'resist' forms of cultural or ideological domination. John Fiske (1987) is known in reception studies as one of its leading proponents. Fiske's insistence in the context of text-audience engagement that, 'pleasure for the subordinate is produced by the assertion of one's social identity in resistance to, in independence of, or in negotiation with, the structure of domination' (1987: 19), firmly locates him in this paradigm.

Included often amongst the list of interpretivist studies is Janice Radway's (1984) ethnographic study on women's reading of popular romance novels, even though it is recognized that Radway's findings are less about 'the meaning of the text' than about 'the social event of reading'. Influencing such a reading of her study, despite its indisputable sociological rather than semiological bearing, seems to be Radway's

finding that reading romance novels provides women readers with an 'escape' from their mundane domestic roles. Her argument that women use fiction reading as strategic tool to make space for themselves denied to them elsewhere in patriarchal structure, where family and domestic role take the foremost place, suggests that these women use reading as a 'resistant' practice. Sharing a similar theoretical position is Mary Ellen Brown's (1987, 1994) ethnographic investigation into the conversational networks of soap viewers. She too argues that women viewers engage in 'resistive pleasures' through such talk. Her analysis of such talk reveals that the pleasure for women lies not in identifying with patriarchally defined representations of them, but rather in recognizing and resisting their subservient position in such ideological representations. Paul Willis (1990) also endorses a similar position through the idea of 'creative consumption' from studying cultural practices of young people. Amongst other studies which do not overly dwell on 'resistance' but seek to study variable interpretations, are Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz's (1993) study of the popular American soap *Dallas,* where they examine cultural variations in the readings of viewers watching this soap in Israel, Japan and the US. Also placed in this paradigm are functionalist studies on the social uses of media, for example in the works of James Lull (1988, 1990).

With such studies engaged in examining variable interpretations and interpreting the politics of pleasure, audience studies began polarising into what Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) call the 'Incorporation/Resistance' paradigm. This defines the two positions of 'incorporation' and 'resistance' within which such studies situate themselves: 'whether audience members are incorporated into the dominant ideology by their participation in the media activity or whether, to the contrary, they are resistant to that incorporation' (1998: 15). The interpretive theorists, as discussed above, mostly locate themselves on the 'resistance' side of the pole. The 'incorporation' side, meanwhile, often includes members from the Glasglow Media Group, for example Greg Philo (1999), who believes that audiences are heavily influenced by the ideology and meaning the text is trying to convey. Such a polarisation of audience studies soon found criticism, with resistance theorists attracting a greater share of it, as the 'incorporation' perspective anyway held far less currency in the sphere of audience studies. In this criticism, the main charge was that 'resistance' theorists shifted focus from the broader ideological structures of

reception, to simply demonstrating 'multiple' and 'resistant' readings. The populist, constructivist, and postmodernist approach these studies advanced, many saw as lacking in critique, thereby initiating calls for a rethink and retrieval of critical perspectives in cultural reception studies (McGuigan 1992; Gibson 2000; Thomas, 2001; Murdock 2004). Also others, not so much concerned about the theoretical posture of these studies than the 'ethnographic thinness' on which their positions were built, called for more anthropological rigour (example Abu-Lughod (1997).

Attempts to theoretically reconcile this dichotomy, which also extends in sociology in terms of the classical debate between structure and agency, can be found in Anthony Giddens (1984) theory of structuration. Arguing that structure and agency are mutually interdependent in the constitution of society, he proposes that they be treated as dualisms rather than dichotomies. Giddens argues that social actions are shaped by social structures, which in turn are reproduced or transformed by human agency. In the cultural studies realm, Hall addresses this dualism, for example in his seminal paper *Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'* (1994 [1981]). Hall insists that study of popular culture does not need to subscribe to either the incorporation or resistance paradigms, rather popular culture constitutes itself as a ground on which cultural transformations are worked, through the double movement of incorporation and resistance (1994: 456). Influenced significantly by Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which basically proposes in reference to class relations, that 'a bourgeois hegemony is secured not via the obliteration of working class culture, but via its *articulation to* bourgeois culture and ideology' (Bennett 1994 [1986]: 225), Hall says that popular cultural artefacts rework and reshape the dominated culture in this *articulation to* dominant culture. This conceptualisation defines the text audience relationship:

> There is a continuous and necessarily uneven and unequal struggle, by the dominant culture, constantly to disorganise and reorganise popular culture; to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms. There are points of resistance; there are moments of supersession. This is the dialectic of cultural struggle. In our times, it goes on continuously, in the complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation, which make the field of culture a sort of constant battlefield. A battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost. (Hall 1994: 460)

The 'negotiated' reading position that Hall had earlier formulated in the encoding/decoding model also seems to absorb into this concept of 'cultural struggle' quoted above, but in the former it carries a more sociological than political sense. This notion of 'negotiation of meaning' is what my research also explores. However, in contrast to Hall's argument, which is based on issues of class, my research is defined by the frame of family and gender.

Further alternative ways of studying media and audiences have also helped audience studies move out of the dichotomy. The complexities in the media audience relationship that these studies have identified, suggest that the incorporation resistance paradigm may itself be incapable of accounting for such complexities (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). These studies do not attempt directly to reconcile the dichotomy, but in their arguments, Hall's idea about negotiation and cultural struggle is implicitly evident. It is not hard to see that the historical moment in which these studies emerged—when the schism prevailed and a need to move out of it was growing—would have influenced the approach they adopt. One of the notable emphases in these studies which sought to move beyond the incorporation resistance paradigm, is the focus on the relationship of media to everyday life. Such studies are founded on the premise that media use is inherently embedded in the everyday lives of people and therefore cannot be studied as an isolated object. Instead they insist that media must be seen as a process through which everyday lives are constituted. In situating the history of audience studies into the three generations, it is particularly this research approach and practice of focusing on the 'embeddedness of media and audiences in culture' that Alasuutari (1999) places into the 'third generation' of studies.

Media and Audiences as Embedded in 'Everyday' Culture

The foundation studies in audience reception, for example Morley's *Family Television* or the works of Hobson or Gray, contain references to 'everyday life' in their focus on domestic contexts, so it is hard to locate the exact origin of this paradigm, as Alasuutari also notes. What is apparent, however, is that the understanding of the concept is far more complex now than it was earlier. In the early studies, the 'everyday' tended to be investigated initially in relation to particular social dimensions, such as for example, class and gender in *Family Television* (1986). Some of the subsequent studies attempted to expand these dimensions further, as can

be seen in Jan-Uwe Rogge and Klaus Jensen (1988) study of television viewing in German families, where they found that cycles of development in families also affected their everyday engagement with media. Similarly, in the longitudinal audience tracking study in Britain sponsored by the British Film Institute, conducted initially in 1988 and later followed up from 1991 to 1996, David Gauntlett and Annette Hill (1999) found that major life stages and transitions such as exams, leaving home, employment status, and different points in personal relationships, tend to influence or disrupt preferences and patterns of television viewing. The approach in these studies appears quite comparable to the functionalist approaches on the 'social uses of television' (Lull 1980) where the concerns centre on how audiences use television for identity formation, companionship, relaxation and so on in their everyday life.

While these studies did interrogate the 'everyday' in their study of the domestic contexts, the paradigm began to crystallise only significantly through the collaborative work of a team of scholars initially at Brunel University. Amongst them, Roger Silverstone has been at the forefront at least in arduously theorising the paradigm. One of the early theoretical articulations of it can be found in Silverstone's chapter titled *Television and Everyday life* in Marjorie Ferguson's edited book *Public Communication* (1990). In this chapter, Silverstone calls for an

> ...anthropological conceptualization of the audience and for a methodological approach, or a set of approaches, which sets the audience for television in a context of the work of everyday life: the daily experiences of home, technologies and neighbourhood, and of the public and private mythologies and rituals which define the basic patterns of our cultural experience. (1990: 174)

In this call, Silverstone seeks to transform an understanding of audiences beyond typologies, social groups and aggregates that earlier studies largely dwell on, to an understanding that contextualizes audiences within the complex culture and realities in which they are situated. In other words, he seeks to identify audience practices and the discourses and micro processes shaping these practices, rather than attempting to mould audience activity in social typologies. Thus, he speaks of an important need to treat audiences as a 'social and cultural objects.' At the same time, when asking that

audiences be studied as embedded in certain (indeed multiple) cultures, he asks that they be situated dually at once in both public and private spheres, or as he puts it, as 'embedded in the macro-environment of political economy and in the micro-world of domestic and daily existence' (1990: 174).

The trajectory audience research has taken subsequently can be traced along two distinct but overlapping lines of enquiry, where the central concerns are in investigating the embeddedness of media and audiences in culture. The study of 'domestic consumption', particularly of information and communication technologies, forms one of the lines of enquiry (for example the works of Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley 1992; Haddon 2003; Berker et al. 2006; Mackay 1997; Moores 1993). The other line forms around the more politically inspired anthropologies, often concerned with locating media in the everyday politics of globalisation or as Murphy and Kraidy (2003: 16) put it, in 'a heuristic trail …of the dynamics between global forces and local specificities' (for example Mankekar 1999; Rajagopal 2001; Murphy & Kraidy 2003). My research approach is drawn significantly from both these overlapping frameworks, which seek to examine the cultural embeddedness of media and audiences. However, my approach does not situate itself entirely in either, as will be evident from its particularities which I seek to locate in the following sections. I begin by explaining briefly about the domestication framework.

Domestic Consumption Paradigm

Within the domestic paradigm there have been two kinds of methodological approaches, although their epistemological concerns are comparable. One is a more structured approach followed by Silverstone and collaborators, and the second a looser framework as in that advanced by Shaun Moores (1996) as well as Hugh Mackay (1997) for example.

The approach that Silverstone and other collaborators proposed is now commonly referred to as the 'domestication' framework, particularly after their attempts to formulate an empirical model to capture the practices, processes and cultural contexts of media audience transactions. The term 'domestication' with connotations of 'taming the wild', in the context of audience consumption signifies the processes through which communication technologies are 'tamed' in homes. It seeks to capture

the everyday practices of consumption of communication technologies, as they are appropriated, incorporated and in the process also redefined in homes or in other words 'domesticated.'

The empirical model they evolved is based on two central precepts: one on the concept of 'double articulation'; and second the 'moral economy of the household'. Some of its details are included in the early theorizing in Silverstone's chapter on 'Television and everyday life', but it began to form as a definite empirical model initially through the effort of Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992) in their contributions in the edited collection *Consuming Technologies*. An important point to note about the model they developed is that, although it defines a specific structure of domestic consumption, in its deployment it has not so far reflected a fixed sense. It has always been appropriated and adapted variously according to the particular interest of those using it.[4] Even Silverstone (2006) in one of his last writings before his passing away seems to acknowledge this. In his review of the legacy of the concept, he begins the chapter with the following statement: 'All concepts, once having gained the light of day, take on a life of their own. Domestication is no exception' (2006: 229).

The idea of 'double articulation' on which the model is based, refers to Silverstone's theory that television—and other media technology as well—constitute 'two kinds of mutually interdependent textualities' which he calls its form of 'double articulation' (1990: 179). Silverstone argues that 'technology' itself is a meaningful text—material and symbolic—just as much as 'content' is, on the grounds that technology is socially shaping as it is also socially shaped. Further these meanings that television circulates, he argues, are made in both public and private acts of consumption, as a 'function of the negotiations of consumer choices within the market' (1990:179). This theory thus proposes study of media audience relationship in terms of the economy of consumption, rather than simply reception.

The concept of moral economy refers to the framework in households which shape public and private acts of consumption. Evolving from Silverstone and others'

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[4] For example the range of studies in Berker et al.'s (2006) edited book *Domestication of Media and Technology*.

attempts to define an empirical model, it is formulated as an integrative frame through which the embedded practices of consumption could be studied. Inspired from ideas in anthropology it conceives households as,

> …part of a transactional system of economic and social relations with the formal or more objective economy and society of the public sphere. The central idea here is that households are actively engaged with products and meanings of this formal, commodity and individual-based economy, and that in their appropriation of those commodities they incorporate and redefine them in their own terms, in accordance with their own values and interests. (Silverstone 1996: 287)

In short, the moral economy reflects the social, economic and cultural identity of the household or as Silverstone put it in the recent review, simply as 'the household's sense of itself' (2006: 236). An important point they also note is that the moral economy of the household is both determining of, and determined by, the processes of consumption. In other words, they call attention to the ways in which 'moral economy' shapes consumption, while at the same time shaping itself through the household's practices of consumption. This dialectical and contingent relationship shared between 'moral economy' and 'consumption' they further argue, is also crucial for the household's continuous engagement with public spheres. By this, they mean that while consumption of technologies both in its material and symbolic forms plays a significant part in constituting private spheres, such consumption also influences the shaping of public spheres:

> Objects and meanings, technologies and media, which cross the diffuse and shifting boundary between the public sphere where they are produced and distributed, and the private sphere where they are appropriated into a personal economy of meaning (Miller 1987), mark the site of the crucial work of social reproduction which takes place within the household's moral economy. Information and communication technologies are, of course, crucially implicated in this work of social reproduction, not just as commodities and appropriated objects, but as mediators of the social knowledges and cultural pleasures which facilitate the activities of consumption as well as being consumables in their own right. (Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley 1992: 18-19)

Now in capturing this complex and contingent relationship between processes of household consumption, and its part in the constitution of society and everyday life,

Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley (1992) identify and propose four phases through which communication technologies are adopted and adapted by families. The four phases are: appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion.[5]

An accessible summary of the four phases can be found in the brief description that Jo Helle-Valle, one of the exponents of this approach, provides:

> …the *appropriation* of an ICT refers to the actual purchase of the object. *Objectification* points to the actual usage and physical positioning of the object within the household while *incorporation* denotes the ways the ICT is given a place in the cultural framework of the home. *Conversion* points to the ways the ICT is displayed vis a vis the world. (2007: 20)

Now in empirically translating these four phases into the study of texts, I do find certain problems, but before elaborating on these, it will be useful to take a look at the responses of some other scholars to the approach Silverstone and his associates advocate.

Shaun Moores (1993), in his extensive review of audience studies, observes that the theoretical articulations that Silverstone and colleagues have offered provide a more systematic expression of ideas about audience activity and domestic culture than were already in circulation. When making this observation, Moores notes that amongst others, he himself has been engaged in studies (on early radio) that involved very similar concerns, before the Brunel group actively began pursuing them. In drawing the link, he particularly refers to the idea of 'double articulation' that Silverstone makes. Moores notes that his own research in the field, an oral history project on the entry and incorporation of radio into households in the interwar period, shares concerns about understanding how radio as technology (as distinct to content) was interpreted and appropriated into domestic contexts. For inspiring his own work, he appears to give more credit to Raymond Williams' notion about the 'mobile privatisation' of television—which refers to television' ability to remain private but at the same time cross distances—and the way in which this private and public aspect affected lived experiences. From his empirical experience of the radio study and later

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[5] There have been some revisions to this by Silverstone, in light of his continued work with it as Leslie Haddon (2007) notes.

studies of satellite technology, Moores expresses doubt about the need and the potential of the distinctions offered in 'domestication' model that Silverstone and others advocate, to fully capture the dynamics in empirical situations:

> Whether such fine-grained distinctions are actually necessary to conceptualise the consumption of communication technologies is debatable. So, in situated empirical instances, these four categories might well collapse into each other. (Moores 1993: 100)

He nevertheless gives credit to the scholarship for underscoring 'the part that ICTs can play in achieving a sense of 'ontological security' in day to day living' (1993:99). His comment refers to Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley's (1992) assertion—borrowing from sociologist Gidden's work—that the processes of domestication ensure households 'confidence and trust in the world' (in other words, 'ontological security') through appropriation and reworking of new technologies into their particular cultures.

More openly critical of the formulation is for example Ien Ang (1996), who terms the approach, at least the way Silverstone and associates articulate it, as 'radical contextualism' saying that if attempted it could amount to 'contextualisation gone mad' (1996: 73). In her criticism, she refers to the impossible position implied for the researcher, of trying to be everywhere, in 'ceaselessly trying to capture a relentlessly expanding field of contextually overdetermined, particular realities' (1996: 73). While appreciating the epistemological logic behind the approach, Ang argues that it is, in the end, ontologically and pragmatically untenable. Similarly, anthropologist, Lila Abu-Lughod (1997:111) criticises Silverstone, for all the grand theorising but little ethnographic illustration he provides—referring to Silverstone's (1994) book *Television and Everyday Life*—though she offers no direct critical take on the approach.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that by attempting to theoretically articulate the cultural embedding of media and audience, Silverstone and colleagues, while providing it with a distinctive identity also began expanding its legitimacy. The model has helped inform much subsequent research (see for example in Berker et al. (2006)). But as Maren Hartmann (2006) notes in her chapter in this book, most studies using

this framework largely focus on how the 'technology' is interpreted as text, rather than interpretation and appropriation of the conventional text, i.e. media content. In defining this absence of 'text' within empirical applications of the domestication framework, Hartmann (2006: 87) notes that analyses of content so far have primarily featured on 'the most general' level. By 'most general' she refers to discussions about programme flow and surrounding talk, whereas discussions on genre are considered as representing the middle ground and discussions on individual texts constitute 'the specific.' Calling to rectify this absence, she suggests a 'triple articulation', where communication technologies are studied at once as 'technological objects, symbolic environments and individual texts' in the way she says, the early theorisation of the framework had intended. These views of Hartmann's suggest that although there has been scarce employment of the framework in relation to texts, it does provide a productive approach in understanding textual consumption.

While agreeing with the core idea and some of the concepts articulated within the framework, I tend to share Moores' doubts about its empirical application. The following discussion elaborates some concerns I have in the application of this model in the context of my research, and attempts to articulate the extent to which my research draws on this model.

Although media content and media technology are 'texts' to be read in their own right, treating them both uniformly as an object of consumption, is part of the problem in the application of the framework empirically to study content reception. Within production contexts, texts could be rightly treated as tangible commodities considering the involvement of economies of production, pricing and distribution in their creation. However, in consumption, television texts assume distinct characteristics that differentiate them from other tangible commodities. This happens firstly because, audiences do not purchase television programmes, as they may be on free to air or paid for indirectly through subscription. Though increasingly television texts can be purchased on DVD, turning television into a 'publisher' in Derek Kompare's (2006) view, serial ongoing texts such as soaps, are less likely to be traded in this format.

Even though Silverstone (1999: 79) cautions that 'consumption is an activity that is 'not at all bounded with the decision or act of purchase, nor is it singular', the apparent lack of an economic element in the act of consuming television programmes is significant. This lack resonates as a different sense of ownership in households when compared to other purchased tangible commodities, which Silverstone and colleagues have also acknowledged. For example the collective sense of ownership in households of tangible items may not be there for media texts. Some members in a family would hardly care about a television programme someone watches, whereas a technology purchased even by another member for personal use would still be cared for collectively. Secondly, the lack of materiality of television programmes also needs to be taken into account as it creates distinct dynamics in all the different phases of domestication. Unlike a tangible item, television programmes have an ephemeral aspect too, as they appear in form only temporally.

Although employment of the domestication framework appears somewhat complicated, it cannot be denied that the concept of 'moral economy of the household' enjoys a central place in the process of consumption, and thereby also in the social constitution of society. Thus, in my study of the reception of *Kyunki*, I draw significantly on the concept of the moral economy, but do not attempt to distinguish between the four phases of 'domestication.' Instead I take a lead from the rather unstructured form that Moores deploys in his study. Moores (1996) draws ethnographic portraits of families in studying the dynamics of domestic consumption and through the study demonstrates how anxieties about tradition and modernity are implicated in the consumption of satellite television. Similar to Moores, Hugh Mackay also advances a unstructured form for studying domestic consumption, criticising the 'domestication' framework of Silverstone et al., for 'analysing... respondents' lives in terms of the categories in which they as researchers are interested' rather than rooting the study process in 'actors' own sense making' (1997: 286).

Notwithstanding Moores' and Mackay's useful caveats, I find the concept of moral economy valuable, as a private system of meaning and as sharing a dialectical relationship with public systems of meaning, which are constituted and reconstituted through processes of consumption, both symbolic and material. Thus, partly to avoid

misrepresentation, I have chosen a different term 'family ethos', in place of 'moral economy'. My preference for this term is influenced by two further reasons. Firstly I wish to avoid the suggestion of unified or stable morals, implied by the phrase 'moral economy of the household.' Maria Bakardjieva (2006) also notes this instability of moral economy in her own empirical work with internet users. Mackay also notes that it overemphasises 'the boundedness of the home' (Mackay 1997: 304). The alternative term, 'family ethos' exudes a sense of openness as well as fluidity allowing non-cohesive forces to also be encompassed.

In the thesis then family ethos is defined as a unified system of norms, values, belief particular to each family, which its members share. It is formed from a synthesis of ideologies about family, gender, religion, socio-cultural-economic capital, life stage and circumstances of the family, which are continually undergoing change. Hence family ethos is understood not as static but a constantly redefining concept. It displays a sort of dual characteristic, providing the members with a state of connectedness in the knowledge that they belong to this one collective and at the same time providing a sense of separateness in accommodating each individual's idiosyncratic identities. Family studies theorists have also been using essentially similar frameworks, but in different forms, such as 'family theme', 'family culture', 'family myth', 'family paradigm', 'family belief systems', in which the variations can be accounted by the specifics within each formulation (Papp 1996).

In order to articulate how this concept is used in the study and in order to understand the reception of *Kyunki*, I also need to refer to the other line of enquiry that I had mentioned earlier, when describing the 'everyday' paradigm which Murphy and Kraidy (2003) refer to as 'global media studies'. These studies are much closer to Alasuutari's definition of the 'third generation' of studies, than the framework on domestic consumption that I have discussed. They have included a focus on media content, unlike the former cited framework which largely dwelt on consumption of 'technology as text'. Their approach, however, is not 'semiological' but corresponds to what Alasuutari describes as resuming 'an interest in programmes and programming, but not as texts studied in isolation from their usage as an element of everyday life' (1999: 7). As Gray in her chapter in the same book appreciatively puts it,

> In different ways these studies are concerned to place media readings and use within complex webs of determinations, not only of the texts, but also those deeper structural determinants, such as class, gender, and to a lesser extent, race and ethnicity. These studies have also shed light on the ways in which public and private discourses intersect and are lived out within the intimate and routine practices of everyday life. (1999: 31)

The references Gray and Alasuutari make are to ethnographic studies in much the same way that Marie Gillespie's (1995) work about the media culture of second generation British Punjabis or Purnima Mankekar's (1999) ethnographic study on the implications of nation and gender in popular programmes of India's national television broadcaster. There are also other studies that I have found useful in their concern with discursive politics, even though they are not all necessarily ethnographic (for example Gupta 1998; Rajagopal 2001; Mitra 1993; Zacharias 2003). These studies have framed and inspired questions for my study, as I have pondered the processes of reception or consumption of the serial. As Bakardjieva (2006:71) asks 'what are the upshots of domestication and how do they matter to the distribution of freedom and control, power and knowledge throughout the culture of which they are a constitutive element'?

Marie Gillespie's discussion about the concept of family *izzat* or family honour is particularly useful in articulating the dynamics of family interaction and cohesion, or what I call 'family ethos'. Gillespie found that *izzat* significantly governs the lives of the young British South Asians whose media practices she investigated. The concept of *izzat* is mainly concerned with the maintenance of the family's status in society and usually operates through discursive practices and networks. Common to South Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, it exercises regulation over the family as a whole, largely through norms of moral and sexual chastity, though *izzat* predominantly regulates young people, and more particularly, young women. Examples of the sociology of family *izzat* often make sensational news stories such as when young women are killed by their own families in so-called 'honour killings'.

In my study, too, the significance of this concept is evident but is articulated in slightly different but very close terms—that of family *maryada*—which can be

translated as propriety, tradition, ideals or social and moral boundaries, and seems to have significance particularly in the reception of *Kyunki*, and of course in other acts of consumption. I will discuss the finer points of this concept of *maryada* and its relation to family ethos that I am attempting to define, in the later chapters as I begin discussing my findings, but for now it should suffice to say that a wide range of social and political discourses are implicated in both.

The centrality of family ethos in my research became apparent during the process of analysing interviews, in other words, it has been constructed from my discursive analysis in a similar method to that used by Silverstone et al. in developing the idea of a moral economy. For example, I did not initially set out to examine moral attitudes and frameworks, but critical discussions that emerged about the serial in the interviews began forming the major resource for my analysis. In these discussions, patriarchal and nationalist discourses generated by the serial, and the families' critical postures on the serial offer important insights into the micro-cultural and discursive frameworks in the families, as well as the way in which such frameworks shaped their reception. While I draw on my respondents' discussion of the serial to interpret their discursive constructions of patriarchy and nationalism, I also draw on broader contexts of interaction, conduct and response in the interviews, in order to interpret their practices in respect to these same political concepts and to define the framework of reception in their households. Thus understanding the reception of the serial has been a paradoxical process, where appeal of the serial is understood within the frame of family ethos and family ethos is understood through discussion of the serial. The process of analysis thus constitutes a constant to and fro, or reflexivity between the textual response and the larger discursive frame.

Approach of My Study

In the light of my review of the literature so far, the approach of this study can be defined as seeking out discourses that dominantly structure reception, as in lived reality and what audiences find inscribed in the text, and understanding the negotiation between the two. It emerges from the study that media constitutes itself largely as space to negotiate, as Hall (1994) in his article on 'deconstructing the popular' had envisaged. This study also confirms Hall's point that the legitimating

and disrupting power in this space is contingent on the discursive realities of economies, societies and cultures in which the agent is placed.

In these respects, my research draws on established approaches, but an empirical approach contributes to what many have been calling for. From Kim Schroeder in the late 80's through to Jack Bratich in 2005 or Maria Bakardjieva in 2006, this call can be repeatedly heard, in the epistemological conclusions the multitude of studies that form the 'second generation' come to.

Now I can say in my study gender and family are discussed as discourse, and not typology, thereby responding also to Ang's (1996) and Liesbat van Zoonen's (1994) suggestion that gender should not be treated as 'essentialist'. In my data analysis, although it was theoretically engaged with the imperatives emerging from second phase studies, I found myself grouping my study participants or audiences into some objective categories, in my attempt to manage the data. The data, however, itself 'resisted' attempts to be organised along class lines or according to political polarities of progressive and conservative for example. It eventually became clear that audiences simply couldn't be studied as objects but only as discursive subjects. This meant seeking out dominant discourses the serial evoked and attempting to understand how viewers differentially negotiated it. In other words, my own fraught and finally abandoned attempts to empirically organise my findings into patterns and patterning made concrete sense of methodological reflections within cultural studies.

I have come to full agreement with what Moores has said about the fallacy of the concept of audience, when he notes that 'the conditions and boundaries of audiencehood are inherently unstable' (Moores 1993: 2) especially in this age, when the media is becoming increasingly embedded in everyday lives. Further he says, when the object of enquiry itself is so unstable, it puts into question the whole process of studying audiences and argues that it makes more sense to recognise that there is reality outside of and beyond the discourses which constitute the audience as a category to be known. Yet this reality, media and communication scholars must note, is formed from a 'dispersed and embedded set of practices that always finally eludes attempts to fix and objectify it' (1993: 2). Support of this notion can also be found in Gray's conclusions:

> What reflexive ethnographies have suggested is the very boundlessness of media processes, the impossibility of constructing a frame around media text and audience, of the need to take account of and pay attention to the messiness of the everyday, the dull thud of the commonplace, the routine and routinized nature of daily life in all its complexity, and into which media forms are enmeshed. (Gray 1999: 33)

Although theoretically convincing, this approach seems of doubtful value when considering that empirical claims from this approach would produce more subjective stories than objective answers. But allaying such doubts is a particularly inspirational observation Bakardjieva (2006) makes, in her constructive criticism of the domestication framework. In her study on domestication of the internet, she observes that for some participants in her study, the study itself is a 'vehicle of conversion' (2006: 76) for bringing into the public domain, their private experiences with the internet (for example frustrations with commercial online intrusions such as pop up ads). It may be recalled that 'conversion' is one of the four phases identified in the domestication model, wherein households display to the world beyond their homes, symbolically or through conversation, the meanings they appropriate in their private acts of consumption. For me, this idea has helped clarify the value of my own work and the validity of my painstaking and rather open-ended approach.

This final section of this chapter turns to discussion of some of the feminist studies on popular genres that have delivered important insights into audiences' engagement.

Feminist Ethnography and Soap Opera Studies

As I foreshadowed early on in the chapter, some of the influential feminist work on soaps and popular genres has provided valuable leads for my own study of the serial *Kyunki*. These studies have been of interest to me not only for the structural insights they have offered about audiences' engagement with soap genres, but also for the encouragement they provide to the suggestion emerging from my research, that audiences relationship to serials or soaps cannot be seen as straightforward or self-evident. On the contrary, it appears that there is something much more complex and generative happening in this engagement. For example, the varying perceptions of femininity discerned in *Kyunki* by media critics, viewers, and uninterested or non-

viewers in my study, shows that the category of 'woman' in the serial is not fixed, instead is categorically open to negotiation. It is through these studies, that the instability of meanings and the idea of cultural and political struggles ensuing to gain control these meanings, have primarily come to light. Thus these works have been valuable for their historical contribution in validating the study of popular forms as well as for their interrelated contribution in shaping feminist discourse.

Initially feminist cultural studies was concerned with questions of representation of women, so textual analysis and literary criticism were the preferred methods. Amongst such studies an overwhelmingly influential example is Laura Mulvey's (1975) work on film narrative, in which she argues that film narratives basically address male and masculine pleasures, by inscribing women as erotic objects for the visual pleasure of men. Shortly thereafter, however, the theoretical model of spectatorship in film studies such as Mulvey's, was eventually undermined, as the 'active audience' perspective gained influence in cultural studies with feminist scholars turning their attention to audiences in order to understand the cultural significance of popular texts. One of the consequences of this shift in attention was that 'feminism' soon found itself problematised, and unstable. This was because a contradiction began appearing in notions of the feminine or femininity that feminist critics advocated, and what ordinary women considered as feminine. In their engagement with popular narratives and artefacts such as soaps, ordinary women were legitimating what feminist critics had always held as oppressive representations of women. Feminist critics realised their discourse of rejecting traditional feminine values in favour of masculine values and behaviour, had little purchase among their female research subjects (Hollows 2000: 10). Thus it was through the analysis of popular culture and audiences' engagement with popular cultural products that subsequent feminism began informing itself. Joanne Hollows (2000) in her critique of the juxtaposition of feminism, femininity and popular culture, notes that feminist audience research that emerged in this path was often 'motivated by a desire to relinquish some form of feminist control' (2007: 107) by letting cultural practices of ordinary women inform feminism, than imposing feminist imaginations of the critics.

Nevertheless, one of the limitations of this new approach in feminist media studies, Hollows (2000: 108) notes, citing Ang and Hermes (1996) is that such studies largely

treat women as a unified category without actually 'problematising the category of "woman" itself.' Another feminist media scholar, Zoonen (1994) also makes similar assessment of these works, saying that in most reception analysis gender is 'assumed to precede cultural preference and behaviour' (1994: 123). Noting that such assumptions construe gender as a 'constant and consistent feature of human identity, established early in life', she argues that 'particular genre preference, such as women express of romance and soaps, can not be seen not only as a result of gender' (1994: 23). Instead arguing that gender identities are constructed, she urges that gender be conceived 'not as a fixed property of individuals but as part of an ongoing process by which subjects are constituted often in paradoxical ways' (p.123). It is these concerns that my study and approach seek to redress. For example, my research methodology takes the family as a unit in studying the reception of the serial, and not just women viewers, as has been commonly followed in most other studies on soaps. In this way, the 'femininity' and feminine roles of mothers, daughters, daughters-in-law and sisters I interview can be seen as formulated in some respects as part of ongoing family interactions and shifting familial dynamics.

In the many valuable insights offered by studies of women's reception of television soaps, two research concerns have been dominant. As Hollows (2000: 90) notes one has been about 'how soaps address female spectators and construct feminine subject positions through textual analysis' and second, about the social context of viewing 'by studying the meanings that social audiences bring to their soap viewing'.

An influential early writer in this field is Tania Modleski (1988), whose work is often cited as a classic for identifying that soap narratives have a uniquely feminine aesthetic. Methodologically, her study characterises a reader-response approach, where a textual critique is offered using an implied construct of the audience, rather than a study of actual audiences. One of the central arguments she makes is that soaps contain a distinctly feminine aesthetic, which she demonstrates by drawing comparison with other traditional masculine cinematic narratives. She argues that while pleasure in masculine narratives is derived from identification with one protagonist, usually male, and his representation of power, which is most visibly evident in the closure or narrative resolutions offered, in contrast soaps derive the pleasure is from divesting power and making the viewer feel powerless. She bases this

on the thought that the soap narrative invites identification with multiple characters, as a consequence of which the viewer would identify and empathise with characters on both sides of a conflict, basically like a mother would with her warring children. The conclusion she draws is that the subject position offered to the viewer is of an 'ideal mother' who can advise or warn, but not really intervene and resolve the conflict in the family. This lack of resolution, for Modleski, is also another element of pleasure that women would find in soaps. Her contention is that this aspect is homologous or comparable to life situations of mothers and housewives, for example where women's lives revolve around waiting for husbands to come home or for the baby to sleep. Thus the tendency of soap narratives to constantly introduce obstacles and move resolution further and further away, parallels the disorder or disequilibrium that women find in their lived experience, and this instability, Modleski contends, is meaningful or identifiable for women. In her view, while it is the restoration of order in traditional narratives that provides meaning; in soaps the (familial) disorder is what provides meaning for women, as it is through disorder that the function of mother is maintained, as the mother is eternally needed as an adviser or confidante to the members of her family.

Further, Modleski notes that typically in soaps there are one or two characters that viewers are invited to hate, in all probability characterised as an exact opposite of the viewer's ideal self. Usually a female, this villainous character, would be shown to be in total control, even manipulating situations to her advantage, whereas in the viewer's own life, such situations would be really stressful and anxiety producing, for example issues of conception, pregnancy or custody of child. In Modleski's view, such representations cater to fantasies of power, where the villainess gets what she wants, even though the viewer never fully identifies with the character. Also, in such representations women derive some pleasure in seeing men suffer the same anxieties as them at the hands of the villainess, suggesting that the villainess also serves as an outlet of feminine anger.

Like many others who backed this argument, Modleski discerns pleasure for women in exploring the consequences of moral, social and psychological judgements. As a result she finds 'talk' a central device, both in the text and in its reception, as a means of exploring consequences. Modleski, further, finds this feature responsible for the

apparently repetitive nature of soaps, where different characters reflect on the same event from different social or familial positions or perspectives. The repetitive and fragmented structure of soaps, she argues, fits perfectly with women's contexts of viewing, where the viewer may need to answer the phone or check out whatever is on the stove. So Modleski concludes that the pace and form of soap narrative accommodates the distracted modes of feminine leisure.

Modleski's influential early account has been subject to much theoretical and empirical contestation. Charlotte Brunsdon, for example, gives women viewers much more credit than Modleski does. While Modleski's arguments infer that soaps basically serve to reinforce patriarchal ideologies by connecting to women's sense of powerlessness, for example in the 'ideal mother' position, Brunsdon (1997 [1981]) sees soap viewing as a process of 'constructing a moral consensus about the conduct of personal life' (1997: 16). She suggests that making meanings from soaps requires particular competencies. One of these is being able to share an understanding of the genre, have historical knowledge about the character or their past. Drawing on a useful distinction later made by Robert Allen (1985), she proposes that that it is not the 'syntagmatic' but the 'paradigmatic' dimension of the soap narrative that offers pleasure. In other words, interest is less about plot events, than to whom they happened, and what the moral or social consequences may be.

Ethnographic accounts, which emerged subsequently, also began challenging Modleski's early thesis. For example, Radway's (1987) study of popular romance novels, which was one of the earliest, complicated Modleski's view that soap reinforced patriarchal ideologies, by finding that women used the act of reading as a space to resist such ideology. Hobson (1982) and Brown (1987) also found that use of soaps extended beyond the act of viewing, when women enjoyed talking about soaps, using it as a collective reference material to think and talk about their own lives. Brown, in addition, insisted that this kind of talk also provided space for women to subvert or resist dominant patriarchal discourses.

More emphatic in rejecting Modleski's 'ideal mother' position is Seiter's (1989) study of working class women viewers of soap in America. She finds that far from adopting the 'ideal mother' subject position, participants in her study often despise the

characters commonly imagined to evoke sympathy. For the participants, the thought that many of the privileges such characters enjoy are denied to them socially makes them see the characters as variously 'wimpy or 'whiny'. Seiter finds that they hate the supposed 'ideal' traits of passivity, dependence on men, and powerlessness, and instead frequently admire the villain. In light of these findings, Seiter argues that women even seek a kind of therapeutic pleasure in soaps by criticising passive, powerless women characters who conform perfectly to patriarchal expectations. In effect she argues that women are able to adopt a critical distance in their relationship with soaps, attributing it to their competence with the genre.

Similarly Ang's (1985) study of the pleasures of the American soap *Dallas* in the Netherlands, found that viewers constantly shift to and fro, between fictional and the real, identifying while at the same time distancing themselves, from the fictional world constructed in the text. She argues that pleasure lies not in realistic role models, but in a melodramatic identification with the character, evoked symbolically or emotionally through the various subject positions offered in the text.

These are some of the influential feminist studies that have helped in shaping my own understanding of viewers' engagement with soaps and other popular genres. While it is commonplace now within cultural studies to consider 'trivial' television genres as legitimate areas of study, it is also the case that, more broadly, the soap opera, and its viewers, remain objects of derision. These studies remain of considerable importance in pointing to the ways that soaps address complex problems of domestic life and allow for open kinds of reading unmatched (or indeed *imitated*) by other more prestigious genres (Creeber 2004).

Although these studies demonstrate that pleasure is itself political, my research leads to the conclusion that the framework of pleasure through which the reception of soaps are often examined, reinforces the notion that engagement with such texts occurs primarily at the level of sensory engagement, rather than via some kind of rational engagement. But it is clear from these studies that the engagement with popular texts extends beyond pleasure and is in fact very much political as Glen Creeber (2004) also observes in his critical appreciation of serial television, which in turn means that rational processes of meaning making are involved in their reception. The concern

with the framework of pleasure arises in my study of the reception of *Kyunki* particularly because very few interviewees spoke of the serial's appeal in terms of pleasure. The Indian context perhaps is responsible for a disinclination to describe the pleasures of viewing, since purely pleasurable pursuits of any kind are conservatively understood as unspiritual, unreligious or even as vice. I also wonder why 'feminine genres' and popular culture products are predominantly discussed within the frame of 'pleasure' while this is not the case necessarily with 'non feminine' or 'high brow' genres. From what we know from the studies so far, and with further confirmation in my study too, I would suggest that it would be more worthwhile to discuss popular genres including feminine genres as a definitive engagement with cultural politics and less in terms of pleasure. My intention of course, is not refusal of pleasure as Hollows (2000) suggests, but to reinforce that cultural engagement is an integral rational process through which meanings about this world are negotiated and constituted, through 'legitimation' and 'disruption'.

This chapter has traced the history of audience studies and in the process has located my research within the 'third phase' discussed by Alasuutari. It has argued that media and audience relationship is formed through an intersection of discourses, found in the text and in the lived contexts of audiences. In light of this recognition, the thesis defines its approach as a study of the discourses that frame viewers' relationship to *Kyunki*. It argues that study of the reception of a particular text requires a reflexive approach, in linking the interpretations viewers make to the text and the larger discursive framework, which I explore in terms of family ethos.

Having established the theoretical location of my study and its approach, it is now possible to provide a clear account of my methodology.

CHAPTER 2
Research Methodology

In the last chapter, I located this thesis within Alasuutari's 'third generation' of audience studies, simultaneously locating my project within the ethnographic tradition of audience research. As the epistemological particularities of this location have been largely addressed in the literature review, in this chapter the aim is to outline the methodological imperatives of this thesis. Through a detailed account of the processes through which data for this study were gathered and analysed, and a review of some important criticisms that have emerged of ethnographic methods, both inside and outside audience studies, this chapter then seeks to explain and justify the methodology of this thesis.

The chapter begins with a brief description of the study methods and location of this research. It then discusses the analytic framework through which data was interpreted, and examines concerns about subjectivity in the research.

Methodology

Whilst it was clear from the beginning that an ethnographic approach was the most appropriate method for my research interests, as the study was interested in examining the popularity of a particular text, my research also sought to consciously retain a textual focus within the ethnographic investigation. In inspiring this multidimensional approach, in the previous chapter, I have outlined how this study is informed by cultural studies and feminist epistemologies. Simultaneously I have attempted to clarify how my consideration of this approach has drawn on existing scholarship that recognises that social, cultural and personal dynamics *within* families play an important role in shaping audience choices and practices.

When determining the specific methods the study would deploy, I was also attracted to the idea of using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods for this study, as ethnographic approaches in audience studies endorse a variety of methodological options. Particularly influential in respect to my methodological decisions have been the confluences in the works of Morley (1986) on family and television; Silverstone and others at Brunel University on the consumption of

information and communication technologies (1992); and John Sinclair (1992) for CIRCIT, a research centre now affiliated to RMIT University. My interest in these approaches has been shaped and informed by my own background in television market research, where combined approaches are now an industry norm.

Accordingly, a survey of hundred families, and in-depth interviews with a smaller sample of twenty families drawn from the survey, was determined as an appropriate sample and method for this study. It was decided that the study would be carried out in my hometown, Ahmedabad city, which is also one of the major cities of India, with a population of over four and a half million people.[6] While logistical motivations were definitely involved in selecting Ahmedabad for this study, which is classified amongst the second-tier cities of India, after the four metropolitan cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai, my familiarity with the city, my understanding of the culture and practices, having lived there all my life, made it an equally appropriate site for such an ethnographic study. Further it also aligned well with the broad interests of the study, as it has high cable and satellite penetration (56 percent)[7] and a strong following for *Kyunki*. I shall address further concerns and debates that are likely to arise in selecting one's hometown as a site for study later in this chapter, but firstly I will describe the research methods and the sampling process.

The survey was designed to elicit a preliminary and broad understanding of the structures and composition of families and their television viewing practices. In-depth interviews, I envisaged, would then form the core resource of the study, augmenting understandings from the survey, and providing comprehensive insights into the individual and collective dynamics involved in families' television viewing. The rationale for this research methodology is best presented by examining some relevant changes in ethnographic audience studies and discussing some of the criticisms that have shaped these changes, which I will discuss in a separate section shortly.

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[6] This figure represents the population of Ahmedabad urban agglomeration in 2001, when the last census was drawn (From 'Statistical Outline for 2005-2006', Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, http://www.egovamc.com/amc_budget/Sta_report.asp).

[7] According to NRS (National Readership Survey) 2005, at http://www.ndtvmedia.com/location.htm

Study Location

Ahmedabad was the capital of Gujarat state, before Gandhinagar was made the capital in 1960. But Ahmedabad's domination in Gujarat never diminished, as even after the administrative shift the city continued to remain the commercial and financial hub in the state. Renowned for its textile industry Ahmedabad was often earlier referred to as the 'Manchester of the East', but after the decline of this industry and closure of many textile mills particularly since the late seventies, the city went on to develop a more diversified economy. Today, the manufacture of chemicals, metals, machinery and food products, in addition to textiles, are the main drivers of its thriving economy.

In terms of geographic layout, the city is often notionally separated into two divisions: the walled city, referring to the old part of the city which is enclosed within the boundaries of a historical fort; and all the other suburbs that have grown outside of fort, which constitute a larger area of the city. Sultan Ahmed Shah, who founded Ahmedabad in the fifteenth century, built the red sandstone fort enclosing the city. Today defining the decaying fort as well as characterising the historical architecture of the walled city, are its twelve majestic gates, which provide entry from different ends into the walled city, serving also as iconic reminders of the past glory. Another distinctive reminder of the historical legacy are *pols* in the walled city, a unique form of urban settlement that came into existence since Ahmed Shah's reign. Formed like micro enclaves, *pols* refer to a neighbourhood comprising a cluster of houses, often multi-storeyed, built in rows around a narrow street or network of streets and enclosed by an arched entrance gate. The unique architecture of these houses can be seen particularly in the stone or wood carvings on their façades and their interior courtyards. Residents of each *pol* shared a common caste or occupation earlier, but now *pols* are often defined by religion.

While the walled city embodies the traditional spirit of the city, modernity can be seen in the way the rest of the suburbs have developed. The Sabarmati River—on the banks of which Mahatma Gandhi set up his famous Sabarmati ashram and led India's freedom movement—cuts through the city, dividing it again into east and west. The suburbs on the west are the understood as the contemporary, modern and prosperous face of Ahmedabad, while those on the east, which includes the old city, are seen as

older working class areas with most of the factories and industries having developed on this side.

The western part also represents the intellectual and cosmopolitan profile of Ahmedabad, being home to many premier research and educational institutes, such as Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), National Institute of Design (NID), the renowned Indian Institute of Management (IIM) along with many other fine art and cultural establishments. But during the last two decades, this profile has been overshadowed by a consumerist and materialist profile with the burgeoning of many swanky residential, commercial and retail complexes on this side of the city. With these rapid developments the city has been experiencing, it has also expanded widely, incorporating into its boundaries several agglomeration areas much further away from the fort's periphery. While this brief description provides a broad understanding of the residential districts of Ahmedabad city, it must be noted that none of the suburbs are homogenous in character with a mix of various socio-economic classes coexisting in each suburb.

Since Ahmedabad has been the most important industrial and commercial center on the western part of India (apart from Mumbai), the city has derived a significant proportion of its migrant population from both neighbouring and more distant states. Taking this aspect into consideration when defining sample characteristics for this study, it was decided that only natives of the state, that is, Gujarati families would be included in the study, in the interests of maintaining some amount of homogeneity. And for obvious reasons, another condition laid in selecting the sample was to only include families having subscription to cable and satellite television, as I have mentioned in the introductory chapter, the serial is broadcast on the satellite channel, Star Plus.

In my study, the sample was selected from five suburbs: three on the west side of the river and two on the east side, which included one in the walled city. These suburbs were purposively selected to get a fair mix of socio-economic class groups in the sample. In the survey, the sample was drawn equally, that is, twenty households from each suburb. Participants for the in-depth interviews, meanwhile, were selected through the survey, which explicitly asked about their willingness to further

participate. Of these, only families who stated they were current viewers of *Kyunki* were invited to participate. Amongst the one hundred families interviewed in the survey, seventy-five families said they had at least one member viewing *Kyunki* regularly. And of these seventy-five families, fifty-five agreed to participate in a further in-depth family interview. Despite what appeared initially as an overwhelming response in terms of finding participants for the family interviews was concerned, difficulties nevertheless emerged in trying to maintain a balance between the selected sample suburbs (that is to find four families from each of the five suburbs) and in arranging sessions inclusive of all family members. This restricted me largely to weekends and in light of the summer heat of Ahmedabad, to evenings for the in-depth interviews. Further due to unexpected exigencies in families, a few interviews had to be cancelled and some rescheduled making the planned balance sometimes appear impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, I succeeded in the end in completing the targeted sample of interviews.

A final point about selection concerns the minor difficulties faced in recruiting Muslim participants. Since Ahmedabad has a fairly significant proportion of Muslim population (12.4 percent),[8] I attempted to follow this ratio, not for purposes of a representative sample but mainly for diversity and in the interests of exploring the role played by religion in the serial's reception. However, many Muslim respondents from the survey declined further participation, as well as others declining the survey. In one instance, I was shown out of the house, midway through the survey interview, when the elderly man of that household was unable to contain his suspicion of me. In others cases some male members would thoroughly inspect my questionnaire and on seeing the questions on demographics would make an excuse or flatly refuse. Finally seven Muslim families took part in the survey, of which two families welcomed me into their homes for the in-depth interviews. Reluctance and refusal of Muslims to participate can be primarily attributed to the festering communal tensions in Ahmedabad city, which have lead to a cycle of vicious riots, with the last major riots seen in 2002. The alleged complicit role the State government played in failing to protect Muslims seems to have increased wariness of official as well as unofficial

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[8] Majority are Hindus (82.6 percent) and the figures are representative of Ahmedabad Urban Agglomeration in 2001 (From 'Statistical Outline for 2005-2006', Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, http://www.egovamc.com/amc_budget/Sta_report.asp).

enquiries. While this does not mean that other respondents were all eager to participate in the study, there were relatively fewer refusals amongst Hindus and others, and the reasons for refusal of these latter groups was often to do with the nuisance value of social investigators, rather than suspicion of them.

Having defined the sampling and data collection process, I will now discuss concerns with ethnography that have arisen in audience studies, and by explicating these concerns, will defend my methodology.

Defending Ethnographic Methods of this Study

It is widely acknowledged that the term ethnography is used far more loosely in cultural audience studies than in anthropology, where the methodology originated. In anthropology, ethnography is understood as a form of research involving close field observation of any socio cultural phenomenon over an extended period, entailing at least eighteen months of stay in the field (Gillespie 1995). In contrast, audience studies, which has appropriated and adopted this methodology quite differently, does not stipulate such extended periods of stay in the field, endorsing a range of research methods, for example, in-depth interviews, participant observations, group interviews and telephone interviews as part of ethnography. The works of Morley (1986), Seiter et al. (1989) and Gray (1992), amongst many others, serve as important early illustrations of the use of ethnographic methods in audience studies. The soliciting of letters from viewers about their interests in a particular programme or particular media (for example Ang 1985; Bird 1992), has also been included under the rubric of media ethnography.

However, the inclusion of these methods in media ethnography started becoming a concern when the 'interpretivist' paradigm began gaining dominance in audience studies. In the epistemological anxieties the paradigm generated, it was the ethnographic methods, in particular, that found criticism for producing 'ethnographically thin' studies (Evans 1990). Such criticisms led to calls for an 'anthropological conceptualisation of audiences', seeking to draw audience studies closer to the anthropological conventions of ethnography (Silverstone 1990). A notable and early study responding to this call by Silverstone, is amongst others, Gillespie's (1995) study of the cultural and media practices of young people of

Punjabi background for which she lived in the field – Southall, Britain – for an extended duration. Ever since then, there has been a growing body of anthropologically inspired scholarship in cultural media studies located also within other interdisciplinary fields (for example Mankekar 1999; La Pastina 2003).

Referring particularly to Debra Spitulnik's earlier lament about the lack of 'anthropology of mass media', Elizabeth Bird (2003) says that much of the current body of work in audience studies is just that, considering them also as perfect examples of Alasuutari's 'third generation' of audience studies. While she appreciates the contributions and value of the anthropologically inspired approaches, she also argues 'we do not need to close the door on systematic, ethnographically inspired studies that seek to explore specific moments of media interaction' (2003: 6). Bird makes this argument mainly in defending the approaches she adopts, for example of her cultural study of supermarket tabloids where she solicits letters from readers and conducts phone interviews. In supporting her view, she cites the value of Seiter's (1999) work on the embeddedness of media and everyday culture. Seiter presents two field projects: one involving parent support groups of which she was a member, with whom she uses group interviews; and the other with pre-school teachers and day care givers, where she deploys intensive interviewing methods, which included one-on-one interviews and participant diaries. Against the charge many make on such research methods, that they result in ethnographically thin or holistically lacking studies, Bird argues that, 'classic ethnographic fieldwork may not be an appropriate method for studying dispersed media audiences, at least for the ethnographer working alone' (2003: 7).

In respect to the charge about lack of holism resulting from use of such methods, Bird further notes that a holistic perspective is not necessarily a study of 'complete self-contained' societies, rather it is about exploring questions and issues in context and their linkage to other aspects of culture. Thus Bird argues that ethnographic significance lies in the 'ethnographic way of seeing' (quoting Wolcott 1999), rather than in time spent in the field. Citing Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, (1995), she defines this way of seeing as '[getting] close to those studied as a way of understanding what their experiences and activities *mean to them*' (Bird 2003: 8, italics in original). My thesis supports and is supported by this view. Although my study does not, in the

conventional ethnographic sense, attempt to contextualise the society or culture of my participants in all its varied hues and dimensions; the survey and in-depth interviews nevertheless, adequately illustrate the discursive dynamics of gender and family involved in the reception of the serial.

Defining the Analytic Framework

Having outlined my sampling and offered some clarification of the ways in which my methodology can be considered as ethnographic, I now turn to describing the processes of analysis this thesis has followed. This is an area in which I was called upon to undergo a very significant shift: I started with an interest in determining taste cultures, a project shaped by my work with the research arm of one of India's major television companies. Many of the survey questions that I posed were concerned with understanding individual and collective preferences of genres and programmes (and of course *Kyunki),* and focused on searching for some objective factors underpinning program preference. By the time I came to analyse my results, the methodological framework of my research had shifted in respect to coming to terms particularly with the concept of 'subjective knowledges'. My original data, however, was not impacted by this, as despite my initial desire for objective answers, the structure of my in-depth interview was very open. It was intentionally devised and conducted in an unstructured manner, seeking to understand the relationship of family dynamics with television viewing, albeit with the hopeful expectation that objective dimensions, such as class and religiosity, would become self-evident in the analysis. Confronting the very complex task of analysing the interviews in the absence of such obvious links, provoked a theoretical and methodological rethink. The 'untidy' nature of the family interviews—their complexities, nuances, fragmented and often contradictory nature— defied organization into a single analytic framework of interpretation.[9] I adopted an approach, comparable to the 'grounded theory' approach as advanced by Barney

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[9] On finding initially that no clear correlations could be clearly established in the analysis, confirmed also by a preliminary analysis of the survey data, I began seeking out frameworks for comprehending the data. It took me in many different directions initially in search of relatively objective frameworks, leading me, for example, to social psychological approaches of symbolic interactionism and social identity and the more recent theory of 'critical realism.' These frameworks, however, seemed limited in encompassing the merits and complexities of the data, and in the process I found myself, increasingly encountering the value of postmodern epistemology. But at the same time, the strident criticisms that I was also finding of it, made me reluctant to embrace it, in my analysis at least, although my data collection procedures may already have embraced with it, albeit without my complete comprehension of it at the time.

Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), of allowing the material itself to suggest the organizational framework. After transcribing the interviews, and writing up a detailed portrait of a few families and their viewing practices as case studies, I began to see that notions of gender, family and nation were integrally involved in viewers' engagement with the serial, both in its appreciation and criticism. At the same time the data also showed that a gendered pattern of reception, for example, could not be so easily established. Instead, viewers' interpretations seemed to be influenced more by the ideological and discursive frames existent in their own families, rather than just a social characteristic like class, religion, religiosity or gender. This finding encouraged me to return to take a closer look at Silverstone's, Hirsch's and Morley's conception of the 'moral economy of the household' as discussed in the last chapter. While my data did not enable me to distinguish between the four phases of domestication they had suggested, it became clear that in each household a particular moral economy did shape reception.

Though the politically charged space of the serial—where meanings are intensely negotiated within the moral and cultural frameworks in families—was an unanticipated finding, I was faced with the dilemma of how to organise my data to accurately reflect the particularities of my findings. Would I be treating each family as a separate case and discussing how their particular familial frameworks subjectively influenced their engagement? Presenting individual accounts of twenty families was impractical, whilst selecting a few out of these cases presented concerns about being reductive and/or unfairly suggesting that these were representative. Also, how would the quantitative survey be integrated into these findings? How would I attempt to contextualise all the different levels, spaces and zones of reception context, in which multiple discourses are implicated, microscopically and macroscopically, and relate it to families' responses? It was then, in answer to these questions, concluded that rather than trying to encompass all the multiple discourses and sub-discourses involved in the reception of the serial in different families in all the varied ways, it would be fruitful to trace the dominating discourses structuring reception across families. The transcribed interviews and the detailed family profiles confirmed that discourses of gender and family were invariably involved in the reception within all families, although the nature of these discourses were not unified, and appeared rather contradictory in many ways. Consequently, in seeking to construct its crucial finding

that *Kyunki* is indisputably a political space where a political struggle over meanings strongly ensues, and that this aspect constitutes an important part of its appeal, the chapters on my findings demonstrate these discursive variations and oppositions.

It is in establishing this argument that Chapter five seeks to demonstrate the dominance of such discourse and in the process show how the serial constitutes itself as an inherently political space. This chapter uses excerpts from the interviews that evocatively illustrate the involvement of these dimensions in the processes of reception. The chapter highlights a significance of the research methodology this thesis adopts, as it allows the discourses to emerge from the accounts of viewers thereby allowing them to structure the analysis, rather than investigating discourses identified *a priori,* like for example, Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis (1992) have followed in their study of the American talk programme the *Cosby* show. In their study, which involved a screening of an episode to regular viewers and subsequent interview and discussion with the groups, the authors adopt a defined focus on racial discourse in the show in the interviews, even when there was evidence that it may not be a dominant concern for the viewers as Seiter (1999) also notes.

After attempting to establish the significance of these discourses in the formation of *Kyunki's* audiences and critics, the following chapter investigates how the micro cultural and discursive frameworks, or the 'family ethos' contributes to shaping viewers' interpretation of and relationship with, the serial. The subsequent chapter then attempts to examine the contribution of textual features in shaping the same meanings and interaction viewers have with *Kyunki*.

From this discussion, it can be seen that it is in the attempt to configure my data that the thesis seeks out discourse, as viewers' system of meaning and practice, to comprehend their relationship with the serial. I have reflected on my own paradigm shift as my understanding, selection and evaluation of research methodology had been formatively shaped by the entirety of the process of researching, planning and conducting ethnographic research.

Further it is now customary in ethnography to also discuss questions of subjectivity, as in how the methods and the researcher's subject position may have influenced the

outcomes. In the following section, it is this question that I am seeking to address with regard to my research.

The Research and My Subjectivity

In discussing the choice of research methods, Bird further argues that methodological choices in themselves do not validate the outcomes of the research, but they matter because '[they] play into and ultimately shape the conclusions of any research' (2003: 9). Thus she says, as many others have earlier noted, that it is imperative 'to examine our choices, and at the very least reflect on that dynamic interplay' (2003: 9). This obligation on the part of researchers has been discussed theoretically in terms of 'self-reflexivity', referring not just to implications of the methods used, but also the researcher's own subjectivity (Clifford 1983; Haraway 1988). Concerns about subjectivity in ethnography were first initiated through the famous 'Mead/Freeman' controversy, when anthropologist Derek Freeman (1983) challenged and contradicted Margaret Mead's (1928) earlier findings. Prior to this controversy, ethnography was dominantly perceived as an approach that was largely objective, reliable and embedded in reality. The researcher was imagined as having an unobtrusive relationship to the research subject, and it was this impression perhaps that granted ethnography emphatic acceptance in media and audience studies also. Feminist scholarship was important in recognising the fragmented and constructivist nature of knowledge as part of a movement into a postmodern ontology and epistemology. For example, Donna Haraway (1988), argues for the 'situatedness of knowledges', proposing the need for reflexive accounts in research, where not just the object of study, but also the subject and researcher him/herself is problematised.

James Clifford (1983) also questions ethnographic authority, by identifying the role of discursive strategies in the construction of ethnographic knowledge and/or accounts of reality:

> ...one must bear in mind the fact that ethnography is from the beginning to end enmeshed in writing. This writing includes, minimally, a translation of experience into textual form. The process is complicated by the action of multiple subjectivities and political constraints beyond the control of the writer. In response to these forces ethnographic writing enacts a specific strategy of authority. (1983: 120)

It was probably in response to concerns such as Clifford's that there has been a tradition, in audience studies at least, of including excerpts of the conversations and discussions with participants verbatim, to give voice to those studied. Since these excerpts are still selected by authors, how such mostly unintentional authority on the part of ethnographers may be overcome entirely is not exactly clear. Helpful, however, in dealing with this issue is Moores' (1993) critique of the politics of research in media ethnography, where he seems to show less concern for Clifford's arguments on discursive strategies, instead recommending 'examining sympathetically the 'meaning systems' of others, whilst retaining a crucial space for ideological evaluation and critique' (1993: 69). Moores cites the work of Gray (1988) and Valerie Walkerdine (1986) as examples of self-reflexive modes for dealing with questions of subjectivity and authority, in the occasional autobiographical style these authors adopt and the effort they make to see things from the subject's point of view, 'paying attention to the interdiscursive ties' forming audiences and their pleasures (1993: 68). To anticipate the discussion contained in Chapter six, the concept of 'family ethos' that this thesis develops relates quite closely to the 'interdiscursive ties' of which Moores speaks.

The question of reflexivity is also taken up by Pierre Bourdieu who takes a differing approach, in its consideration autobiographical and individualistic reflexivity as narcissistic (Bourdieu &Wacquant 1992). Karl Maton (2003) talks about *reflectivity* rather than reflexivity in condemning accounts that primarily reflect on the individual author's historical and social positioning. Bourdieu instead advocates 'epistemic reflexivity', where rather than focusing on the social and academic location of the researcher, the epistemic structures framing the researcher's frame of thought are brought into focus. His conception of reflexivity asks for an exploration of 'unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 40). Such a conception of reflexivity, he says 'far from encouraging narcissism and solipsism',

> ...invites intellectuals to recognise and to work to neutralise specific determinisms to which their innermost thoughts are subjected and informs a conception of the craft of research designed to strengthen its epistemological moorings. (1992: 46)

This conception of reflexivity essentially seeks to overcome the partial epistemic structures or field of knowledge through which the researcher operates and assumes a position which is not 'situated'. Although this may represent an ideal position (recalling the objective research goal with which I started this research), the transcendence of social positioning seems to be an impossible position to achieve. The difficulties in putting Bourdieu's approach into practice confirms my scepticism, although some continue to optimistically engage in formulating ways of putting the approach into practice (for example see Maton 2003). Instead the approach Purnima Mankekar (1999) deploys in her ethnographic study comes close to Bourdieu's urging of epistemic reflectivity, whilst not drawing on his work. Mankekar, when discussing her own positionality in her ethnographic study, makes note of the impact of her training in anthropology and feminist theory (as well as her personal and social contexts), on her ability 'to stake claims, mark positions and identify political and moral vantage points from which to launch our critiques' (1999: 31). Contemporary feminist theories in particular, as well as cultural theories, have similarly played an important part in my own capacity to 'stake claims' and 'mark vantage points' in my study. For example, my encounter with the women in my study provoked a major reassessment of my assumptions and notions of feminine empowerment as informed primarily by a feminist discourse that imagines empowerment in the rejection of traditional gender roles. The participants in my study did not see participation in the public realm, in the world of work, as necessarily empowering for women, nor did they appear to find gendered social roles problematic. Instead, the empowerment they were seeking was defined very much within the domestic realm, without relying on the need to participate in public realms for power. A complex conceptualisation, and unattainable ideal of feminine power was being realised by them, in Tulsi, the central character of the serial.

The importance of historical circumstances and micropolitics in shaping the ethnographic encounter, as noted by Bird (2003), has also been useful in further developing my research and my understanding of reflexivity in ethnographic research. Bird discusses the need for ethnographers to be attentive to the communicative and methodological nature of silence, in addition to articulate participant responses. For example, gender may play a role in who speaks willingly to whom (Bird, drawing on the work of Keesing). The meaning and significance of silence is relevant in my

study: the silence of men most often presented itself for interpretation. While I shall address relevant matters of reflexivity and subjectivity as they arise in the following chapters, I conclude this section of my discussion by noting that 'epistemic reflexivity', as Bourdieu seems to have conceptualised it, can manifest not through the reflexivity of an individual researcher, but through a collective enterprise when other members situated in different epistemic frameworks interpret, review and critique the research.

A final issue to be addressed in respect to subjectivity concerns the selection of my hometown as a field site. In anthropology similar concerns often appear in terms of the 'emic and etic' approach, broadly referring to the insider/outsider binary of defining the relations between the researcher and the researched.

I am an insider to the extent that I am a resident citizen of Ahmedabad, except for this sojourn to Australia specifically to pursue my PhD. In this regard Mankekar's (1999) careful discussion of her own positionality raises some relevant issues. In her study— of Doordarshan, the public broadcaster of India, and its role in shaping contemporary politics—Mankekar regards herself as a citizen of the city (New Delhi) where she conducts the study. But when discussing the many ways she feels as an 'insider' in the cultural contexts she examines, she at the same time also notes how her middle class status, cultural capital, emigration from India, and 'other shared and divergent histories' with her study participants along the axes of ethnicity and generation, also distances her from them and complicates such insider status. This insider/outsider discussion serves two purposes: first it serves as an important reminder in understanding the complexities in claiming an 'insider' status; and secondly, it leads to the recognition that my own relation to my study participants is in no way homogenous, but historical, multifarious and structured on a variety of axes (Bird 2003).

Furthermore, in Mankekar's (1999: 35) study, class emerges as a defining axis in shaping her positionality against her participants. Her upper class position against that of her largely lower middle class participants, Mankekar notes, is an obvious determinant shaping their different subjectivities, which she credibly addresses. I have been less able to identify any dominant way in which my subjectivity has distanced or

otherwise positioned me in relation to my study participants. Perhaps since there was less homogeneity in terms of class amongst my study participants (as my study design had sought out participants from diverse classes), there was no particular uniformity in the class relations shared between my participants and me. The families included in my study ranged from wealthy business families, academically well-placed families, to the skilled and unskilled worker families. This meant that my study participants were located variously in upper, equivalent and lower positions on the class axis in relation to me. Even where the difference was largest, class did not appear as a significant issue confronting our relations.

In contrast, my ethnicity, as a non-Gujarati was an intervening variable, if only to a minor extent. Nevertheless, I could converse with my participants in Gujarati language, as well as Hindi or English, in accordance with participants' choice. While as an Ahmedabadi who had lived all her life in this city, I shared a common cultural understanding with my study participants, enabling me to take notice and discern the cultural subtleties and nuances in my ethnographic encounter with them, I am also aware that some of those nuances may also have escaped me. Of particular concern, for example, were the cultural connotations and cultural subtleties of the sub-caste and the nativity of participants to the different regions of Gujarat. These complexities exceeded the boundaries of our short sessions, and the central purposes of my project. Moreover, these dimensions did not appear to be a dominating discourse in their reception.

My approach of presenting myself simply as a student was advantageous in gaining entry and achieving a balanced relationship with my study participants. Since I was not representing any organisation, nor holding any particular position of power, I consider that my participants were permitted to engage with me in relatively independent terms. My enrolment in a 'foreign' university generated some curiosity and interest in participating, but it did not otherwise appear to shape the encounter. As an older student (I am in my mid thirties), I was something of an oddity to them and I believe this incongruity assisted in gaining their respect. It should, however, also be acknowledged that people of Ahmedabad who allowed me entry into their homes and their private lives were simply generous, trusting, hospitable and respectful of my project, allowing me to feel very much an 'insider'.

This discussion also points to the inherent instability in the insider/outsider binary. It underscores the point that unless researchers are conducting a study about themselves, they would invariably be examining a social universe that includes and excludes them in complex, layered and nuanced ways, which, again, may not always be comprehensible to the researcher.

Before turning to a detailed examination of my findings, it is important to locate the development of these serials in a broader social, historical, industrial and textual understanding of television in India, which is the subject of Part Two of this thesis. The next chapter examines the shift from a single government service to the 'era of plenty' now prevailing in India.

PART II

Television in India:
Institutional Contexts and Textual Profile of *Kyunki*

CHAPTER 3

Television in India: Defining Contemporary Contexts and Audiences

This chapter provides a brief historical context of the development of television in India, identifying changes that have taken place in structures of television broadcasting and, simultaneously, of audiences in India. The purpose of the chapter is to contribute to developing a well-grounded understanding of the contexts of the reception of *Kyunki,* particularly since television in India has undergone some radical change over the past two decades.

Before cable and satellite television arrived, India had only known a public and monopolistic system of television. It comprised of the single broadcaster, Doordarshan, owned and controlled by the state. But since 1991 with the unsystematic and *ad hoc* arrival of cable and satellite television—in other words, of private broadcasting—the nature of television in India has undergone a radical change. On the one hand, the unprecedented range of channels and programmes brought about by cable and satellite television has created markedly dynamic and competitive structures of television, to the delight of audiences. But on the other, this new system of television has also consequently fragmented the once homogenised television audience of India, defined earlier by Doordarshan. Most visible in this fragmentation has been regional divisions, with the emergence of language channels, which now cater to different linguistic groups, broadly delineated by the regional states of India. Additionally, niche channels for sports, news, movies, and music and so on, have also fragmented television and its audiences in a different way. Within this rapidly changing dynamics, a relatively recent and less conceptualised phenomenon has been the emergence of a gendered form of television in India, constituted through the particular genre of serial melodrama that *Kyunki* and its like have come to represent.

Serials have always been a popular genre, however, even on old Doordarshan, serials rarely have been referred to as a particularly feminine genre. Serials enjoyed a largely gender-neutral perception, with both men and women seen to share similar interest in serials. The extensive popularity of some of the legendary serials of Doordarshan such as, *Hum Log* (1984-85)*, Buniyaad* (1987-88) or the religious epics like *Ramayan* (1986-88) and *Mahabharat* (1988-90) and similar others, broadcast mainly in the

eighties offer testament to this. This perception, however, has undergone a drastic change since 2000 with the arrival of *Kyunki* and its distinctive genre, as these serials are increasingly referred to as feminine or as a women's genre. While such a perception is growing, it must be noted that these serials are hardly marginal to television, instead they occupy an integral space and time on television. They are shown on the most dominant channels in the industry and invariably on prime time. So despite the gendered perception surrounding *Kyunki* and its genre, the reception cannot be so easily defined in gendered terms as is also evident in my study. There are male viewers in the families who very much enjoy the serial, just as there are women who, to a similar extent, despise it. It is possible that the excessive focus on women and women's themes in the genre is contributing to the perception that the K serials are women's television. For the purposes of this study, however, the important point to be made is that this perception of the serial as feminine, plays a central role in its reception. The intense and divisive response the serial finds, both in the criticisms and the appeal, seem crucially implicated in such a perception. While the reception of the serial and the form and structure of the serial is studied in detail in the later chapters, this chapter hopes to outline the emergence of this form by tracing the contexts within which it has emerged. For this, the chapter reflects on the way in which television has evolved in India. For a better understanding of the evolutionary contexts, the chapter begins by providing a brief summary of the contemporary structures and dimensions of television in India.

Dimensions and Structure of Contemporary Television

From the handful of channels that had opened private broadcasting, there are now over 300 channels available to cable and satellite audiences in the country, this figure is expected to swell to 700 channels by 2009 (Chandran 2007). It all began during the 1991 Gulf War, when a few local entrepreneurs using some locally made dish antennas arranged for the reception of CNN to watch the news coverage, sparking interest in the idea of satellite television. It became a reality when the Hong Kong based Li Ka-Shing family launched STAR TV (Satellite Television Asian Region), and began beaming signals both into India and China after they acquired the satellite Asiasat 1 (Sinclair, 1998). Star TV, which was acquired by Rupert Murdoch in 1993, initially started with a bundle of four channels, Star Plus, Prime Sports, MTV and BBC, all in English. Satellite television took off in earnest when the following year,

India's first Hindi satellite channel Zee Television was launched by the domestic entrepreneur Subhash Chandra. Thereafter, India has been in the middle of an expansionary boom cycle.

Just as channels have grown in this short span, so have audience numbers. According to latest estimates, there is an average of 230 million viewers of cable and satellite television in a week. [10] In terms of ownership, 68 million homes in India now have access to cable and satellite television, out of the total 112 million homes that own television. This makes India the third largest cable television market in the world, behind only China and the US, which have 106 million and 69 million cable homes respectively.[11] And these numbers are further continuing to grow rapidly, with NRS 2006 registering a twelve percent growth in cable ownership over the previous year.

While the new competitive system of television that private broadcasting represents has replaced the former monopoly of Doordarshan, the national broadcaster continues to remain the leading broadcaster, with the benefit of the wide reach it has established since the inception of television in India in 1959. Its reach and viewership has been significantly greater than its rivals, but in the urban sectors where cable and satellite television has mainly established itself, the popularity of Doordarshan is markedly waning. Viewer ratings in cable and satellite homes show that very few of Doordarshan's programmes feature among the list of popular programmes.

Doordarshan's wide reach comes from the exclusive right it holds as the nation's public broadcaster, over terrestrial broadcast, which remains the dominant form of television distribution. But this privilege may cease soon, as there have been reports of government plans to privatise terrestrial broadcast (Roy 2005). Before cable and satellite television arrived, it was through the establishment of the extensive terrestrial network that Doordarshan had grown. Currently through this network, Doordarshan is able to cover seventy-nine percent in geographical area and ninety-one percent of the population (Press Information Bureau 2007). The network, which includes six

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[10] As per National Readership Survey (NRS) 2006. The National Readership Studies Council, constituted by representatives of Audit Bureau of Circulations, Advertising Agencies Association of India and Indian Newspaper Society, conducts the NRS annually.

[11] Figures for China and the US availed from
http://www.instat.com/press.asp?Sku=IN0603202MBS&ID=1792

television stations called Doordarshan Kendras and 1400 transmitters of varying transmission capabilities spread wide around the country, is one of the largest terrestrial communication networks in the world (Press Information Bureau 2007). Doordarshan earlier broadcast only two channels—DD National, which had a national coverage; and DD Metro, which was meant exclusively for metropolitan cities—until it had to respond to the threat from private channels. Subsequently Doordarshan began introducing its own satellite channels, an estimated 2.8 channels a year between 1992 and 1995 (Pathania 1998). As of now, Doordarshan has thirty channels in its stable delivered differentially through cable and terrestrial modes (Press Information Bureau 2007). Many of these channels are regional language channels established to challenge the mushrooming private regional channels.

In the increasing competitive television environment, Doordarshan's role and status as the public broadcaster has come under debate. Stridency in demands to make it an autonomous institution and remove it from direct state control led subsequently to the establishment in 1997 of a statutory autonomous body called Prasar Bharati, or Broadcasting Corporation of India, under whose control public television and radio were since placed (Kumar 1998). The idea was to model public television along the lines of the UK's BBC, but so far it has not succeeded well as the corporation remains supported primarily by the government through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (Ninan 2007).

Distribution of satellite television meanwhile is primarily through a multitude of cable networks that have emerged in India in an unorganised and anarchic way. The cable networks are basically a small and closed loop of transmission, wired through cables and of late wireless cables. The cable networks are run by small time entrepreneurs commonly known as local cable operators whose area of operations often only extend within a suburb. In this system of distribution, the local cable operator, after downlinking television signals with a set of dish antennae and receivers at a head-end, then amplifies and re-distributes the signals to subscriber clients wired to this service. The service involves subscription charges for viewers or subscribers, whereas the terrestrial mode of reception is free. But cost has so far not appeared as an impediment in the networks proliferation, considering the enthusiastic uptake cable and satellite has found.

These networks came into existence before private satellite television arrived. At that time the feed from the head-end consisted not of television signals, but video (mostly Hindi movies) which the operator would play from VHS devices. In 1995 after cable and satellite television arrived, there were an estimated 100,000 such operators in India (Sinclair 2004). But subsequently, as cable operations became more capital intensive due to expansions in the satellite television industry, the number of cable operators also declined. Coinciding with the decline was the emergence of another link in this chain of distribution – the multi system operator (MSO), a kind of wholesaler as Vanita Kohli (2003) describes them. Many of the small operators were bought out by these MSOs, which reduced the number of cable operators to around 26000 in 2004, from the estimated 60000 in late 2002 (Sinclair 2004). The MSOs were essentially formed of consortia of cable operators or with backing from some broadcaster, to function like cable companies with potential for larger investment and thereby, the ability to receive many more channels than the small operators. In the existing system, the MSOs relay downlinked signals to small cable operators for a fee, for further distribution to the subscribers included in the small operator's loop. The emergence of these operators brought about some consolidation and regulation of the largely anarchic manner of cable operations in India (Sinclair, 2004).

In the distribution of satellite television, Direct to Home (DTH) services have also begun since 2003. Most of DTH service providers emerged through the fiscal backing of large broadcasters. Dish TV, owned by the major domestic broadcaster Zee Network was the first to introduce DTH. Quickly thereafter in the following year, Doordarshan also introduced its own DTH service called DD Direct Plus. The latest entrant has been Tata Sky backed by the Star Network. In this system, which does away with the intermediary services of cable operators, broadcasters uplink to specified satellite system and subscribers downlink directly, with a reception device. The providers establish agreements with different television broadcasters so subscribers can receive a bundle of channels of multiple broadcasters through a single service. But there has been a trend among broadcasters to deny their channels to rival DTH providers, so the range of channels offered by the providers varies substantially. The subscription fee for DTH is higher than cable as of now, but it is becoming competitive day by day. Currently it includes a monthly subscription fee ranging from Rs.250 to Rs 600, in addition charges for the receiver and installation are

approximately between Rs. 1500 to Rs.4000. In comparison, Doordarshan charges no monthly subscription fee, only a onetime fee of Rs 3000 for the receiver and installation (http://www.ddinews.gov.in/DTH/Receive). This system of distribution provides a hope of extending the reach of satellite television substantially as it does not have the limitations of establishing cable networks.

From the current multiple mode of television distribution (now existent) and the countless channels that are available to audiences, it is evident that the television market place in India has diversified and multiplied. Through this brief discussion presented above I have attempted to summarize the contemporary dimensions and structures of the television distribution in India. To understand the extent to which the institution of television has changed, it will now be worthwhile to take a brief look at how television developed in India. I provide a short detailed summary, from the more extensive accounts found, for example, in publications of Ananda Mitra (1993), Nilanjana Gupta (1998); K Moti Gokulsing 2004; Srinivas R Melkote, Peter Shields & Binod C Agrawal (1998).

Development of Television in India

Television has had a relatively late and slow start in India compared to the west, where television had become available since the early thirties. In India it was introduced in 1959, but it began spreading widely only after two decades, i.e. from the eighties onwards.

Television was introduced in India in a climate of reluctance. The Congress government of the newly independent India, having achieved independence from the British in 1947, resisted its introduction for quite some time, on the grounds that it was an item of luxury, ill affordable to the poor nation. Eventually though, after many deliberations when the government was persuaded that television could prove to be a useful instrument in promoting social change and development, the idea began finding acceptance. Funding received from UNESCO and donations of equipment from international corporations also assisted in persuading the government. Thus television began in India as an experiment of the state, in which the first broadcast was relayed twenty-one television sets in Delhi from a makeshift studio built in the premises of the national radio broadcaster, the All India Radio (Kohli 2003).

This experimental broadcast expanded slowly over the next decade, but it remained restricted to Delhi. The broadcast formulation at this time was exclusively an instructional and educational one. The government set up access at community centres and at government schools for students, drafting the initial spread of television in India as essentially a community activity. Individual ownership of television therefore only emerged much later. In this experimental and pedagogic approach, which marked the first two decades of television, we can also see the national government's attempts to comprehend the technology, in terms of programme transmission, as well as programme production.

Television service reached other cities only from 1972, beginning with Mumbai. By 1975, seven major cities were receiving television as television stations and broadcast facilities were progressively set up in those cities. Doordarshan was established and named as a separate entity in 1976. Until then it had been operating under the wings of the All India Radio (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, n.d.). Slowly by this time, television content also widened, with news programmes and film based entertainment programmes starting to supplement the original instructional fare. Doordarshan's duration of broadcast also extended, but unlike today where round the clock service is the norm, it was basically limited to just few hours each day (Mitra 1993).

The slow expansion of television in the first two decades was also due to the exclusive reliance on a terrestrial mode of transmission. It asked for huge investments in infrastructure for setting up television stations and transmitters, as each could cover only a short specified radius. This meant that transmission centres were mostly located in urban areas leading also to the growth of television as a largely urban phenomenon (Mitra 1993).

The need to overcome this limitation and find wider rural reach lent urgency to the Congress (Indira Gandhi) government's plans to experiment in satellite communications and broadcasting. It found the necessary encouragement in a landmark experiment named the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), which was conducted jointly in collaboration with US space agency NASA during

1975-76. The experiment covering 2330 villages, spanning twenty districts over six states, tested satellite broadcast technology as well as the potential of television in social and educational empowerment (Agrawal, 1981). Encouraged by the results, India soon began investing in communication satellites and also developing them domestically. The Indian National Satellite (INSAT) program emerged from this initiative for incorporating satellite technology into television broadcasting, along with other communication uses. In 1982, the same year that the Asian Games were held in Delhi, India's first communication satellite INSAT-1A was launched allowing Doordarshan to commence the use of satellite transmission in its broadcast. Satellite transmission here refers to use of the technology in linking up all Doordarshan Kendras (regional centres), which had until then operated as disparate regional services, servicing regions of their radius (Mitra 1993; Gupta 1998). The networking of the regional centres, allowed Doordarshan to introduce a national feed called the National Programme relayed from Delhi for simultaneous broadcast across the country. Broadcast was organised as a three-tiered service integrating national, regional and local transmissions on a single channel, with the national and regional centres sharing time on it (Mitra 1993; Gupta 1998).

This technology provided an impetus to Doordarshan to rapidly expand its reach. One new transmitter was commissioned every day for four months in 1984 (Gupta 1998). By 1987, Doordarshan had expanded its coverage to nearly seventy percent of the population, improving considerably from the twenty-six percent that it was covering in 1982 (Thussu 1999). In this period, private ownership of television also rose, with household ownership of television growing more than twenty fold, from one million in 1979 to twenty-three million in 1989 (Kohli 2003).

Other important initiatives—for instance, the commencement of colour transmission in 1982—and the further easing up of regulations on manufacture of television sets, also encouraged and facilitated the proliferation of Doordarshan since the eighties. But most visibly marking Doordarshan's expansion was its commercialisation. This meant that Doordarshan began to embrace more and more popular entertainment programmes, moving steadily away from its earlier definition as fundamentally a didactic tool. This shift within Doordarshan also corresponded with economic and political changes at the time. From the late seventies onwards, India started to slowly

veer towards a neo-liberal political model of governance where private enterprise began taking on an expanded role, in contrast to the former socialist paradigm where the state clearly held a dominant and paternalistic role.

The term commercialisation refers to the introduction of commercial sponsorship of Doordarshan programmes and not diversity in ownership, for, as I have mentioned, Doordarshan enjoyed a monopoly until the following decade. Advertising was introduced on Doordarshan in 1976, but until the eighties it remained quite nascent, featuring mostly still advertisements. Gradually when advertisers began seeking wider audiences and grew more demanding with the liberalisation of the economy, commercial sponsorship on television also became more forceful and sophisticated. It played an important part in the introduction of India's first television serial, *Hum Log*, aired during 1984-85. It was the first programme where production costs were paid by the advertiser, in exchange for commercial airtime on Doordarshan (Kohli 2003). The unprecedented popularity it found changed the nature of television in India. It unified audiences in India like no other programme had done before. Subsequently telecast fees[12] and commercial airtime on Doordarshan rose, with revenues soaring 'from Rs. 170 million in 1983-84 to Rs.2.1 billion in 1989-90' (Kohli 2003: 64). With *Hum Log*, the serial genre also established itself as an integral part of television. By 1987 almost forty serials were produced with two serials on an average being aired each evening (Kumar 1998).

There is little doubt that the policy of commercialisation and the concurrent rise of consumer culture in India greatly benefited Doordarshan in its expansionary goals, yet these developments also attracted critique. For example, Manjunath Pendakur (1991) argues that the policy shift of Doordarshan was made at the cost of broader national interests, primarily to serve the political interests of a few, such as, including the government, transnational capitalists and elite classes of India. While this claim may be hard to ratify even with the advantage of hindsight, there remains little doubt that this paradigmatic shift immensely advanced the social and cultural significance of

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[12] Telecast fees are charges broadcasters makes for 'giving away airtime in slots of 30-60 minutes…depending on the time slot and what it expects the programmes to generate in advertising revenues. It gives the producer a fixed proportion of seconds, called free commercial time (FCT), that the producer sells in order to recover his money.' (Kohli 2003: 82)

television in India. The range of cultural studies of television that have since emerged, which focus on this period when television grew extensively, partly testify to see for example Singhal & Rogers 1989; Krishnan and Dighe 1990; Mitra 1993; Gupta 1998.

One of the dominant views that have emerged from these studies has been that in repositioning itself through popularising and commercialising measures, Doordarshan tried to define a unified national culture and promote a sense of national consciousness among audiences. In speaking of the 'consensual cultural narrative of the nation' (Gupta 1998:89) that Doordarshan attempted to forge, scholars such as have primarily referred to the serial genre, which, as I mentioned earlier, began assuming an integral space on television. Through their studies they have brought to light the important role television, in particular serials, have played in forging ideas of citizenship and nation. This role has also been traced to programming aired before the shift, when television partnered with the state in the creation of a 'modern' nation through its social and developmental didacticism. The patronising tone of television messages, Gupta argues, corresponded with the perceived role of the state at the time. Subsequently, when the role of the state shifted in the new political and economic regime of liberalisation, this shift was also signified in the programming on television, for example in the involvement of private and commercial enterprises.

Brief History of Serials in India

Hum Log (We People), India's first television serial, emerged from a collaborative initiative of the state and private sponsors, with the combined goal of popularising television while also continuing to disseminate educational and developmental messages. *Hum Log's* narrative focused on the life and struggles of a lower middle class family and was addressed mainly to families. It sought to promote the idea of birth control or family planning, but slowly expanded its address to include issues regarding empowerment of women, family harmony and community living (Gokulsing 2004; Mankekar 1999). It was telecast during 1984-85 in a total of 156 episodes of twenty minutes each, two days a week on primetime. *Hum Log* was soon followed by another lengthy serial *Buniyaad* made of 104 episodes portraying the struggles of an ordinary Punjabi family caught up in the trauma of 1947 partition of India. Essentially these serials were all conceptualised as domestic family sagas, however, there was a conscious attempt in the narrative to define a larger social space,

within which the relevant domestic discourses would be framed. For example, in *Hum Log* the status of women and in *Buniyaad* the history of partition remained the dominant social framework.

Thereafter serials became a popular feature of Doordarshan and even today many of those serials are remembered by audiences, like *Rajni* (1985); *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* (1984-86); *Nukkad* (1986); *Tamas* (1986) etcetera. I use the generic term 'serials' following conventional Indian practice, but some of series could be accurately described as situation comedies.

In the course of evolution of Indian serials two other serials that are regarded as milestones are *Ramayan* (1987-88) and *Mahabharat* (1989-90) both based on Hindu epics of the same names. The massive popularity of both led to a proliferation of the sub-genre of mythological serials that they came to iconically represent. In the emergence of this particular genre, many saw Doordarshan articulate a Hindu image of India, in the national culture it was attempting to forge (Mitra 1993; Mankekar 1994; Rajagopal 2001). These scholars argue that such an articulation contributed to marginalising minority religious groups, and consequently weakening India's secular credentials. For example Mitra (1993) says

> Doordarshan's India is thus an India (...) where the central cultural practices are those that revolve around Hinduism and the language is predominantly Hindi. This reproduction has now been able to mobilize a new political conservatism that is the Hindu right. The images reproduced and circulated by Doordarshan have now indeed become dominant in India's popular culture. The consequent struggles can only get acute and bloody now that the precarious balance between communal harmony in national integration, and the dominance of the majority Hindus, has swayed to the right. (1991:154)

While Gupta (1998) does not challenge these contentions, she points out that although cultural products and artefacts articulate and legitimate dominant social, economic and political ideologies, discursive formations of culture are not confined to them, but emerge from conditions of everyday life. Her study, exploring the reception of television in India (and thus inevitably including a focus on serials), defines reception in terms of India's negotiation of modernity cast through the discursive conflict between community and individualism:

Television programming [acts] as an agent in this reconstruction of Indian modernity as the nation, the community, the family and the individual struggle to redefine themselves into modern moulds. (1998: 107)

The arrival of satellite channels accelerated a trend where Indian serials drew on the conventions of Western soap opera, with a focus on melodramatic—rather than social or broadly historical—themes. The early serials on satellite television, however, conformed mostly to the generic practices of Doordarshan, for example in *Banegi Apni Baat* (1992), which sought to represent the anxieties of youth and college students. Then with the two innovative serials Doordarshan introduced in the mid 90's called *Shanti* (1994) and *Swabhiman* (1995), the nature of serial programming underwent a major change. These two serials were significant in producing an audience for daily soaps, and for daytime and afternoon programming. Their narratives concerned the intimate and personal lives of rich upper class urban women. Soon with the satellite channels recognising the potential for the daily soaps, India witnessed an unprecedented mushrooming of serials, which aired daily, weekly, on daytime and primetime, heralding the era of continuous serials not just on Hindi mainline channels but also on regional networks.

According to recent estimates, serials occupy about twenty-eight percent of the total telecast time across the six mainline channels that include both national and private channels in India (TAM 2003). A large majority of these serials appears to dwell on feminine or domestic concerns quite like the soap opera format, indicating widespread incorporation of this form. It was with the arrival of *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* however that has brought about a new change even to these long running serials. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, they established the 10 pm to 11 pm slot as part of the prime time band. Secondly according to critics, prior to *Kyunki*, the serials were attempting progressive 'bold' representations of women, with characters stepping out of the conventional stereotypes, by asserting their identity and taking control of their lives, and so portraying empowered women, for example, in *Tara*, *Saans*, *Kora Kagaz* or *Hasratein*. In fact, even in serials of the mid to late eightes, rarely were women completely restricted to domestic realms as in *Kyunki*, even as much as they were embedded inevitably in these contexts. For instance, Kalyani, as an obedient daughter,

blended the domestic with her professional role as a police officer in *Udaan* (1988). Even female characters that did not pursue any professional roles had public significance in the way they articulated some very public concerns (for example Lajoji in *Buniyaad* (1994), Rajni in *Rajni* (1985), Sita in *Ramayan* (1986-88) or Draupadi in *Mahabharat* (1988-90)*. Compared to these serials of the eighties, however, serials of the late nineties in their representations of empowered women, Mankekar (2004) says, inadvertently also introduced themes of individualism and the privileging of 'conjugal desires' over the extended family system.

Kyunki and *Kahaani,* in contrast, emphasise the traditional extended joint family, and the narratives revolve on the trials and tribulations of the central female characters in their attempt to resolve family conflicts and keep the family strung together. Importance is given to family and family values over personal desires of women.

In explaining the discursive and ideological trajectory of serials, Gupta (1998) identifies India's shifting encounter with modernity in the eighties, as being located in the ideological conflict the discourses on television evoked between community and individualism. Her study points out, in reference to some serials like *Hum Log or Buniyaad* of the early eighties, that although the tensions between tradition and modernity or community and individual were raised in response to concerns of the new political and economic liberalisation, the resolution often tended to emphasize the importance of community over individual. But she notes that this changed later during the late eighties, as many of the serials that emerged at that time, appeared to become increasingly supportive of ideologies of individualism, for example in serials like *Swabhiman* (1995) and *Shanti* (1994). The arrival of private cable and satellite television, further endorsed these ideologies and also created a fear of 'cultural invasion' in their corpus of foreign programming, which comprised programmes like *Santa Barbara* (1984-93)*, The Bold and the Beautiful* (1987-) and similar other American soaps. And later when indigenous programming began on private channels, the emphasis on individualism and modernity continued with 'an explicit focus on the politics of family, sexuality and intimacy' (Mankekar 1999: 356). Serials such as *Tara* (1993-95) *or Hasratein* (2000) were distinct from the earlier serials on Doordarshan, which would invariably attempt to draw a link between domestic discourses and the larger social space, in reflecting the conflict between traditional and modern.

Mankekar (2004) points to a general increase of erotic elements on television, not just in serials, but also in other programmes like talk shows and advertisements. The more recent range of serials, such as *Kyunki*, which have returned the focus to traditional family values, Mankekar then contends, has emerged as a backlash to the modernist discourses that had earlier dominated.

This chapter has attempted to trace shifts in the industrial landscape of Indian television, describing the fragmentation and the consolidation of a diversified market, in contrast to a previously monopolistic state-run system. These contested developments have followed broader political changes, and led to the emergence of the popular K serials.

CHAPTER 4
Kyunki and Questions of Genre

In beginning to investigate the appeal of *Kyunki*, the last chapter outlined the contemporary structures of broadcasting in India, noting the role institutional contexts have played in *Kyunki's* emergence. It also addressed the consequence of *Kyunki's* success, in considering the way that the serial—and the genre it founded—contributed to a further fragmentation in television, and to creating a distinctively gendered form of television in India. The significance and the dimensions of this gendered appeal of, and contestation over, the serial are addressed in detail in the ethnographic data presented in next three chapters. First, however, a more developed exposition of the serial itself is called for, which is the goal of this chapter.

I have already shed some light on thematic concerns in the serial in the Introduction, and in chapter three as noted above. This chapter will develop a deeper understanding of the serial's textual features, beginning with a fairly comprehensive and detailed summary of its plot and story. It then defines the textual properties of serial, through a detailed description of the serial's ongoing themes, structure, narrative and mode of address. Thus, the discussion in the chapter represents a partial textual analysis, in the attention it pays to the aesthetic aspects of *Kyunki* and genre, whilst consciously avoiding an ideological critique, which is held over for later chapters. This approach is consonant with the theoretical foundations of the study; particularly its understanding that social meanings from texts arise in audience's negotiations. Nevertheless, since aesthetics and ideology in any text are inevitably intertwined, a sense of the ideological and social-cultural significance of the serial does inevitably begin to emerge from this chapter.

Kyunki: A Beginner's Guide
It hardly needs to be stated that long running serials defy easy summary, and as I have mentioned earlier, *Kyunki* has been running since 2000. I will focus on the initial storyline of the serial and then note some of the plotlines that have been of particular interest or concern to my study participants.

In the Introduction, I had indicated that the serial is wholly and completely concerned with the domestic life of one fictional family—the Viranis, a rich business family. A defining feature of their lives is joint family living, a tradition where multiple generations of a family live together in one household. A further layer of tradition is located in their identity as a Gujarati household (ethnically from the state of Gujarat, where joint family living is quite pervasive). Yet they are simultaneously identified as a modern urban family, who live somewhere in the metropolis of Mumbai. To briefly recapitulate a further point made earlier, their imposing family mansion is named Shantiniketan, 'abode of peace', but their household is instead a site of relentless discord and drama.

When the serial commenced, the family was comprised of three generations of members. Over the years, however, the family has acquired and lost many members, through birth, marriage, divorce and death, with the result that five adult generations constitute the Virani household in 2007. Initially, the first generation was headed by the elderly and humble patriarch Govardhan Virani, founder and owner of the Virani business empire, and his equally unassuming wife Amba. The second generation was their three respectful sons: Mansukh, Himmat and JD (Jamnadas); and their respective wives, Savita, Daksha and Gayatri. Initial conflict in the narrative is set up by characterising these three women as egocentric, uncaring and even antagonistic to their mother-in-law, Amba. The third generation, meanwhile, comprised the adult grandchildren of the family: Mihir and Kiran, sons of Savita and Mansukh; Chirag and Suhasi, son and daughter of Himmat and Daksha; and Hemant and Sejal, son and daughter of JD and Gayatri.

An early plotline in the serial centres on the antagonistic feelings between Amba and her three daughters-in-law. Savita, the eldest, is the shrewdest amongst them all. She guards her own selfish individualistic interests, rather than the interests of the larger family. Worse, she encourages her relatively straightforward sisters-in-law to follow in her footsteps. This opposition between Amba and her daughters-in-law engages with the ideological conflict between individualism and collectivism, a theme pursued recurrently throughout the serial's run.

Further complicating the discord between Amba and her daughters-in-law, is Tulsi, who soon becomes the central protagonist. This lovely and pleasant natured daughter of the Virani family's priest, who lives next door in a much more modest home, is the only one who understands and empathises with Amba. Further she is willing to take up cudgels in Amba's defence. Her strong sense of duty and respect for elders immediately sets her character apart from the other women in the family. A further structuring opposition is established when Mihir the eldest grandson of the family, falls in love with and marries Tulsi, against the wishes of his mother, Savita, but with the complicit approval of his grandparents. Continuing with her selfish and self-centered ways, in her dual position now as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, Savita's character establishes herself as the central antagonist to Tulsi, who becomes the ideal heroine as the caring, nurturing, and selfless daughter-in-law of the family. Savita's resentment of Tulsi then forms a dominant theme. She resents Tulsi for her poorer background and also for contributing to Mihir's breakup with Payal, the girl Savita had chosen as her daughter-in-law. Additionally, the support Tulsi gets from the family elders forms a further source of resentment. Savita looks for opportunities to disgrace or insult Tulsi, while to her dismay, Tulsi cleverly manages to win every situation, without creating a family showdown. Meanwhile, Tulsi gains another enemy in Payal, who, bitter over losing Mihir, takes every opportunity to create discord in the family and set members of the family against Tulsi. The narrative dwells on the significant burden Tulsi carries, in making space for herself in the family as a new member, in the face of the unwelcome treatment from her mother-in-law and few others, and in reinforcing her role as a buttress for the family's harmony and unity.

Threats to the family's unity come from both within and outside the family, in the form of numerous characters, some of whom have appeared and disappeared from the serial several times throughout its run. Along with providing the requisite dramatic tension in the narrative, it is through these characters that plots evolve and help advance the serial's narrative both temporally and spatially.

One of the most dramatic and powerfully experienced events in the serial's history was the death of Mihir early in 2001 (about six months into the run). His death

evoked protest and furore amongst viewers, and was subsequently reversed.[13] Mihir was found alive and well, but suffering amnesia in the care of a lady doctor – Mandira, simultaneously opening another narrative thread by showing her fall in love with Mihir. For Western audiences accustomed to such narrative reversals in television soap operas, this may seem a regular and typical feature of the genre, but the significance of this particular narrative reversal in defining audience's subsequent relationship to *Kyunki* in India must be noted. It was in this reversal that audiences first realised the distinctiveness of *Kyunki's* conventions of generic verisimilitude and began appreciating the difference in the structure, and novel concept of realism, pursued in the serial in contrast to previous Indian television exemplars.

Mihir eventually returns to Tulsi, but Mandira's repeated attempts to regain him form a major plotline in the serial. In this way, while Tulsi's relationship with the family and Mihir remains the central narrative interest, several sub-plots also develop involving other family members, interlinking directly or indirectly to the central interest. These sub-plots offer space to explore many social issues apart from the main theme. For example a minor early plot development involves Pragna, the married daughter of Amba and Govardhan. Pragna returns to 'the abode of peace', facing some grave financial difficulties in her marital home, but finds that her sisters-in-law, Savita, Daksha and Gayatri are displeased about it and unwelcoming. Though relatively insignificant in the scheme of the larger narrative now, this sub-plot usefully explores the weakened power position of a daughter in her natal family after marriage. It shows that after marriage women often lose claim to their parent's property or inheritance and thus find themselves displaced in their parent's home. I noted in the last chapter that the K serials departed from earlier forms in their focus on the domestic. Whilst this is generally the case, larger social issues do become part of the domestic concerns of the family in these subtle ways.

Thematically linked with the overarching plot of the serial, this sub-plot about married women's loss of support from their natal homes, helps to also configure and reinforce Tulsi's righteous nature in significant contrast to the other women, by showing Tulsi as warm and welcoming of Pragna, as well as making an active effort

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[13] Rumours, in fact, abound this may already have been part of the narrative strategy.

in helping her aunt-in-law overcome her financial difficulties. A similar example concerns Tulsi's remarriage, after Mihir's apparent death. Out of concern for Tulsi's future and well-being, the family persuades her to remarry. The efforts on the part of Tulsi's marital family offer a striking contrast to the dominant discourse surrounding widow remarriage in India, which remains a fraught social issue. The resolution offered in this plotline, however, avoids following through on its daring representation, by melodramatically bringing Mihir back to the family fold moments before the wedding is about to take place.

A narrative shift of great significance took place in late 2002, with a temporal leap forward of twenty years, enabling the instantaneous introduction of a fourth generation of the family. Thereafter plots begin forming around the lives and relations of these characters who, notwithstanding their sudden elevation in narrative importance, were not entirely unfamiliar to viewers as they had been shown previously as children. Key plotlines pursued in this era included: the return and reformation of Gautam – Mihir and Tulsi's wayward son whom they had bequeathed as a child to Mihir's childless brother and wife; the revelation of the existence of Karan – Mihir and Mandira's illegitimate son, and his eventual acceptance into the Virani household; Karan's marriage and relationship back and forth between Nandini and Tanya; and a great deal more familial intrigue, reversal and change of this sort.

A particularly dramatic and controversial point in the serial is when Tulsi kills Ansh, earlier revealed to be her long lost son. He is a scheming, evil and an irrevocably criminal character, who brings matters to a head for Tulsi when he rapes his recently separated wife. Tulsi's discovery of the rape and later efforts to save the daughter-in-law from her son's evil clutches eventuates in his killing. This development in the serial attracted considerable press attention (Pisharoty 2004; *Screen India* Dec. 17, 2004; Ninan 2005). Some reports noted that it parodied a sequence from the distinguished Bollywood classic, *Mother India* (1957), in which Nargis, the protagonist heroine, shoots and kills her bandit son. In this intertext, *Kyunki* associates itself with *Mother India*, one of the most extensively critiqued feminine constructs in cinema and feminist studies of Bollywood cinema and national culture. Apart from cultural critique, the killing sequence attracted interest as it was spectacularly shot, with reports suggesting that the serial's producers spent about Rs. 50 lakhs (about a

million US dollars) to achieve the rotating camera shot and the 'bullet time effect'.[14] Interest in this televisual spectacle ensured advance publicity and the thematic significance of this sequence can also be seen in the responses of some of the participants in my study, in the concerns they express over the issue of a mother killing her own son (see chapter five and six).

Some of the subsequent plots included the conviction and imprisonment of Tulsi; her banishment from the family and eventual return after twenty odd years (much compressed in diegetic time), and the introduction of the fifth adult generation of the family. A recent news-making event for the serial was the replacement of Smriti Irani, the actor who had played Tulsi for the seven years, after she quit the project citing other work commitments (India 360, 2007)

This detailed summary points to the resemblance of *Kyunki* to the genre of Western soap operas. Its 'continuous and never ending format' (Creeber 2004: 8), convoluted plots and absence of a linear storyline, clearly seem to place it within this influential Western television genre. While there is little doubt that *Kyunki* draws significantly from this genre, analysis in this chapter will show that there are important differences in *Kyunki's* form and structure, in the way in which the format has been adapted and indigenised. Such indigenisation of the soap opera form is certainly not exclusive to *Kyunki* as is evident from the numerous studies that have noted of the generic and cultural hybridity in the production of telenovelas (Sinclair 1999; Straubhaar 2007).

Generic Form and Structure of *Kyunki*

In outlining form and structure, clarification is needed about my use of the term 'serial', as the term in the West conventionally implies a form of drama 'set over a fixed number of episodes' (Creeber 2004: 8). In contrast, as I have mentioned before, *Kyunki* is continuous and never ending in a very literal sense: the series runs five nights a week, for fifty-two weeks of the year. My use of the term follows popular practice in India, where all serialised television narratives are simply called 'serials' both by the industry and audiences, without distinguishing between series, soaps, or

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[14] This term was coined in respect to the innovative and much-copied special effect of the Hollywood film, *The Matrix* (Wikipedia, 2005).

sitcoms, for example. Where generic distinctions are made, they are based on the thematic content, such as social, comedy, crime/detective, horror, and so on. It is only media commentators in India who employ the term 'soap' when referring to serialised narratives; however, rather than referring to formal structures, such usage tends to signal a distaste for the triviality or feminine emphasis in such narrative texts. The producers of *Kyunki* have also rarely referred to it as soap and have explicitly promoted it as a serial for families to watch together, and rarely spoken of it as specifically a women's genre (Lalwani, 2003).

It cannot be denied, however, that *Kyunki* shares many features with Western soap opera genre: in its regular and frequent transmission, address to female viewers, creation of loyal audience, use of a fairly large cast, generally low production values and low cultural status, concern with day-to-day activities, plotlines revolving around everyday lives of a small community or family. Similarly, it also attempts to simulate real time and realistic events; interweaves narratives whose resolutions overlap rather than coincide with episode boundaries; uses 'cliff-hangers' as narrative device for continued viewing; and focuses on female characters and on 'feminine' or domestic concerns (Livingstone 1990). Whilst these features describe soap operas in general terms, some scholars, such as Muriel Cantor and Suzanne Pingree (1983), make further distinctions within the genre, reserving the use of the term soap for daytime programming addressed to women. This 'daytime' definition[15] would prevent *Kyunki* from qualifying as soap, on the basis of its prime time transmission.

The expression 'prime time soap' was used in the eighties to refer to two popular American television serials, *Dallas* (1978-91) and *Dynasty* (1981-89). Cantor and Pingree question the validity of this hybrid term, arguing that, 'evening or prime time television dramas (serials and series) in the United States differ from the soap opera in three ways. Their production (costs and control), the number of episodes produced and the content all distinguish teleplays from soap operas' (Cantor & Pingree 1983: 26). In addition, they also note that in these new formats, significant emphasis is given to masculine themes of power and big businesses, and also that their pace of

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[15] *Kyunki* is also broadcast on daytime in the afternoon, but this is a repeat of the previous night's original broadcast, so it is understood primarily as a prime time show, as confirmed also by television viewer ratings.

action is much quicker than in soaps. Thus, notwithstanding their serial narration and focus on family and interpersonal relations similar to soaps, these critics define prime time dramas as significantly different to the soap genre.

Anna McCarthy contests Cantor and Pingree's view, arguing that such a narrow definition of soap overlooks practices in other countries where 'programmes designated as "soap operas" may air once a week, several times a week, or daily and at different times of the day' (2001: 48). She suggests instead 'soap is perhaps more accurately perceived as a flexible and adaptable narrative form, capable of many kinds of variations across temporal and national contexts' (2001: 48). Departing from this more flexible definition, Tamar Liebes and Sonia Livingstone (1998), in a study of the local soaps produced in five European countries, have distinguished three subtypes: the community soap, the dynastic soap, and dyadic soap. The community soap, they say, is developed within the spirit of public service broadcasting, where a conscious effort to transmit social messages is apparent. Many of the serials broadcast before *Kyunki's* arrival, both on Doordarshan and on cable in India, seem closely identifiable with this subtype. The noticeable absence of this public service tradition in *Kyunki* seems to place it closer to the subtype of dynastic soaps exemplified by *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, where focus is on 'one powerful family, with some satellite outsiders—connected by romance, marriage or rivalry—on its periphery' (1998: 153). *Kyunki* also shares similarities with this genre in terms of budget, scale of production, and attention to fantasies of wealth and power, as well as its broadcast in primetime; however in its almost exclusive focus on female characters, along with the absence of a male patriarch or godfather, *Kyunki* also departs significantly from this generic subtype. In *Kyunki*, male characters function mostly as an index to position women relationally, as mother, wife or daughter-in-law, much in contrast to the American prime time exemplars where male characters have featured as central players. Thus, despite being broadcast in a similar and conventionally 'masculine hour' of television, *Kyunki* maintains a female focus refusing space to the masculine themes observed in such dynastic soaps. Another defining feature Liebes and Livingstone find in dynastic soaps is a conservatism 'in terms of power structure, family and gender relations' (1998: 161), but responses from my participants in my study pose significant challenges to such a view in relation to *Kyunki*, further raising methodological issues about making comparisons between scholarly textual insights and audience responses.

A significant further difference is the far greater restraint in *Kyunki* in respect to issues of sexuality and erotics, in its sensitivity to the conservative cultural context of India. While marriages and romantic relations certainly feature on it, it consciously refrains from the display of sexual dalliance, unlike in Western soaps.

These various similarities and differences between *Kyunki* and daytime and prime time soaps, and the identified subgenres, lead to the conclusion that *Kyunk*i constitutes a hybrid entity which draws on the many variable formats of soap. While K*yunki* appears inevitably as part of the global exchange of production concepts characteristic of television, it can also be noted that the production of *Kyunki* resists some dominant trends in the West. Its seriality is *continuous* where partial *discontinuity* is a marked feature of contemporary Western serial television. The term 'series-serial hybrid' (Creeber 2001; Hammond & Mazdon 2005) has been used to describe this dominant narrative format in contemporary Western television, where ongoing 'arc' narratives link self-contained episodes; in contrast *Kyunki* eschews self-contained narration. Furthermore, *Kyunki* has few of the qualities of restraint associated with so-called 'quality drama' now prevailing in the West. Quality drama is characterized by strong literate scripts designed to appeal to educated audiences, and in Jane Feuer's (2005) account, it is associated with a move away from the tradition of 'melodramatic excess' in the 1990s drama.

From the discussion so far, it is clear that although *Kyunki* closely identifies with the soap genre, there are important distinctions in its structure and form that complicates the serial's location in it. Thus it seems more appropriate to describe it as a hybrid and evolving form of the Western soap opera rather than simply as an imitation. In articulating the distinctions in *Kyunki*, I have primarily attempted to situate the serial in terms of its structural features. In further elaborating its location and distance from existing genres, I now turn my attention to its textual aesthetic, particularly the ways in which *Kyunki* deploys melodrama.

Melodramatic Aesthetic and *Kyunki*

Popular understandings have often assumed a close identity between soap opera and melodrama, mainly considering the dominant focus on personal and private realms in

both; however, Christine Gledhill an influential scholar of film and television criticism has sought to challenge this view. Exploring the relation between melodrama and soaps, Gledhill (1992) argues that despite a common focus on the private realms, their inter-relations are, otherwise, quite ambiguous. Amongst the many contrasting structural factors that she identifies, Gledhill cites the continuous and endless seriality of soaps, and the consequent lack of narrative closure in them, as particularly antagonistic to the melodramatic mode:

> Whereas melodrama, in order to produce its symbols and moral lessons—in particular its *deus-ex-machina* resolutions—is dependent on the freeze-frame of tableau and narrative closure, soap opera must continually destroy equilibrium and frame in order for the show to go on. (Gledhill 1992: 113)

Her point here, that the moral economy of melodrama is at odds with the reconfigurings of the endless seriality of soaps, raises important issues for this study of *Kyunki,* while giving weight to Ellis' (1982) early observation about the segmented and repetitive characteristic of television narratives.

In further establishing the ways in which the soap opera aesthetic distinguishes itself from melodrama, Glehill cites the centrality of talk to soaps. She says that in soaps, narrative progress is structured through talk, substituting the need to enact narrative events, which is an inevitable attribute in melodramatic forms. She points out that while flamboyant *mise en scene*, theatrical performance, spectacular actions, and grandiose delivery of banal sentiments are an important part of melodrama, in soap narratives events are incidental and are dominantly announced through talk, with characters informing each other and the audiences about the occurrence of an event though their everyday conversations. By identifying such distinctions, Gledhill (1992: 114) concludes that although 'soap operas appear to share a subject matter with melodrama, namely the home, family and heterosexual relations', in fact soap operas,

> take family and personal relationships at face value rather than mechanisms for melodramatic enactment, that dialogue similarly displaces the expressive codes of melodrama, and that endless seriality cuts across the formal demands of the melodramatic worldview. (1992: 144-115)

Gledhill's discussion helps to point to the way in which the textual aesthetic *Kyunki* represents a particular *rapprochement* of these forms. For example, dramatic and spectacular enactments of events are a common and dominant part of the series, as my earlier discussion of the spectacularly enacted sequence of Tulsi's shooting her son Ansh illustrates. Similarly, grandiose dialogue delivery is a common element; often drawing on religious, mythological and other social cultural adages and wisdoms, set pieces of dialogue in *Kyunki* exhibit an inclination for moralising. Further, in a rather excessive device used for rousing melodramatic effect, the serial's dramatic events or developments in the visuals are often accompanied with explosive blasts of thunder on the sound track. So characteristic of the genre is this device, that it has been the target of parody in various other films and television shows.

Characterisation in the serial is also consistent with the melodramatic mode of narration. Characters occupy one dimension of a polarized moral economy of good and evil, which scholars, as I noted earlier, have identified as central to melodrama. Those supportive of Amba and Tulsi in the serial are shown to be good, and worthy of audiences' sympathies, while the rest are shown as villainous – avaricious, selfish, venal and so on. As the principal character representing the ideal Indian woman, Tulsi represents a perfect blend of modern and traditional values. Dressed always in sarees and proudly wearing *sindoor* on her forehead, she presents as a traditional housewife. But at the same time she is characterized as confident and competent, as well as dutiful—enmeshing the traditional with the modern—and creating an ideal image of femininity for viewers. Tulsi's appealing virtues are cast into relief in contrast with the other female characters: mean and crafty Payal; the shrewd 'other woman' Mandira; the selfish and vindictive mother-in-law Savita. By way of declaring the moral and ideological positions of these women characters, the 'bad' women are shown to dress much less modestly than Tulsi, often glamorously in the brighter, expensive and flashy sarees and jewellery they wear. Another feature distinguishing *Kyunki* from soap forms is in the inclusion of moments of comic relief, which provide a break from the predominant high melodramatic mode of the serial. Daksha, one of Amba's daughters-in-law and Tulsi's aunts-in-law functions as the main comic character. Played by a well-known Gujarati actress, she often provides humour through her broad Gujarati-Hindi accent Hindi and occasionally English, as well as her all-consuming enthusiasm for Hindi movies.

The ongoing seriality, as Gledhill notes, result in a polarized moral economy that is nevertheless quite dynamic. As characters' relationship to Tulsi shifts, so does their place in the binary. For example, when Mihir was believed to be dead, the support and concern Savita showed for Tulsi, along with her advocating her remarriage, drew significant admiration. Similarly, Mihir has also constantly shifted in the binary; particularly in the way he grants and loses trust in Tulsi; however, as the heroine's husband, Mihir never degenerates morally to the degree of others in the plot, and his distrust of Tulsi generally results from misunderstandings. Thus, in *Kyunki* Tulsi constitutes the moral pivot, against which all other characters—male and female—assume their moral characterization and standing. From this perspective, character development appears far less nuanced and complex than in 'quality drama' produced by niche US cable providers such as HBO (Feuer 2005; Creeber 2004). Nevertheless, in their shifting positions as 'characters slip out of the symbolic placements designed by melodrama', they do accrue complexity (Gledhill 1992: 114). While Gledhill is primarily referring to the ways in which soap characters pose ideological challenges through their slippery or unconventional positioning, in *Kyunki* it is in their continuously shifting positions within the binary of good and bad that the characters appear somewhat complex.

The extravagant lifestyles and patterns of highly conspicuous consumption on the part of the Virani family are further examples of a dominant pattern in melodramatic forms. The family's wealth and elite social status is underlined at every opportunity – characters commonly make business and personal deals in multiples of *crores* (which equals ten million); a practice that has attracted quite a lot of criticism even amongst viewers. In the domestic space of the serial, the everyday and ordinary are eschewed in favour of an elaborate formality in dress and accessorizing. Such excess extends into plot events, in the kind of malice, rivalry and double dealing operating between family members.

While an orchestral score is an essential part of the organization of affect in the melodrama, *Kyunki* adds songs and music in distinctive ways. Besides the signature song, which is a motif of high drama (deployed primarily to further sentimentalize Tulsi's moral or emotional quandaries), the serial also appropriates applicable songs and tunes from well-known Hindi films, making a layered intertextual musical

background. Further, devotional hymns, verses from Hindu scriptures, and folk songs are also used amply in a nostalgic evocation of Hindu culture and traditions. Songs are accompanied by extravagantly celebrated rituals, traditions, and festivals observed in Hindu traditions, explicitly reinforcing the Hindu identity of the Viranis. The emphasis given to devotional religious traditions and culture further distances *Kyunki* and other K serials from the largely secular form of the Western soap and also many of the Indian serials where the reference to religion is largely implicit.

Further spectacle is provided in one-off specials events, which exploit the permeable diegesis of television. One recent example was occasioned by the anniversary of *Kyunki* in 2007. For this episode, two other similar family serials produced by Balaji Telefilms, which air regularly on prime time just as *Kyunki,* were seamlessly integrated to create a master crossover spectacular combining all three. The subsequent episodes resumed their individual narrative trajectories, with characters exhibiting highly negotiable memories of the events in the special episode.

So far in this section, I have deployed Gledhill's insightful analysis of melodrama and soap, in part, as a guide through which to illuminate the formal and aesthetic specificities of *Kyunki:* the complex hybridity of its form; the nature of its excess; its melodramatic conventions, and its endless seriality. These qualities also set the serial significantly apart from other family serials in India, with which it otherwise shares a thematic focus on, and address to, the family. While the other serials also draw on melodramatic conventions, in their focus on personal and domestic realms, their narratives however also find purchase in 'realist' conventions, significantly contrasting them from *Kyunki*, which boldly challenges conventions of realism.

It seems to follow from Gledhill's argument that realist conventions are associated with finite narratives, and that melodramatic conventions give way in the face of seriality. Establishing a definite link between seriality and melodrama, she states,

> The combination of family and seriality produces conditions in which devices employed by melodrama are almost inevitable: the return from the past, reversals of fortune, painful confrontations, and the interpolation of topical social, economic or political reference into personal, family dramas. (Gledhill 1992 : 122)

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I noted earlier in Chapter two that before *Kyunki*, a narrative structure of relentless seriality was rare in India. Whilst in terms of its excess, *Kyunki* seems clearly distanced from the 'realist' mode, at the same time its unending, quotidian and unresolved nature does tie it into patterns of everyday life. This complex relationship to realism is an important axis of my ethnographic investigation in the later chapters. Whilst *Kyunki* shows a blatant disregard for conventions of narrative verisimilitude, such as continuities with past events or consistencies in the ageing of characters, in the serial so blatant is this disregard, that elements of 'excess' seem to play a vital part of the narrative strategy.[16] For critics of the serial, these incongruities offer rich pickings and many possibilities for ridicule, but this misses the point of the pleasures for dedicated viewers as my findings on reception will show.

Melodrama and Realism

Whilst the many ways in which *Kyunki* deploys melodrama, along with its variable departures from the norms of realist modes, explain the contestation and denigration it has faced, viewers' engagement with the serial reveals a completely different picture. It is important, then, in the final section of this chapter to directly tackle the relationship between melodrama and realism. Realism is a vast field of enquiry, well beyond the scope of my project; however, some selected references provide a productive backdrop to my subsequent analysis of viewers' engagement with the serial.

In beginning to understand the significance viewers find in the serial, it is useful to note John Fiske's point that excess is a form of a hyperbole:

> *Excess as hyperbole* works through a double articulation which is capable of bearing both the dominant ideology and a simultaneous critique of it, and opens up an equivalent dual subject position for the reader. (…) Soap operas are often derided for their excess, yet it is precisely this characteristic that allows the complex reading postions assumed by many fans. These fans treat the operas as if they were real and sometimes relate to their characters as though they were their own family. Yet they know what they are doing, they know that their pleasure in

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[16] For example, the rendering of the age of characters, as in the character of Amba who is close to 100 years in the diegesis is hardly shown as and the lack of noticeable age differences between those playing grandmothers and granddaughters seems to exemplify *Kyunki's* deliberate disregard for realism

reading soap opera as real life is illusory and that they are, according to their more normal standards, being somewhat silly in doing so. (1987: 91).

Thus despite the unreality or excessive mode, there is some connection to reality in the serial that viewers identify and make sense of, which Ang (1985) explains through her well-known study of *Dallas*, as 'melodramatic imagination'. She says that working on a usually symbolic and emotional level, viewers can connect with the various subject positions offered in the text, even if, on the face of it the representations appear unreal. Anjali Monteiro and K P Jayasankar (2000), further allude to this notion, in their conception of the 'imaginary/normal', when discussing how spectators position themselves in relation to the text. Similarly, in *Kyunki* also, although the representations are excessive, the emotional conflicts Tulsi's character, for example, experiences in the narrative, quite strongly invite viewers to empathize with her realities.

In this section, Gledhill's work again provides another important lead. She is one of the most widely credited scholars contributing to the appreciation of melodrama in film studies. Mercer and Shingler (2004) note that it has been primarily due to Gledhill's efforts during the eighties, of identifying realism in melodramatic forms as opposed to 'classic realist' forms, that melodrama has undergone a redefinition, and simultaneously found critical recognition. Until then, melodrama had been considered as a genre characterized by an absence of 'realism', as distinct from 'classic realist texts' – a grouping that was held to operate outside generic classification or formula, offering a representation of reality that was unmediated. One of Gledhill's important contributions was to intervene into the polarized critical status of these genres, through an interrogation of the underlying assumptions by drawing on feminist critiques. Gledhill argues that the value of realism in classic realist texts arises not simply in its authentic representation of reality, but in its orientation to bourgeois and patriarchal ideologies in the way it represents the world:

> Classic realist texts (…) reproduce bourgeois ideology because they implicate the spectator in a single point of view onto a coherent, hierarchically ordered representation of the world, in which social contradictions are concealed and ultimately resolved through mechanisms of displacement and substitution. In this process the spectator is 'interpellated' as the 'individual subject' of bourgeois ideology. (1987: 8)

Seeing such resolutions in the realist narratives as also helping to 'resecure the homogenous identity of a patriarchal subject' (1987: 9), she conversely argues that melodrama is seen as unrealistic and carries a pejorative sense, because of its dominant association with female concerns and feminine discourses. Similar claims were also made by other feminist scholars of soap opera through their empirical and ethnographic work as I have noted in my literature review in Chapter one. Further to this point, Gledhill contrasts the higher critical value enjoyed by other 'non-feminine' or seemingly 'masculine' texts, such as nineteenth century theatre and also early twentieth century Hollywood genres like the western, gangster, and action genres, despite the melodramatic qualities they unmistakably carry, for example in their fantastic and spectacular action scenes. Thus challenging the notion that melodrama is primarily a genre restricted to women's forms or 'women's weepies', Gledhill urges a rethink and rehabilitation of melodrama, reconceptualising it as a *mode* which manifests across genres and audiences.

Seeking to demonstrate the cultural significance of melodrama and restore its critical value in academic spheres mainly, Gledhill (1987, 1992) also endeavours to define the *radical* potential of melodrama. Emphasizing again that it should be assessed as a mode altogether distinct from realist texts, she attempts to establish the ways in which melodrama engages with reality. In this regard, she emphasizes the moral and ethical enterprise involved in melodrama. Drawing on Peter Brooks' (1976) seminal work *The Melodramatic Imagination*, she argues that,

> The melodramatic mode organizes an imaginative world constructed on the principle of terminal conflict between polarized moral forces that run through the social fabric and are expressed in personal and familial terms extending beyond the biological family into all areas of social life (1992: 107)

This polarised moral force in melodrama, which I have raised earlier in relation to *Kyunki's* narrative, Gledhill says is a moral and ethical project the form engages in to fulfil a certain need in society: it defines the socio-political arrangements, in a period when religion and the sacred order—the earlier frameworks for defining such arrangements—have been displaced, through the expansion of capitalist societies (1992: 107). Gledhill identifies melodrama's mechanism of 'personalization' as

central its engagement in this social project, which she notes is an ideological source for realist modes of drama. But the difference in the two modes of drama, she defines as follows:

> In melodrama what people feel and do, how they relate to each other, is of utmost consequence—the source of meaning, the justification of human action. Personalization in this respect is not simply a realist technique of individualizing the social world. Nor does it simply as is often said, "displace" social and political issues into personal or familial terms in order to achieve a bourgeois fantasy resolution. Personalization is melodrama's primary strength. The webs of economic, political, and social power in which melodrama's characters get caught up are represented not as abstract forces but in terms of desires which express conflicting ethical and political identities and which erupt in the actions and transactions of daily life. (p. 108)

The point she makes is that, while in realist modes, the narratives seek to portray individuals as representing particular social forces or political dynamics, the reverse occurs in melodrama, wherein social and political understanding emerges and is revealed through the moral and ethical conflicts the characters face in melodrama. In other words, realist modes seem to portray a defined or predetermined social or political dilemma—often with a bourgeois resolution—whereas melodrama, in seeking an intricate focus on the microcosmic transactions of daily life, reveals the various and multiple social, moral, ethical dilemmas that intersect in the constitution of life. Thus for Gledhill, melodrama in engaging with reality, does not rely on simply empirical representation, but takes 'authentic documents from the "real world" and push[es] them towards the symbolic activity of metaphor' (1992: 108), where metaphor—through music, gesture and other cinematic techniques—expresses the otherwise inexpressible.

This reconceptualisation of melodrama and the insight into its workings that Gledhill offers significantly helps to explain the text and also appeal of *Kyunki*. It offers an explanation for the significance viewers may find in *Kyunki's* insistent focus on domesticity and micropolitics of family, a focus not seen previously on Indian serials. Earlier serials mostly reliant on 'realist' modes, explored definitive discourses, and sought to represent specific larger social problems within the individual context of family, for example: social struggles of middle class families in *Hum Log*; history and trauma of partition in *Buniyaad*; complexities of extra marital relations in *Saans,*

Hasratein and also Kora Kagaz; dowry and financial burden for parents of daughters in *Amaanat*; divorce in Heena and so on. In contrast to these, *Kyunki*'s narrative is not hinged on a particular social issue, but works with a constellation of issues exploring family politics in all its complexity and messiness, facilitated by its melodramatic form.

When defining the relationship of melodrama and realism, it is also important to refer to Steve Neale's (2000) comments on the concept of 'verisimilitude', which refers to systems of expectation and hypothesis that are invoked when audiences interact with different genres. In other words, the term refers to rules and norms followed in genres that construct or constitute the genres reality, thus making the narrative coherent, internally consistent and pleasurable for audiences. In defining this link between genre and reality, Neale cites the influential semiotician Tzvetan Todorov to distinguish between two forms of verisimilitude: generic verisimilitude and cultural verisimilitude (2000: 32). Generic verisimilitude refers to the compliance of texts to the identified conventions of the genre in order to appear plausible, for example, the acceptability of an external laugh track in sitcoms, while the same would appear jarring in a detective or mystery serial. Thus music and sentimental songs in *Kyunki* perhaps appear acceptable because of its melodramatic form, whereas the earlier serials closer to realist conventions never included these devices. The second form of verisimilitude refers to norms of representing social and cultural realities, such that cultural verisimilitude refers not to an objective 'real', but to what audiences accept as real: 'The verisimilar is not a relation between discourse and its referent (the relation of truth), but between discourse and what readers believe is true' (Todorov in Neale, 2000: 32).

This distinction is a productive one in opening our understanding of the different notions of reality involved in *Kyunki* and audiences' complex investments in the meaningfulness of the serial. The subtle distinctions that Neale discusses in respect to notions of verisimilitude can also be linked to Gledhill's earlier point about melodrama (discussed above): that realism in melodrama does not simply reside in empirical representation, but also in the symbolic activity of metaphor and what audiences can accept as real. In this light the seemingly excessive or absurd elements

in *Kyunki* such as extravagant metaphor, dialogue, visuals, and music can be viewed more sympathetically.

Understanding melodrama as a narrative *mode*, rather than as 'a failure or excess of realism' allows for a better appreciation of the variable ways that realism has operated in relation to melodramatic forms (Landman 2006: 104). In her study of 'imperial' cinema produced in Australia between 1920's and 1950s, Jane Landman notes how claims about authenticity and naturalism were made on the basis of location work or dramatic thrills (rendering of a dramatic events), for films perceptibly melodramatic in mode. In addition to the examples of variable realism invoked in melodrama that Landman suggests, we can also add the rendering of socio-political formations or the emotional and ideological realisms pursued in them, as can be seen, for example, in the gender and familial formations in *Kyunki*, notwithstanding its otherwise excessively melodramatic mode. It is important to also note however that the appeal and contestation does not seem to lie only in the various occasions of verisimilitude, but also in the challenges posed to verisimilitude. Neale also comments on this when he states that generic and social cultural regimes of verisimilitude are involved, not just in the compliant relationship of texts to generic and cultural verisimilitude, but also in transgressions and gaps, as in 'deviations from the norms of sense and logic, or departures from dominant cultural models of action, speech and behavior' (2000: 34). Such transgressions and deviations can also be seen in *Kyunki*, and perhaps has been a reason for public contestation over its value and meanings. In contrast to the didactic realism of earlier state-sponsored serials, the 'aspirational lifestyles, stylized sets and a very upmarket and glossy image' (Krishna 2004) of *Kyunki* are as much part of its transgressive approach as are its raising of fraught issues about female morality, family duty, remarriage and so on.

In understanding the cultural significance of these melodramatic representations it is also useful to take note of Gledhill's discussion of the crossover effect, 'as media fictions circulate in society, supplying generic signs as cultural signposts, and conversely, reabsorbing cultural codes into generic worlds as markers of authenticity or contemporaneity' (2000: 238). In *Kyunki*, such crossovers are readily apparent in terms of the 'aspirational' sarees and jewellery designs inspired by the serial, that are

widely available in markets in India, which are objects of desire for some of the viewers in my study.

Finally, in defining the relationship between melodrama and realism, melodrama studies have also explored the function of pathos and its provocation of tears. We can see the importance of this function in *Kyunki* also, in the deep empathy the protagonist Tulsi especially evokes. Mercer and Shingler (2004: 90) note that while in earlier feminist interpretations pathos was aligned with oppression, in contrast to anger which was seen as liberating, later feminist interpretations have queried this equation. Mercer and Shingler cite Linda Williams' (1998) work, which conceives tears as having the potential for 'future power' by provoking anger at the spectacle of pathetic and virtuous suffering, thereby arguing that pathos does not necessarily imply powerlessness. Nevertheless, when considering the function of pathos in *Kyunki,* in terms of these arguments, an added complexity that needs to be considered is that, while Tulsi evokes deep empathy in her similar virtuous suffering, there is also a certain 'agential' aspect about her character's ideological power that is deeply embedded in viewers' engagement with her. Thus, her appeal seems to lie not just in empathy, but also in an admiration of the power she exhibits, which for most women viewers would be hard to realize in their own lives.

These debates and scholarship usefully problematise approaches that polarize distinctions between a melodramatic mode and conceptions of realism, which is a key axis operating in the responses of my interview participants. The participants discuss notions of realism, which can operate in distinctly different registers in melodrama, as compared to 'realist' forms. By way of concluding this chapter, I quote the following provocative excerpt from an interview with Ekta Kapoor, the creator of *Kyunki*. Published on *Indiantelevision.com* in 2003, Kapoor simultaneously reveals the concept behind the serial and the genre, and, touches on many of the points made in this chapter:

> Interviewer: Why are most of your serials in keeping with "the country's cultural values"?
> Ekta Kapoor: Most of the rich people do not need values, most of the poor do not have time for them. Hence middle class values are what my serials are about. These middle-class values

are incidentally in keeping with the cultural ethos of the country. As far as I am concerned, economically I belong to the high class, but morally to the middle class […]

I wanted to make a serial about a family that lived together. I wanted to make a serial around what I do not have. There are four of us in the house – we saw our cousins only on holidays. I missed us all living together. I created realism by creating real life characters, I created idealism by creating a family. And of course, I kept my flag of middle-class values flying.

[….]

I realised that one subject which holds eternal interest for us Indians is the family – every Indian family is bound by traditions, festivals, etc and every family tends to celebrate occasions with relatives, every family has certain characters who are good and bad, or rather, have particular habits.

Then, I weaved all this realisation together. That's it.

[…]

My serials are seen by families sitting together at the dinner table. When I say families, it obviously includes all the children.

(Interview with Vicky Lalwani, Indiantelevision.com, posted on May 29, 2003)

Kapoor confounds idealism and reality on the one hand, and values and family, on the other: just 'weaved […] together'. A broad moral framework of middle class values, inclusive of joint family living and ritual expressions of familial and religious culture are bound up with the national in this quote, which puts the family at the centre of the interest of the nation and the serial at the centre of this address. The subsequent chapters will demonstrate the success of her strategy.

PART III

Reception

Summary of Empirical Findings of the Study

In examining the popular appeal of *Kyunki* this thesis has so far reviewed literature in the field, and critically examined the institutional contexts of television broadcasting in India, and as well as the textual characteristics of the serial itself. In light of these discussions, the thesis now turns to reception in this third and final part. The ethnographic family interviews form the primary basis for this further inquiry, and are presented in the three following chapters. This short section, which draws on my survey findings, provides a preliminary sketch of the social profile of the study participants, and an overview of their domestic viewing contexts and situations.

Social Profile of Study Participants

In the chapter on research methodology, I indicated that the sample of this study includes only households in Ahmedabad who are of Gujarati ethnic background and have access to cable and satellite television. While the majority of the participants have been drawn from within this predefined demographic, it may be noted that in a few cases, particularly in attempting to enlist Muslim households, there has been some deviation.[17]

In defining the social and cultural profile of the study participants, the descriptive summary I provide here is based on the analysis of the survey, details of which are presented in the tables in Appendix 1.

Out of the hundred families who participated in the survey, the majority are Hindus (ninety one percent), with the rest comprising of Muslims (seven percent), Jains (one percent) and Parsis (one percent), a distribution which roughly reflects the religious

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[17]Although all the seven Muslim households enlisted in the study have access to cable and satellite television, it may be noted that, ethnically, they are not Gujaratis, but belong to the neighbouring State of Rajasthan and to be more precise, they belong to the Chippa community. However since they had been residents of Ahmedabad for the past forty to fifty years, ever since their forefathers migrated most seemed to consider themselves as Gujaratis. The reason for this moderation in the sample selection is that Muslim households were found only in one of the five suburbs selected in the study, which is not very unusual considering the polarised nature of housing between Hindus and Muslims in the city. In the suburb of Astodia located in the old and inner district of Ahmedabad, the majority of Muslim households I came across belong to the above-mentioned community. From anecdotal estimates of the participants the suburb has about 40,000 to 50,000 Chippa population.

composition of the population of Ahmedabad.[18] In terms of family structures, joint families (fifty two percent) form majority of the sample, with nuclear families (forty three percent) forming the next largest category. The remaining five percent includes single parent and other complex kinship formations. Linguistic preferences and use in families show Gujarati is the most commonly spoken language, which is not surprising considering that the sample essentially comprised Gujaratis. In the seven Muslim households, Chippa and Urdu are the preferred languages. In roughly one third (thirty one percent) of households, family members also speak other languages. English (seventeen percent) and Hindi (sixteen percent) are the most commonly spoken second languages, with some making use of both these at home.

While the above indicators largely provide a sense about the cultural profile of the sample, a sense of the social profile develops by examining some indicators of socio economic class. On applying the socio economic classification SEC,[19] which is popularly used in market research, to my study sample, minor variations in the socio economic distribution can be seen between the survey sample and the interview sample, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Socio Economic Class of Study Participants (Percent Distribution)

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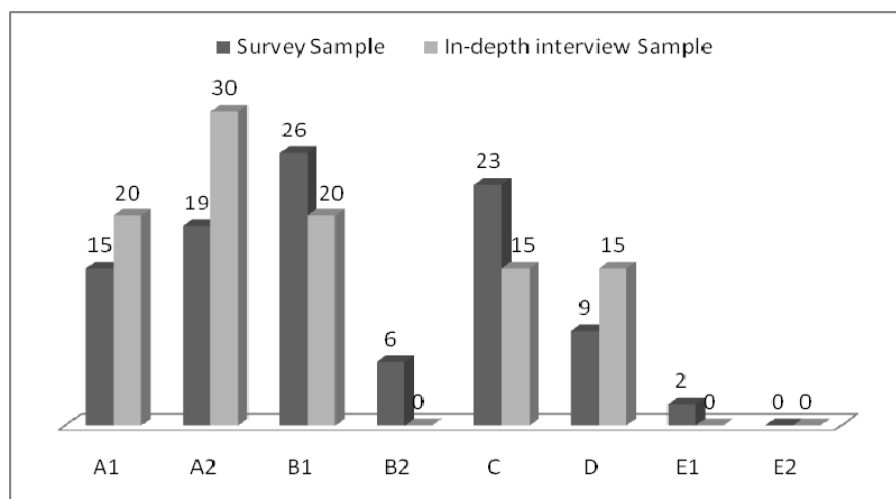
[18] Population distribution by religion is: Hindus (82.6 percent), Muslims (12.4 percent) according to the 'Statistical Outline for 2005-2006', Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation at http://www.egovamc.com/amc_budget/Sta_report.asp

[19] This model of classification has been developed by the Market Research Society of India. It defines eight social groups, in a descending hierarchy A1, A2, B1, B2, C, D, E1 and E2. Based on the occupation and education of the chief wage earner of a household, in this hierarchy A1and A2 represent the upper class, B1 and B2 the upper middleclass, C the middle class, D the lower middle class and, E1and E2 the lower classes.

The figure shows that the proportion of households from the upper socio economic categories such as SEC A1 and A2 are higher in the interview sample as compared to the survey sample. At the same time, it also shows a slight increase in the interview sample of participants in the lower economic group of SEC D. From these figures it can also be noted that, on the whole, in the study there are significantly fewer families in the study from the lower socio economic segment. Considering that cable and satellite television subscription is higher amongst the middle and upper middle classes in India, the distribution of the sample appears fairly consistent with general societal patterns. It may also be noted that in selecting my sample no specific distribution quota was specifically sought, so the existing pattern of distribution mainly reflects what has emerged from the sample drawn.

While the SEC classification or measure offers a broad understanding of the social class of the study participants, it should also be noted that notions of class are highly fluid and variable. As I have explained earlier, two determinants of this classification are the occupation and education of the chief earner of the household; however, as social class also includes other variables, such as area of residence, political standing, association with groups and organisations, lifestyle, and so on, I shall present a few examples of households I interviewed in the study to demonstrate variations within the above class categories and also to provide a better sense of what the class definitions entail.

For example, according to the classification, both the Patel family and Lohana family who participated in the in-depth interviews belong to SEC A1, the upper most category in the classification. The Patel family comprises six members, Chetan aged forty-eight, his wife Manisha, forty-two, their son Kiran and his wife Janaki, both twenty-two, their daughter Sanya, twelve, and Chetan's mother Sheelaben who is seventy-two. This family qualifies in SEC A1 on account of the education and occupation of the principal wage earner, Chetan. He has a graduate degree in arts and runs a fairly big garment manufacturing business, with a factory of his own. While this information was accessed through the survey, from the interview it became clear that the business, in fact, is jointly owned with Chetan's own natal and extended family, with his father and three other brothers also having ownership in it, although since some family dispute, the business has been divided amongst the brothers now.

This family lives in a very modern and contemporary looking new town house in one of the upmarket suburbs on the west side of the city. They told me they had employed professional interior designers to design and furnish their home. Their open plan kitchen has state of the art kitchen appliances and fittings, and with their big screen LCD television, and general high style, their home portrays sophisticated affluence. They also own two premium cars. However, in personal attire and general attitudes, however Manisha and Chetan were much less sophisticated and modern, than the appearance of their home would suggest. While their home and décor revealed a taste for modern living, the interview with them (which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters) reveal that their investment in contemporary sophisticated style was located in its materialist appeal, rather than being a sign of sophisticated cultural or intellectual interests.

In contrast the Lohana family, although they too qualify as SEC A1, are significantly different to the Patels. The Lohana family comprises six members: Himanshu, and his wife Jasodha both in mid-fifties; their son Anil and his wife Hiral, both in their mid twenties; another son Nikhil who is twenty-three; and Himanshu's elderly mother Parvati, who is about eighty. Himanshu's education and occupation classifies this family in the category of SEC A1. He has a graduate degree in science and works as tax consultant and controller with an established private company, after having taken retirement from the government organisation he worked for. All other members in this family, except the elderly mother are employed in gainful work.

They live in a large, but plainly and modestly decorated apartment on the same side of the city. On one side of their living room is a fairly old and unremarkable sofa, which faces the television and frames it with a divan on the other side with a finely embroidered hand-woven cover, and two sofa chairs. A bright yellow telephone on a side table stands out conspicuously in this room, in this sparsely furnished apartment. However, while the décor is rather plain and representative of conventional middle class taste, the interview with the family reveals a taste for modern values usually associated with greater sophistication. They all speak good English, in fact much of the interview was conducted in English, and the discussion and interactions between

the members in this family reveals their relative lack of concern for tradition and a willingness to explore new ways of living in India.

The brief description of the two families reveals some of the differences within class categories and also illustrates the qualities of individuals and the standard of living in these categories. Similar differences are evident in the other class categories too, but since I have made the point about differences with the groups, I will now present an example of one family from the lower socio-economic category, in order to illustrate the diverse range of families. Amongst the three families that fall in the category of SEC D, are two Muslim families who participated in the in-depth interviews. Both live in the *pols* of Ahmedabad and have fairly similar domestic settings. One of these is the Batliwala family comprising four members: Ruksanabanu forty, her husband Javed, forty-five, son Farhan twenty-two and his new bride Mumtaz, who is eighteen. Both father and son work as contract drivers of taxis and other small utility vehicles. Because of the seasonal nature of their work, it appeared they had lean and lucrative phases in their employment. For some additional income, Ruksana also works as a seamstress from home for the women in their neighbourhood.

They live in an exclusively Muslim locality, which has a mix of both lower and upper class housing. In some parts of this locality, different classes live next door, in others a more divisional cluster is apparent. The old multi-storeyed heritage type buildings are where the middle and upper classes mainly reside, and the smaller worn out dwellings are where the poorer and those of the lower economic end make their home. Typical of the walled city area, a network of narrow lanes criss-crosses through the locality with some lanes just wide enough for a scooter or cycle to pass. The Batliwala family lives in a tiny one-room unit in the poorer clusters along of row of similar such units. Each unit opens right onto the lane with hardly any space between the two. For the Batliwala family their room serves multiple purposes—living, cooking, dining and resting all take place in this tiny space. They have a television set in one corner, with Ruksana's sewing machine next to it and a bed on the other side. In another corner is their cooking space with the gas cylinder and hotplate kept on the floor. A little loft above and space under the bed serve as their storeroom. The toilet and bathroom are shared facilities available to their cluster of units. In view of the lack of space in their

home, they and other neighbours all use part of the lane as their courtyard, with each having a coir cot in front of their respective units.

The descriptions illustrate the range of differences in the cultural and social profile of some of the families who participated in the study. In the next section I will briefly outline the television viewing patterns and behaviour that emerged through the survey.

Overview of Television Access and Viewing Habits

The majority of the households in the survey sample (seventy-nine percent) own one television set. Only sixteen percent own two sets and much fewer (five percent) own three sets. Most households have fairly new televisions, with nearly all (ninety-seven percent) owning a colour television set. These televisions have, on an average, a capacity to receive around eighty channels. Siticable (fifty-six percent) and Incable (thirty-six percent), the two dominant cable distributors of Ahmedabad, are the service providers of the majority of the households in the sample. Most of the families have been subscribers of cable and satellite television for over ten years. Some families claimed to have been subscribers for over twenty years, even though satellite television had not yet been during this time launched in India. They clarified that it was the video cable that they had access to at that time. On an average, families pay over two hundred and thirty rupees in cable fees every month, with significant variation also evident in the fees households pay within the sample.[20]

In terms of television viewing behaviour, one of the questions in the survey asked what times the television remains on in their households. In response to this question, the survey found that on weekdays in all the households (hundred percent) television is switched on during prime time between 8 pm to 11 pm. The next most popular viewing time is the early evening between 6 pm to 8 pm. On weekends too, prime time is the most popular time slot with close to two thirds (sixty-two percent) switching on the television during this time. At the weekends, the second most popular time is in the afternoon between noon to 4 pm with almost half (forty-eight

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[20] At an average exchange rate of 34.2 Rupees for every Australian Dollar for March 2005 when most of the survey data was gathered, the amount translates to 6.7 AUD. Exchange rate from http://www.x-rates.com/d/INR/AUD/hist2005.html

percent) saying they watch television in this period. On an average in the survey of households, television remains on for more than five hours on weekdays and above six hours on weekends. Six families in the sample stated that they have the television on for ten hours or more on weekdays and twenty families stated that it remains on for the same or greater amount of time. In a couple of families, the television is on continuously for almost eighteen hours, from the time they wake up till the time they retire to bed.

In most families, there are two forms of watching television: the family together sitting to watch, and individuals watching separately. Both are common and frequent practices. The entire family watching together is more common on weekdays (eighty-six percent) than on weekends (sixty-eight percent). Amongst the programmes that the families watch together are the three popular serials of Star Plus: *Kasautii Zindagi Kay* which airs at 8.30 pm, *Kahaani* at 10 pm and *Kyunki* at 10.30 pm. On weekends, families enjoy watching films together on the television. When asked to identify the family members watching the largest amount of television, respondents in the survey have, in majority of cases (fifty-four percent), identified a female member, and in terms of age, these members are usually (thirty-two percent) aged over fifty years. Teenagers, between the ages eleven to twenty years (twenty-three percent), are the next commonly identified family members.

Of the hundred families surveyed, seventy-five households have at least one member who is a current viewer of *Kyunki*. Response to detailed questions about who in the family watches the serial reveals that, of the total 479 members whose responses were collected, 238 members are current viewers of *Kyunki* (almost fifty percent). A gender analysis of these viewers shows that two thirds (sixty-five percent) are women compared to thirty-five percent of male viewers. In terms of the age of these viewers, although the largest category is of viewers over fifty years, viewing age amongst the other age groups is a fairly evenly distributed, with the twenty one to thirty age group (twenty-four percent) forming the next largest category.

Unsurprisingly, Tulsi is the favourite serial character with eighty-four percent of the sample households. When asked to identify the most enjoyable features of the serial, almost two thirds (sixty-four percent) state the portrayal of joint family living as their

favourite, followed next by good performances (thirty-six percent) and the depiction of relations between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (twenty-nine percent). In twenty-eight percent of families, the participants say they have a member in the family who strongly dislikes the serial and in twenty-six families they say at least one member who has discontinued watching the serial. Amongst the stated reasons for dislike the most common are that the narrative is unrealistic (thirty-eight percent) and that narrative length is unnecessarily prolonged (thirty-three percent).

Whilst I have noted in the methodology that the survey presented no clear social indices to guide my analysis of the ethnographic findings, this discussion provides a useful background to the following chapters in demonstrating the following points:

- Cable viewing is quite widespread penetrating into quite poor families.
- Television or cable is no more a novelty to the families, as most have owned for over ten years now.
- Television viewing is an integral part of families' schedule with most having the television switched on in their homes for over five hours each day.
- Also television viewing extends into relative late hours until 11 pm, with two of the most popular programmes of families, *Kyunki* and *Kahaani* scheduled after 10 pm.
- K serials are popular across all social classes and across age groups, although it is slightly more popular amongst female viewers.
- Family viewing is just as likely to be films as serials, but serials are more likely to be watched by mothers and daughters, or mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law than the rest of the family.
- Tulsi is unquestionably a popular character in the families, and the invocation of joint family living forms an important part of the engagement with *Kyunki*.

CHAPTER 5

Political Spaces of Popular Television: Uncovered in the Reception of *Kyunki*

> Men only bring money home. For them family is not a responsibility unlike for women. For men, it's a hobby if they wish to they can.
> (Karuna, thirty-four, female, school teacher, Parmar Family)

> They are showing false things, reality is not like that. In those serials on Star Plus, ladies are shown of status and men are shown to be cows. Men have no spine in them.
> (Chetan, forty-two, male, garment business owner, Patel Family)

Based on the survey this study conducted, the previous section has provided a broad social profile, as well as useful background information about the viewing behaviour and domestic settings of my study's participants. Along with this current chapter, the remaining chapters in this final part of the thesis draw on the ethnographic interviews I conducted with families who view *Kyunki*, as a way of demonstrating the intricate and complex family dynamics involved in its reception. This chapter identifies and discusses the discourses the serial's text activates for its audiences, paying attention to the ideological engagement the text dominantly opens ups for its readers. The subsequent chapter illuminates the moral economy of the household, or what I refer to as the 'family ethos', and the operations of this ethos in intervening or shaping in the meanings and discourses viewers engage with in the serial. The role of the genre or textual aesthetics in shaping appeal or engagement will be examined in Chapter seven, the final chapter of the thesis.

I have so far stressed, on the basis of my review of literature, that audiences are formed through intersecting discourses found in texts and audience contexts. The aim of this current chapter is to identify and understand meanings and discourses and the political dimensions of these discourses, dominantly involved in the reception of *Kyunki*.

My analysis reveals that notions of womanhood in particular, along with interrelated notions of family and nation, are deeply implicated in the readings of the serial. It can also be seen that the meanings forged by viewers are far from unified, and are instead

highly contradictory and entangled in many competing and conflicting threads. From such contestations over the meanings of *Kyunki* which the study finds in the families interviewed, and also considering the fact that hardly any of the participants are dispassionate or indifferent in their views about the serial, the current chapter argues that a significant part of the popularity of the serial lies in the political space it constitutes for both committed and uncommitted viewers. 'Political' here refers not to the organized space or processes of mobilizing power, but to the informal everyday processes through which the society is politically constructed. Thus, in what follows, the chapter examines interpretations, questions and discourses that viewers appropriate from the serial, revealing viewers' attempts to mediate social structures of power and hierarchy, by either defending or reconfiguring their perceptions of social realities through the meanings they forge. On the basis of this analysis, the chapter concludes that the appeal of *Kyunki* lies not just in nostalgic and cultural pleasures, but also in part to its ability to form an engaging political space where viewers and others can mediate social ideologies and meanings, and attempt to transform or reinforce structures of social power.

Negotiating Womanhood through *Kyunki*

From the enduring and overwhelming appeal that Tulsi finds amongst my participants, and amongst audiences more widely, it is apparent that the figure of woman is centrally at issue in the negotiation of meanings in *Kyunki*. Her significance as the driving force or the 'soul of the serial' is recognised even amongst those family members I met who do not have a particular liking for the serial. In addition to the focus on Tulsi, notions of womanhood are more broadly and consistently foregrounded in the reception of *Kyunki*. The following extract from my interview with the 'Bhatt' family demonstrates this point. In this middle class family of four, Dinesh, fifty, is the sole earner, working as an assistant manager in a textile mill. His wife Kapila, who is forty-nine, stays home, and their two children, a son and a daughter in their late teens, are pursuing higher education. The men of this family in particular take a disapproving view of the serial and this exchange between the mother, son and myself, reveals not just the nature of their concerns, but also a sense of the family dynamics involved in viewing *Kyunki*, as the mother cedes ground to her son's critique:

Priya (to Kapila): So you are saying women are shown strong in some way.

Kapila (mother): Yes they show strong women and also show her as religious and moral. That is to do what is righteous (*dharmic hoy evu karvanu*).

Priya: So you like the righteousness of Tulsi…

Hemant (son): They also show that women are getting dominant in today's world. In Ekta's serials women are definitely getting dominant.

Priya (to Kapila): Do you think so too, that the serials characterize women as dominating?

Kapila: Women are stronger.

Hemant: They show Mihir cannot solve the problems like Tulsi can!

Kapila: Yes it's a little exaggerated.

Priya: Do you think what Tulsi does ordinary women cannot do?

Kapila: No we can't.

Hemant: Ordinary woman would think her husband is the head of the household and let him decide for the family. But here Tulsi thinks she is the head of the family.

Kapila: Yes, they show women a little forward these days (*saame batave che*)

(Family 20)

The movement from Kapila's focus on morality, to Hemant's anxiety to assert the primacy of men in the 'ordinary' Indian family reveals how notions of gender and the family, readily slide into notions about, or come to represent, the nation, and the current state of the nation. These linkages have been the subject of much interest in the work of feminist postcolonial theorists, whose work points to the ways that the family operates as a gendered concept metonymically linked to ideas of nation (see Yuval-Davis 1997; Collins 1998 and McClintock 1998). Morley explores similar links between home, gender and nation in his relatively recent work *Home Territories* (2000). As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Tulsi as a daughter-in-law, wife, mother, mother-in-law and grandmother, has come to simultaneously represent various and multiple familial positions. The intertwining of family, gender and nation is, however, particularly apparent in her characterization as the *bahu* (daughter-in-law) of the Virani household, and it is worth noting that it is in this role that she is primarily imagined as a perfect embodiment of Indian womanhood. This idealisation of the role of *bahu* also revealed in the appeal of the serial's portrayal of traditional culture and values *(sanskar)*—for example joint family living, respect for elders, and the various rituals and customs of India—shifts responsibility for this image of the nation on the shoulders of women.

Concerns about womanhood featured on Indian television have always been embedded in discourses of family and domesticity. In Chapter three particularly, I traced developments and shifts within Indian television serials that nevertheless maintained female characters in variously powerful and inspiring roles from the 1980s to the 1990s in such serials as *Hum Log,* as well as in mythological serials like *Ramayan*. In this chapter I also note how *Kyunki*'s restriction of its female characters to the familial and domestic realms, has been condemned as retrograde and regressive. Surprisingly, however, such a concern is almost completely absent amongst my participants. While none in the entire cross-section of families interviewed found it concerning that womanhood in the serial is almost solely constituted through family roles, many participants seemed alarmed rather, with the 'modernistic' conceptualizations in *Kyunki*. For some of them, such modern conceptualizations seem so threatening that they even want to kill or 'bash up' the producer, Ekta Kapoor, for corrupting women and society. It is significant, if unsurprising, that those expressing such extreme views are all men, most who have stopped watching the serial or have expressed distaste for it. For women, meanwhile, Tulsi largely figures as an epitome of womanhood. It must also be noted, however, that although the character is much admired by women, she is also seen as confronting. I attribute this ambivalent relation to women's own domestic realities and discursive frameworks, as I will demonstrate below. For now, it can be noted that these contrasting views—such as press condemnation and wide variance in men's and women's readings of Tulsi— are indicative of how subjective concerns about progress, empowerment and modernity are entangled in the dominant readings.

If the above discussion suggests that the reception of *Kyunki* is structured along gendered lines, then I need to clarify that viewers' approbation of Tulsi is far from consistent even amongst women. Similarly, although most men I interviewed voice opposition to Tulsi, some also find her appealing. In understanding the complexities in viewers' response to this character, and the questions Tulsi's raises about womanhood for viewers, it is important to understand aspects involved in the idealization of Tulsi.

Idealization, *Dharma* and Femininity

In audience discourse Tulsi is constituted as an ideal in two significant ways. The first draws on patriarchal notions of womanhood, and idealises Tulsi for submitting to the family in her acceptance of her responsibility for family harmony and unity. The second dimension of her idealisation is constituted through notions less exclusive to womanhood, involving more universal principles of righteousness, in an ethical, as well as religious, sense. It is this second dimension which depicts the character as resolutely righteous, which opens up concerns as it challenges and even conflicts with gendered ideals.

Tulsi's resolute goal in the serial—of maintaining the integration and harmony of the family—configures her within traditional gendered roles. This aspect of her character is established in the serial from quite early on; from the time Tulsi is initiated into the Virani household through to her marriage to Mihir. As I have described in Chapter four, Tulsi is contrasted strongly with other women, in the precedence she gives to family interests and the close relationship she shares with the family matriarch, her grandmother-in-law Amba. Many families said that it was this endearing picture of a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship that was the serial's initial appeal when they started viewing in 2000.

Despite seemingly conforming to gendered morals in such a characterization, her role as a daughter-in-law also significantly complicates these morals. Traditionally daughters-in-law hold one of the most disempowered positions in joint family structures, with idealised images conceiving them as docile and completely submissive to family interests. Ideal daughters-in-law are understood as obedient and yielding to the demands of their husbands, mothers-in-law and others, but not necessarily as responsible for the family. Socially, the rising preference for nuclear families in India and the general belief that it is daughters-in-law who instigate break up of joint families, further lends value to such idealistic conceptions of daughters-in-law. In contrast to such perceptions, when Tulsi makes the unity of the family her cause and responsibility, she assumes not just an idealized, but also a glorified position in viewers' minds. By assuming responsibility for the family and constituting herself as the protector of its interests, rather than just being an obedient docile daughter-in-law, she presents a subtle and ingenious challenge to such idealizations.

In presenting this challenge, she also draws support and power from the second constituent of her ideal that I mentioned before. Her resolute commitment to righteousness or *dharma* (as I will explain shortly) endows a kind of moral superiority, allowing her character to transcend gendered morals. This manner of constitution of her ideal explains the adoring yet confronting relation viewers seem to share with Tulsi.

Interviewees in the study refer to the 'higher' morals Tulsi pursues quite commonly as 'truth' (*sach*). As I have noted, it is her uncompromising commitment to 'truth' that leads Tulsi to exceed the moral role prescribed for her. An extract that I present below, of a discussion with two members of the 'Parmar' family who are both avid viewers of *Kyunki* and candid admirers of Tulsi, is quite illustrative in this context. Karuna aged thirty-four, is a school teacher, unmarried; and Madhavi, aged fifty-eight is her mother, a housewife who has never worked outside home. They live in a joint family of seven members, in which the other members are Karuna's father, her adult sister, brother, his wife and his toddler child. Except the brother, all other members in the family were present during the interview, but it was Karuna and Madhavi who participated most attentively. The others moved in and out of the interview to attend to other things. Their home is located in the eastern suburbs in a neighbourhood with a mix of middle class and lower middle class housing, in an old colony consisting of small and neat independent tenements with a gated compound for each house:

> Priya: Which character do you like most in *Kyunki*?
>
> Madhavi (mother): Tulsi
>
> Priya: What is good about Tulsi?
>
> Madhavi: She speaks the truth. Whoever it maybe, she will tell [him/her] the truth.
>
> Priya: Can there be a person like Tulsi in reality?
>
> Madhavi: I doubt if she [Smriti Irani-the actor] herself can be.
>
> Priya: So you are saying, its not realistic, but a good ideal to enjoy.
>
> Madhavi: It's a serial. They have to show some untruth (*khoti vaat*) too. Both true as well as untrue *(saaru khotu banne)*.
>
> Priya: But do you find it appropriate the way they represent women, say for example Tulsi?
>
> Karuna (daughter): I think it is right. If more people become like her it will be good.
>
> Priya: Are they not showing that women have to suffer a lot?
>
> Karuna: Knowledge only comes with suffering. If you cry you understand. The foundation of a family rests with a woman. It is a fact that a family's fate is in the hands of its woman. She can make it or ruin it.

Priya (reconfirms): Women are central in making or breaking a family?

Karuna: Yes. Only women can do that. Men only bring money home. For them family is not a responsibility unlike for women. For men, it's a hobby, if they wish they can [but not compulsory].

(Family 9)

With its disconcerting assertion that the family is only a 'hobby' for men, this conversation, amongst other things, demonstrates how social meanings and social realities are intensely implicated in the reception of the serial. Karuna's assertion about men's and women's relationship to family, while revealing their own conceptions of femininity and gender roles, also illustrates how these conceptions are significantly tied to their engagement with the serial.

Karuna and Madhavi are unequivocal in their stated belief that the responsibility for making or breaking families solely rests with women. For Karuna, there is a necessary moral and ethical superiority in women, in their assumption of this responsibility. For her, the trials and tribulations Tulsi faces hardly speak of oppression or disempowerment, but constitutes the cost paid for women's superiority, as she says, 'knowledge only comes with suffering… a family's fate is in the hands of its woman'. Thus unlike many others in this study who find that Tulsi's moral superiority interferes with gendered familial norms and women's secondary position, Madhavi and Karuna do not find any particular conflict arising between Tulsi's commitment to higher morals and her feminine roles. Karuna's reference to the 'foundations of a family' calls for further attention, as she analyses women's responsibility to family in a philosophical rather than social sense. In this philosophical sense, she sees women's roles and responsibilities as superior to those of men. Instead of happiness, unity, or the social management of family, she refers to foundations and to the destiny of family. She seems to be saying is that in being righteous, Tulsi is strengthening the eternal foundations of family (and this also can be read in terms of nation), which as she explains, can be achieved only through pain and sacrifice. Thus, for these participants at least, Tulsi's moral superiority is stipulated as her gendered responsibility. This evocation of the philosophical and the moral sense as the centre of sense making adds weight to Gledhill's (1992) claims about the moral and ethical enterprise of melodrama, as I noted in Chapter four.

While it is clear from this extract, that Tulsi's righteousness forms an important part of her appeal, it can also be seen that the extent of Tulsi's righteousness also verges on the unreal, particularly for the mother, Madhavi. The daughter, Karuna, is unconcerned about the character's legitimacy, as can be sensed in her comment that 'if more people become like her, it will be good', whereas Madhavi's scepticism is evident in the doubt she expresses about whether the actress playing Tulsi herself could embody such superior values.

It is tempting to read their relative indecisiveness in situating Tulsi between the real and unreal in light of their relationship with Sunita – Madhavi's own daughter-in-law and Karuna's sister-in-law – even if any conclusive links may be hard to make. From my observation of the interactions in their family, especially between Sunita – aged thirty-three like Karuna – and others in the family, it was clear to me that relations between Sunita and the rest of the family are strained. Sunita reinforced this view through some pointed remarks to me, offered as part of her account for her lack of commentary about the serial, about how she is never free from household chores and hardly ever has time to watch television. From the interview I gathered that other women in the family are not as bound to household chores and enjoy fairly relaxed schedules at home, at least in comparison to Sunita. Karuna, and her other unmarried sister, Parul, are both employed, while Sunita is not, though it was not clear whether the privileges the daughters of the family enjoyed were related to their financial independence or in their blood ties. But I nevertheless noted the far from cordial relation they shared with Sunita. While the exact relations between their lived realities and Madhavi's, 'reality' of Tulsi's idealisation is hard to determine, these exchanges nevertheless demonstrate the close potentialities for intersection between lived and 'mediated' realities in the readings viewers make from the serial. Yet it is quite likely that Madhavi's scepticism about the reality of Tulsi is influenced by her relationship with her own daughter-in-law.

As the interview with the Parmar family demonstrates, the higher universal moral Tulsi embodies forms a dominant part of the appeal viewers find in Tulsi. In most families interviewed, 'truth' emerges as a dominant motif in characterizing Tulsi. Statements such as 'she stands for the truth' (*woh sach ka saath deti hai*), 'fights for

the truth' (*sach ke liye ladti hai*), 'is uncompromising on her principles' (*siddhanto nathi todti*), are frequently used in describing her. In understanding the complex connotations involved in this motif, I need to briefly describe the concept of *dharma*, which forms an important coordinate in the construction of Tulsi as ideal.

Dharma literally means religion. However, in its less definitive philosophical sense, it refers to moral duties and obligations, as enshrined in the *Vedas*,[21] in maintaining the eternal cosmic order of the universe. Essentially it articulates the distinction between good and evil, where righteous or *dharmic* actions are seen to support the cosmic order, and non-righteous or *adharmic* actions are perceived to disturb it. John Koller and Patricia Koller (1998), scholars of comparative philosophies describe *dharma* as a 'responsibility', which they explain is constituted through a framework of duties. These duties essentially are formulated to guide *karma*, which basically means action—whether in the form of thoughts, words and deeds—ultimately affects not just the actor or agent, but the entire universe as well:

> Because *karma* connects everything in the universe, every thought, word, or deed affects not only one's own future, but the lives of others as well. Therefore, each person has a responsibility to act so as to maintain the order of the family, society, and the entire cosmos, thereby contributing to the well-being of others. This responsibility is called *dharma*, a word that means to "uphold" or "support" existence. The various duties that make up dharma provide the moral structure of one's entire social life. (1998: 7)

Though *dharma* originates in religion, its philosophical import is as much social, as it is religious. In Tulsi's evocation of *dharma*, this dual exchange is evident. Religious symbolism in Tulsi's righteousness is often emphasized when the background music plays *vedic* or religious chants melodramatically as she undertakes righteous actions. She is portrayed as a deeply religious person, often engaged in prayers and dialogue with her Thakurji (as she refers to Lord Krishna), especially when she faces complex dilemmas, and the many scenes showing her devotions locate her thoughts and actions as righteous often in an explicitly religious sense. The moral dilemma Tulsi faces, particularly when her righteous causes put her in conflict with the interests of the family or one of its members, implicitly and sometimes explicitly recall the profound

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[21] Ancient scriptural text of Hinduism

moral dilemma once faced by the mythological figure Arjuna. On the eve of the war of Mahabharata, on coming to terms with the cataclysmic consequences of war and that fact the enemy included his cousins, relatives and teachers, Arjuna finds himself indisposed to fight, even though he realizes that the war is legitimate in being waged to regain the kingdom his cousins had deceitfully usurped from him and his four brothers. In this moment of profound despair, Arjuna turns to Lord Krishna. The subsequent dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna forms the discourse of the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the sacred texts of Hinduism. In this discourse Krishna counsels Arjuna and urges him to fight, imparting simultaneously the transcendental wisdom of *dharma* and righteousness, the central tenet of Hinduism. The conflict between family ties and higher righteousness is evoked in scenes where Tulsi turns to Amba, as Arjuna does to Krishna, on occasions where she is caught in a similar predicament of having to go against her family.

Only a few viewers found this religious aspect of character significantly appealing, for example Kapila Bhatt said she found 'dharmic *bhavna* (religious temperament)' in Tulsi most likeable. Another viewer noted the religious symbolism in the name Tulsi[22] itself and expressed her appreciation of the serial for its part in educating viewers about the significance of the religious custom of offering prayers to *Tulsi*, the spiritual herb. However, most of the time in the serial, righteousness, or in the pursuit of 'truth' by, the character is presented as simply a valuable principle and is not always set in religious connotations. From the interviews too, it appears that most viewers refer to *dharma* or the motif of truth in Tulsi in an ethical rather than overtly religious sense, although viewers' comments do not explicitly seek to distinguish between the two. I have included this lengthy discussion of *dharma,* to excavate the complex layers of meaning set in *Kyunki* and to explain the second ingredient involved in the idealization of Tulsi. The point to be noted is that in idealizing her in this way, she is presented as a highly principled and ethical person just as much as she is shown as religious and also conforming to gendered expectations.

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[22] Tulsi is a traditional herb often planted in an altar in the front courtyard of Hindu homes. Nowadays in urban apartments, it can be found as one of the potted plants. Mainly women worship this plant at least once a day, mostly at dawn, by lighting an oil lamp near it, offering water, and circumambulating it. Mythologically, this plant represents a celestial goddess, on whom Lord Vishnu (one of the trinities of Hindu religion) conferred a boon in recognition of her devotion to Him, which said that, without worshipping Tulsi any offering to Him would remain incomplete (http://www.tourismofindia.com/misc/tulsi.htm).

To reiterate the discussion so far, I have demonstrated that the idealization of Tulsi includes feminine familial devotion as well as resolute righteousness. Initially both these aspects seem in harmony, but as we will see, when juxtaposed in the construction of an ideal of womanhood, they create conflict and cultural anxiety and thus provide the necessary narrative tension in the serial.

Conflicts emerge when Tulsi is forced to choose between taking an ethical and righteous stand, that might would hurt the interests of the family (or one of its members), or compromising on her socially expected responsibility to the family. In her agonizing predicament of having to choose between the two, Tulsi inevitably gives precedence to her ethical principles, despite knowing the torment it will bring her in hurting one of her own family. This kind of personal no-win situation and the difficult choice Tulsi opts for, serves in glorifying as the selfless guardian of 'truth' in the eyes of her viewers.

This ideal Tulsi embodies then, draws attention to an interesting and as yet unresolved tension for women, between gendered morals and universal ethics or principles of righteousness, while for men, ethical behaviour or commitment to *dharma* is a much-clarified ingredient of masculinity. Being righteous and ethical makes a man an even more valued ideal. For example, if a man were to be harsh on his child, for engaging inappropriate behaviour, fatherly harshness would be considered perfectly appropriate. An ability to overcome his fatherly emotions and enforce a discriminating rationale about right and wrong is unlikely to be considered as harsh. In the gendered conceptions of women, however, maternal instincts or emotional response are considered primary, demanding that her reasoning and sense of discriminating feature as secondary. When Tulsi chooses ethics or righteousness over her obligations to family it challenges a core belief about women's roles and responsibilities. In this challenge, the role of family in particular must be noted. For arguably, had Tulsi applied her ethics and righteous principles within public realms instead of family and home, it is unlikely that she and the ideal she embodies would have created as much controversy and debate.

While it is clear that Tulsi conforms to, and at the same time also challenges gendered morals, the challenge her character poses is most evident in viewers' discussion about whether she can be considered as real. The debates and conversations viewers have in this regard, essentially reveal the political space Tulsi's ideal constitutes for its viewers. In their discussions subtle political negotiations are discernible in the attempts they make to situate the ideal on a conceptual spectrum from real to unreal. Both of the meanings of verisimilitude that I discussed in the last chapter—cultural and generic verisimilitude—are involved in this process. From the analysis it can be seen that the issue of verisimilitude is particularly relevant in relation to female participants' responses, whereas in men's responses, an ideological opposition to the ideal of Tulsi—as in an issue with her superiority in family—also becomes quite evident. Thus in the following section I will first focus on women's interpretations of the serial and their perception on Tulsi's realism and later on men's readings of the serial will be discussed.

Between the Ideal, Real and Unreal

We have seen from the discussion with the women in the Parmar family that for them Tulsi is a perfect ideal of womanhood. For the mother though it is a little difficult to see her as realistic, the daughter is comparatively at ease in doing so. Similar sentiments are also apparent in the interview with the 'Modi' family, where again a pairing of mother and daughter constitute the avid viewers of the family. Their family is a small nuclear unit consisting of parents Jayesh and Vanita, in late middle age, and children in their mid twenties—son, Bhavin and daughter, Karishma. At the time of the interview, the son was the main earner of the family, working as a freelance tutor and lecturer. The father had retired from his job in a semi government organization a few years ago in 2001, and since then mostly stayed home. Vanita has never worked outside the home, while daughter Karishma has been employed on and off, in market research projects as a surveyor. They live in a relatively small one-bedroom apartment in a conspicuously middle class neighbourhood. All four participated in the interview. Except the son, all others watch the serial. The father says he watches not out of interest, but to pass his time.

The conversation with Karishma and her mother Vanita that I present below, while showing similarities with the views of the Parmar family, also illuminates some other

subtle nuances involved in the reception of *Kyunki*. In this family, both mother and daughter find it relatively easy to reconcile the conflict between Tulsi's gendered and universal morals. They do not seem to believe that Tulsi defaulting in her gendered role by giving greater value to her moral principles than to the immediate family's interests. It is apparent in their conversation that they do not have any disputes with Tulsi's character. The absence of any discussion about the realism of Tulsi in the entire interview with this family is one of the indicators of their relative ease with her representation. Instead, their sympathetic feeling for Tulsi, for the unfair suffering her family is causing her, is reflected in their support for the way she combines both the gendered and the other higher morals.

> Karishma: She [Tulsi] does everything for the family, to keep the family *(ghar banaye rakti hai),* but she is not happy herself. There are always fights happening [within the family]
>
> Vanita: She upholds *(sachvi)* the family
>
> Priya: But does she not have to sacrifice a lot for it
>
> Vanita: [Women] have to do that
>
> Priya: You think that is appropriate
>
> Vanita: Yes it is good.
>
> Karishma: No... only until it is right. Now they show Tulsi is blamed for almost everything. That does not seem fair. The other characters do not want to understand the truth at all…. they don't even try to find out. They just think, Tulsi does it on her whim. That is not right.
>
> Priya: So you are saying Tulsi is suffering unfairly
>
> Karishma: Yes

(Family 1)

Their admiration for Tulsi's selfless devotion to family is unambiguously evident in this piece of conversation. From the conversation it can be seen, however, that while the mother Vanita is completely accepting of it, the daughter Karishma, wants to negotiate a little on it. Vanita's acquiescence to the notion that sacrifice and pain are inherent to womanhood is evident in her comment that '(women) have to do that.' But Karishma expresses a frustration with the way in which sacrifice seems to be boundlessly expected of women, speaking with reference to Tulsi. Her comments suggest that she wishes to define a less harsh limit, asking for fairness in the sacrifices women are expected to make, as she says 'only until it is right'. In doing so, she simultaneously also seeks to make the family more accountable or at least understanding of the sacrifices Tulsi makes. In other words, she seems to be

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negotiating a bargain, albeit in quite an indistinct way, in the gendered ideals defined for women. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that the women in both the families I have discussed so far, the Parmars and the Modis, do not really have any significant disputes with such gendered ideals. But it can be noted that in both families, the younger and unmarried women, in expressing their consent to the gender ideals, also express some qualification in their perception or engagement with these ideals, rather than simply surrendering to it in the manner of many of the elder women. For Karuna from the Parmar family, as I noted earlier, pain and sacrifice is not necessarily oppressive, but a process of empowerment and moral superiority of women, and for Karishma, women's sacrifices are not to be boundless, but accepts a fair and reasonable limit for it.

In the earlier extract of the interview with the Modi family, their consent to gendered roles was mainly evident. The superiority of Tulsi—which basically challenges the gender ideal—forms an important part of their admiration, and sympathy for Tulsi is demonstrably evident in the following extract:

> Priya: What is good about Tulsi?
> Karishma: She stands for the truth.
> Vanita: Also she has a conviction that her beliefs are right. And eventually, she does prove that she is right.
> Karishma: She cautions others and tells them they will regret for not listening to her, and we wait to watch that happen.
> Priya: To see them regret?
> Karishma: Yes, to see them regretting.
>
> (Family 1)

This extract confirms their pleasure in the moral superiority of Tulsi, particularly in the way she gains it through espousal of *dharma* or principles of righteousness. What is most appealing to these women is Tulsi's confident stance and adherence to principles, despite the adverse challenges she has to face on account of them. However, a lack of discussion in their interview about the realism in relation to Tulsi, or in other words, how such moral superiority interferes with gendered ideals—wherein women are bound to remain docile and inferior in the power hierarchy of families—suggests that that the idea of such superiority is, after all, not as confronting

for them, at least for the women in this family. In discussion with this family, the issue of realism featured mostly in relation to the serial in general and not specifically in relation to Tulsi. While it is apparent that Tulsi's ideal is unproblematic to the women in the Modi family, the same cannot be said of the men in the family. They did not directly criticize Tulsi, but their disapproval of the character was discernible in their silence when discussion turned to Tulsi (Bird 2003). This contrasted with their active participation and comments when discussing other aspects of the serial. The men's disapproval of the character was also implied by the definitions of womanhood that they revealed at various points through other indirect references in the interview.

With the exception of the Modis, in most families' discussion about the realism of Tulsi inevitably emerged in the interviews, although in varying degrees of interest. While fewer families discussed it at length, most revealed their take on it by emphasizing that Tulsi is an unattainable ideal at the same time as they expressed their admiration for her. For others less concerned with the reality of Tulsi, it appeared a difficult, rather than unattainable, ideal.

In women's discussions of the reality of Tulsi, two distinctive but interlinked threads emerge. Both relate to gaps in cultural verisimilitude, but one thread primarily concerns cultural conflict the ideal poses to the customary gendered roles of women. The second thread relates to the excess in the conception of the character, to the extent that for some viewers such excess raises issues with the characters' plausibility. Both threads illuminate the political play in the reception of this character, particularly in the processes of defining gender and power hierarchy in family.

In this extract of the interview with Manisha Patel and her husband Chetan, both aged in their forties, Manisha offers a lengthy insightful explanation into why she finds Tulsi unrealistic. Her husband's provocative interjections offer some preliminary insights into how her family influences the way she interprets Tulsi and *Kyunki*.

Manisha claims to have lost interest in the serial, but continues to watch regularly, as she says it has become a routine. Others in the family watch the serial intermittently, but none retain the particular affection and esteem that they previously felt for the serial. They are one of the affluent families I met in the study, whose details I have

discussed in the segment on the survey findings. To reiterate, their joint family comprises six members, which includes—besides Manisha and Chetan—their twenty-two year-old son and daughter-in-law, a twelve year-old daughter and Chetan's elderly mother. Manisha is a fulltime housewife and has never worked outside the home, while Chetan runs a garment manufacturing business in which his son has also become involved over the past couple of years. The interview with this family finally took place after four prior unsuccessful visits I made, because for one reason or another, some of the members were not be available at the appointed time. From my first visit to this household, I could sense some strain between the members, which finally became clearer in the interview when Manisha and Chetan spoke to me at length about the stresses they were experiencing with their son. It was concerned particularly with their son's improvidence in spending money and his immaturity in business matters, which for them was further exacerbated by his total 'pigheadness'. It did surprise me that they chose to openly discuss their private matters with a total stranger, but it proved useful in better understanding the social dynamics in their family. On the whole, work and family stresses did seem to have some adverse influence on Manisha and Chetan's relationship too, with Manisha especially showing a kind of exhaustion and resignation with the way domestic and family affairs were consuming her. In the following extract Manisha explains failures of realism she sees in Tulsi:

> Priya: …they are showing Tulsi's story mainly?
>
> Manisha: Yes, majority [predominantly] it is about rich families which is of no relevance to common people. They show about big rich joint families and their lifestyles, which in no way matches middle class lifestyles. In fact, there exists no such lifestyle at all.
>
> Priya: What about Tulsi's struggles?
>
> Manisha: All that is good.
>
> Priya: Does that seem real?
>
> Manisha: Yes, such things happen, but only Tulsi can do all that, nobody can do it in real life. If we emulate that we will be in trouble. If an ordinary woman does like Tulsi, her home/family (*ghar*) will be gone. In the serial, the characters are adjusted, their thoughts are adjusted. Such adjustments do not happen in reality.
>
> Chetan: They are showing false things, reality is not like that. In those serials on Star Plus, ladies are shown of status, and men are shown to be cows. Men have no spine in them.
>
> Manisha (agreeing): Now that simply cannot be.
>
> Chetan: Its not correct, what if women viewers start following that in reality?

Priya: Wouldn't women understand that?

Manisha: What happens is, if women try to follow that, it is not possible in our culture. She is not able to understand that such [ideals] are not meant for her. Ours is a male-dominated society. If a woman tries to raise her head, like in the serial, her family and home will not remain [with her]. Our society will not approve of it. There are women who fight for the 'truth' and come out, but everything is not worth emulating. Women viewers get brainwashed with the serials, and seeing that their home is different than the serials, they may try to emulate what they see. If a woman does not endure [and opposes], then there will be discord in the family. The family won't realise what is in her mind when she does not behave as expected. That is the problem with the serial; it is not possible in real life.

Priya: So you don't find anything real in the serial?

Manisha: Yes, that they live together, understand each others pain and sorrows – all that is real, but again how far is it possible these days.

(Family 13)

First of all, in Manisha's lament about the loss of compassion 'these days' it seems likely that her own personal realities are significantly involved. The understanding and sharing of 'pain and sorrows' as shown in the serial—presumably between Tulsi and Ba—present as an aspirational reality to her. The type of relationship she shares with her mother-in-law was unclear from the interview, but her resigned attitude suggests that her family relations are far from satisfactory. With regard to notions of womanhood, it is evident from this discussion that Manisha considers it crucial for women to be docile and tolerant, and to conform to conventional social and cultural expectations. To do otherwise, as she says, would risk a loss of home and family for the women. These failures of cultural verisimilitude that Manisha finds in Tulsi make her anxious about the influence of the serial on unwitting women, especially considering the rigours of a male-dominated society. Yet despite the gaps she sees, it can be noted that the character is not entirely unbelievable to her, as she says 'only Tulsi can do that'. It does not feature in the realms of excess for her. But she obviously considers herself capable enough to discern the trap posed by the representation, and evaluate the potential threats inherent in emulating such ideals. The serial helps her continue to define the parameters of herself as the docile, conforming *bahu* or wife. Her awareness of the workings of patriarchal systems could be one of the reasons for her pessimistic outlook about women's lives. This pessimism however, does not linked to 'resistance' of patriarchy, as discerned in the work of Brown or Seiter (see Chapter one, p 38). In this instance, Manisha does not

approve of the patriarchal systems, or the docile ideal of women, rather she agrees with prevalent social norms. Nonetheless Manisha provides an insightful account of the impediments confronting women willing to challenge these norms.

In light of Manisha's views on realism and Tulsi, the caustic remarks her husband Chetan makes in the discussion about men's inferiority in the serial are quite significant. He argues that the status of men and women are dynamically interdependent, so that women's superiority is at the cost of men's. This equation means that attempts to reconfigure either, involve a reconfiguration of both. That is what Manisha perhaps means when she says, 'the characters are adjusted, their thoughts are adjusted.' In other words, it is not just Tulsi who is reconstructed, but, concomitantly, the social context in which she operates. And thus for Manisha, in light of the credit Chetan gives to the idea of male superiority, it is only understandable that she feels that it is a formidable task, if at all she tries to change the dynamics of power in her family.

Many women interviewees followed Manisha in noting that it would be disastrous to emulate Tulsi. But few discuss the difficulties of actually realising Tulsi's ideal in the same detail. Some spoke of Tulsi as either "too strong" or "too forward", even though they deeply admired her. Others considered Tulsi unreal because of the resoluteness she showed, which the viewers consider impossible for women, particularly in the context of family. Thus, it appears that this gap in cultural verisimilitude, one that viewers recognize they can only aspire to but never achieve, is an important part of the Tulsi's appeal.

I now turn to the second thread of unreality in Tulsi's characterization, an excessiveness that threatens believability, even amongst devoted viewers. A key incident in the thread is where Tulsi kills her own son, to save his wife or her daughter-in-law from his evil clutches—in keeping with her extreme righteousness. While for those families who were concerned, this was a dominant issue, others accepted this plot crisis as part of the convoluted structure of the serial's plot—as generic verisimilitude in other words. The comments of the concerned viewers reveal that notions of motherhood are even less available for cultural negotiation than more general notions of womanhood, though both are deeply intertwined.

Ruksana, aged forty, whom I had introduced in the section on empirical findings, is a regular and keen viewer of the serial, and is one of the viewers who have strong objections to the murder. She expressed incredulity that a mother is shown to put her rational judgement ahead of her affective and emotional self, regardless of the robustness of the conflict between ethical reasoning and emotional reasoning performed in the narrative. The inflexibility of notions about motherhood for this viewer, appears to have broken her 'suspension of disbelief' when engaging with Tulsi's character, as can be seen in the following extract. As I have mentioned previously, Ruksana lives in a small joint family, with her husband and her newly married son and daughter-in-law in one of the Muslim dominated suburbs in the old part of the city. Her husband and son both work as contract drivers of taxis and other small utility vehicles. Ruksana, like most women in this study, stays home, but unlike most she remains economically active by working as a seamstress, sewing garments for women clients in her neighbourhood. Despite their very modest circumstances, Ruksana appears quite content: she is happy to be living in the neighbourhood close to most of their relatives and extended family and enjoys the sense of security and connectivity. Her married daughter also lives nearby and visits her almost everyday. When I conducted the interview, Ruksana's little nephews who live nearby, were in her house watching cartoon on television. Ruksana spoke of them with much pride and affection. Only Ruksana and her daughter-in-law participated in the interview, as it was difficult to secure a time including the men, mainly because of their variable working hours.

Men in the family do not watch the serial and Ruksana now mostly watches with her daughter-in-law. Earlier, she used to watch with her daughter who is now married and has left home.

> Ruksana: …I don't like Tulsi anymore, she has become boring. Tulsi does not think about her own children, she thinks about others.
> Priya: So you don't agree with what she does?
> Ruksana: No, she is not doing right.
> Priya: Was she okay earlier?
> Ruksana: Yes, but now she is going against her own children. [Tell me] who does like that?
> Priya: Doesn't she have a reason for that?

Ruksana: Whatever. Our children are our own; we can never go against them.

Priya: So it does not seem real to you?

Ruksana: No, it is not realistic. Which mother will kill her own son? That is totally wrong. However, evil the son is, a mother can never kill.

Priya: What aspects do you find realistic in it?

Ruksana : It's only for time pass. That a mother kills her son or kicks the son out of the house is not acceptable *(sahi nahi hai).* Parvati is better than Tulsi, at least she does everything for her children.

(Family 12)

Obviously for Ruksana 'whatever' motivations there may be, they are never sufficient for a mother to go against her children. It is important to note that, even though she seems to have ethical objections to such an act, it is primarily the questions of the social and cultural verisimilitude that raises the issue of believability for her; the act of a mother killing a son is simply unimaginable. That Ruksana does not feel a need to delve into the circumstances shows that the boundaries of motherhood for her are simply non-negotiable. Her comments are also indicative of the extent to which the conflict over ethics and socially defined roles—in this case of motherhood—enters into the realms of the unimaginable.

Although the comments are made in the context of a specific plot incident, it is nevertheless significant that, in Ruksana's comments, motherhood is defined in terms of a mother's relationship with her son, as she says 'which mother will kill her own son?' So self evident and prioritised are an Indian mother's responsibilities to her sons in Ruksana's view, that the debate over this sequence in the serial is generated exclusively in terms of believability, rather than morality. If, for example, had Tulsi killed a similarly abominable daughter instead of a son, it is more than likely that the serial would have raised far more fraught moral issues, regarding mothers' responsibility towards daughters in light of entangled issues of honour, family and female morality.

Yet, quite in contrast to Ruksana, for others Tulsi's act reinforces her moral superiority. In making such an interpretation, there is arguably a conscious attempt on viewers' part to engage with the ethical, rather than social dimensions, in their enjoyment of the serial. This type of engagement is amply demonstrated in the

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following conversation with Indu and Mahesh Jadeja, a thirty-five year-old couple, who are parents of two young children, aged eleven and four. They, too, are a middle class family living in an unremarkable middle class locality. Since their apartment was undergoing renovation at the time of the interview, they were living in the adjacent apartment, very sparsely furnished. Though ethnically Gujaratis, they originally were residents of Mumbai having moved relatively recently to Ahmedabad in 1992 after their marriage. They both spoke good English and their verbal interactions and body language suggested that good rapport and closeness exists between them. At the time of the interview, Mahesh's parents who had come from Mumbai for a visit were also present, but they did not participate. Both Mahesh and Indu enjoy watching *Kyunki*, and believe it is also a useful resource for their children to learn about family values and Gujarati/Indian culture and tradition.

> Priya: Tulsi you said is a central character? What quality of hers do you like?
>
> Indu: Performance is very good
>
> Priya: What about her character?
>
> Indu: That she fights for the truth. She even killed her son for it. Went against her husband for it. Her husband even threatened her that their relationship would break down, her firmness [resolve]. Like when she herself encourages her widowed daughter to marry Abhishek, but when she learns he had killed her first son-in-law, she backtracks and has to then go against her daughter also.
>
> Mahesh: Her fight for truth
>
> Priya: Is it too idealistic?
>
> Mahesh: That's what we are saying, that we know it is dramatized. It cannot happen like that in real life.
>
> Indu: Yes just watch and forget
>
> Mahesh: I mean if it happens in real life it is a plus point, but if not it is not a minus point. That's how we watch the serial, if we find something good in it, good, otherwise, nothing is lost.
>
> (Family 2)

The preceding extract usefully notes this family's awareness of the formal and generic properties of the serial, but I will discuss these aspects later in Chapter seven. For now, in continuation of the earlier discussion, the relative approval they accord to Tulsi's act of killing her son, particularly in comparison to Ruksana, suggests that they are fairly flexible, even in relations to notions of motherhood. And

correspondingly they did not reveal any particular anxieties about the challenge to gendered morals posed by Tulsi's idealization. The Jadejas, however, were almost alone in their confident ability to seek out pleasures and disregard ideological conflicts generated by the serial.

While Ruksana (above) regards the act of a mother killing her son as unimaginable, the Trivedi family, even if they do not entirely reject Tulsi for the same, do come close to doing so, as their comments below reveal. The interaction between the members in this family—cited in the following interview extract—shows their efforts to interpret the character in an imaginable realm. At the same time, these interactions also illustrate the discourses viewers engage with and their attempts to define the discourses, which in this case, is primarily about gender.

The Trivedi family is basically a joint family consisting of two couples: Ramila, aged sixty-five and husband Narendra seventy-one, and their son Vinod thirty-one and his wife Neela, who was not present at the time of the interview. Instead, Ramila's and Narendra's daughter Achala twenty-nine, who lives in another city, but had come home for a brief visit with her baby, participated in the interview with the rest of the family. They are a well-educated upper class family, with most of them engaged in the academic profession, although Narendra and Ramila have now retired. They live in an old but distinguished bungalow in one of the wealthy localities in the eastern suburbs.

This exchange between Achala, her mother Ramila, and her brother Vinod, illustrates the contested nature of Tulsi, between both viewers and non-viewers alike. Ramila is the only devoted viewer of the serial in the family. Vinod, like many men in the study detests it, but Narendra is relatively less vehement in expressing his objections. Achala's response shows some ambivalence:

> Ramila: Isn't it too much that they are showing a mother kill her own son?
> Priya: Probably, they are saying she is an ideal and is doing it in the name of justice.
> Achala: Can anyone in real life [do that] to this extent?
> Ramila: Cannot [be]

Achala: Will anyone do that? Would anyone go to such an extreme? Of course there are problems in families, but do we need to be as idealistic as Tulsi? Can someone be such a *satyavadi*[23]?

Ramila: May be possible, but should not be

Priya: Should not be like Tulsi?

Achala: You have to be untruthful sometimes. Why should you be so truthful and bear so much?

Priya: Do you think, women are possibly watching because they think ideally I should be like this?

Vinod (interrupting): But [women/people] are not like that

Ramila: You just cannot be like that

Vinod: Actually, we are made in such a way that we know that such ideals are good and we may even want to be like that, but our life experiences teach us to be more practical.

Achala: Exactly

Vinod: Also if we try to stick with such ideals, we would be long dead. It's a fact if you are not practical you cannot survive and will die early.

Ramila (laughs): ha ha ha

(Family 10)

Ramila's comment at the start of the extract, illustrates the difficulty they experience in situating Tulsi's extreme act in imaginable realms. Even when it does appear socially far-fetched, they still do not reject the character as Ruksana does. Instead, we can see how this act in the serial leads them to interactively engage in the social meanings and discourses this act evokes for them.

For Achala, the daughter, the whole point of the morals Tulsi embodies is questionable. She does not see a necessity for such morality—gendered and otherwise—as she says 'you have to be untruthful sometimes. Why should you be so truthful and bear so much?' For her, the idea that Tulsi may be extracting power from her 'truthfulness' in order to challenge the gendered ideals appears lost. Instead, Achala's view aligns her with the elite critics in her consideration that the serial only further represents and contributes to the disempowerment of women. Achala is herself an 'empowered' academic, who teaches at a university and is also pursuing a doctoral degree. It is therefore possible to speculate that the fantastic moral empowerment of Tulsi is less desirable from her relatively strong position. However, her views are

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[23] Literally it means an honest person, who only speaks the truth. But this term invariably invokes the fabled epithet of King Harishchandra, who it is said, sold his kingdom and himself to keep his word.

useful in further understanding the social significance of Tulsi's character. It is interesting that Achala does not see any link between the moral empowerment that Tulsi embodies for many viewers, and Tulsi's possible challenge to the gender hierarchies of families.

I think this discussion raises a very significant point in respect to the complex inter-relations between power and feminine social positions. Critics of the regressive nature of *Kyunki* understandably propose that 'proper' avenues to female empowerment are those such as employment or education and do not, perhaps, consider that access to such avenues is itself structured through gendered ideologies. In contrast, the universal moral empowerment Tulsi pursues and embodies is precisely universal, at least in principle.

Unlike Achala, her mother Ramila is much less certain about the meanings of Tulsi. While she seems to make a moral protest about emulating such an ideal, in another part of the interview she expresses an unequivocal admiration for Tulsi: 'until now whatever she (Tulsi) had done is entirely for truth and whatever she says is for the betterment of everyone.' In contrast in the above extract, she refers to Tulsi as someone who should *not* be morally emulated, as she says, 'may be possible, but should not be.' The intense criticism the rest of the family offer about the serial and Tulsi during the interview, may have lead Ramila to express such contradictory views. It is clear from Ramila's admission that she is a devoted and regular viewer of the serial, and also an admirer of Tulsi, implying just how meaningful the character is for her.

The argument her son introduces about the need for pragmatism in debating the social relevance of Tulsi, carries a slight hint of caution indirectly intended for his mother, serving as a warning about any temptations presented by the character. His comment that, 'we know such ideals are good and we may want to be like that, but our life experiences teach us to be more practical', is thus significant. He relies on pragmatism to dismiss the conflict that Tulsi's espousal of higher morals creates with her gendered moral position, and in noting which a sensible path is, he also reinstates the primacy of gendered morals. His comments resonate with the comments cited earlier of Manisha Patel, who worries about women emulating Tulsi. But the

difference between the two is that while Manisha opts for resigned acceptance where women lose both ways that is, if they challenge norms and even if they do not; Vinod, on the other hand, understands that women can choose to be better, by conforming to the existent gendered ideals.

Similar attempts to define womanhood can also be seen in another upper class joint family, the Lohana family, whom I have earlier introduced in the thesis. This family comprises six members, Jasodha, her husband, two sons, a daughter-in-law and Jasodha's elderly mother-in-law. Like the Trivedis, they are one of the few families amongst the interviews where the women are employed. The employed daughter-in-law Hema in this family, like Achala in the Trivedi family, fails to understand the significance that the serial and Tulsi holds for its devoted viewers. Yet Hema's is a stronger rejection than Achala's, in that she refuses to engage with the serial. Jasodha and her elderly mother-in-law are the only devoted viewers in their family, though Jasodha had to take occasional breaks from her viewing of the serial on account of her participation in her son's restaurant business. Others in the family are largely not interested, but watch intermittently as the television is in the lounge.

In the following extract, we can see not just the opposing views this mother-in-law and daughter-in-law have of the serial, but also Jasodha's meaningful use of the representations in the serial to define her own views about social roles – in this case, of widows and the boundaries of women's relationship to family.

> Priya: Now it is five years since you are watching, regularly, occasionally, whatever. There must be something good in the serial that you have continued.
>
> Jasodha: There are some good things in it, its not like it is meaningless. One the one hand they show, how to live together, that you have to make sacrifices, all that they teach. Those are good. But when they drag it too much, then it feels, okay this is a serial.
>
> Priya: How appropriate are the values they show?
>
> Jasodha: They are not at all appropriate (*bilkul sahi nahi hain*)
>
> Priya: For example what?
>
> Jasodha: Like about the widow. Alright, there are changes in society, but it's not like Ekta Kapoor is trying to show.
>
> Priya: You are saying about Savita, that she wears colour sarees.
>
> Jasodha: Sarees are alright, but the way she dresses up at home.
>
> Priya: You mean, the make-up and all?

Jasodha: Yes

Priya: You don't think that is appropriate?

Jasodha: No

Priya: But the values they show, like for example, Tulsi, that she is an ideal woman. What do you think about that?

Jasodha: It's good, not like it's not good. But the extent to which she endures, that she has taken everything upon herself. It cannot happen, that you do so much that everything comes upon you. In short, don't be so idealistic.

Priya: That is in her devotion to her family?

Jasodha: It happens in every home. The elders take care and do things so that the family does not break. But then a times comes, when it does not work, then nobody goes to such an extent, that you, like, drown your own self. That cannot happen.

Priya to Hema: What do you think about this character?

Hema: I think it is disgusting. I don't identify with her or any of the women in that family. That one…the one who married Karan [Tulsi's stepson]…she was a business woman, but now that she is married, she is in sarees and sindoor and does not seem to go to work anymore and has become a weepy creature. I don't think it happens in real life. I think it's just that you know, like, if your neighbour's family is having some problems or fights, everybody is interested to know. It's become India's favourite hobby now, through television peep into someone else's home.

(Family 8)

Hema's dismissal of the serial as a voyeuristic pleasure of viewing into private realms of families, while at the same time expressing her views, shows the relative freedom she enjoys in her family, as she can openly criticise even something her mother-in-law loves. Hema herself is a business owner, running a branded franchise store, and speaks good English. From her interaction with the other members in the family during the interview, it was also clear that, in this family, the common social hierarchies of families were not being followed, especially in the relations of the daughter-in-law with the family. Hema sat during the interview on par with her parents-in-law—the other participants in the interview—and throughout shared a warm banter with Himanshu, her father-in-law, especially in criticising *Kyunki* and other such serials. Her interests on television are mostly Western shows like *Frasier* and *Friends*.

Meanwhile, we can see Jasodha attempt to define widowhood and womanhood in families through the meanings evoked from the serial. To put the comment about

widowhood in perspective, it may be noted that widows are traditionally expected to dress more sombrely, if not exclusively in white sarees, as is mandatory in certain communities. Jasodha, while not disapproving entirely of the changes to this custom, is a bit censorious of the complete overturning of it in the serial. She is thus not disapproving of Savita wearing bright sarees, but her excessive make-up does seem confronting to her. This could be because, even generally, make-up is still not a socially accepted concept in India. Women wearing make-up are often looked upon in dishonourable light. Similarly with Tulsi, Jasodha seems to share a divided relationship with the character. While she admires her, the boundaries Tulsi complicates are not easily approved. Jasodha does not see much sense in such extreme devotion to her family, especially when it adversely impacts the woman herself. She thinks it is necessary to draw a line and protect oneself first, a view earlier expressed by Karishma Modi. These comments reveal the way in which viewers participate in defining social and moral boundaries in conducting social life.

Also unlike Hema, very few women in the study believe that constituting womanhood in domestic terms is disempowering. It is quite likely that Hema, being from Delhi and both educated and enterprising, has been exposed to the conceptions of early feminism, which may have influenced her views in such a way; in contrast to the other women interviewed in this study who mostly stayed home and were not employed outside.

This discussion of the unreality of Tulsi shows how viewers are attempting to negotiate the meanings the character presents within their own social realities. The ethical and moral superiority of Tulsi is confronting in the light of common ideas about womanhood for many, and is significantly explains the popularity and the intense scrutiny Tulsi's character receives. While the way in which Tulsi challenges patriarchal notions is evidently fascinating to the women viewers, we can see that the appeal of the serial arises not simply from it. The appeal emanates from the related discourse the serial provokes, allowing viewers to consider, evaluate and negotiate, definitions of social roles and social boundaries.

In the following section, I focus on the responses of men to this serial and how they participate in the meanings arising from it.

Men's Readings of Tulsi

In contrast to the mixed responses of women, for men Tulsi's character is largely confronting. It needs to be mentioned, however, that this response is a broad generalisation being made between men and women's viewing, and that the divisions are by no means clear cut. A few men do continue to admire Tulsi, just like a few women also detest her. But on the whole, it would still be fair to say that men and women view Tulsi differently.

Many men were open about their admiration for the ethical principles Tulsi espouses, but in none of their views did they indicate the same sense of fascination that women disclosed. Most men chose not to discuss the character, but revealed their disapproval of her through broader disapproval of the serial itself.

Men tend to characterize Tulsi primarily as a daughter-in-law, and interpret the character primarily within this context. Thus, for men, Tulsi appears as a dominating character when they see that many of her actions do not fit with the common conception of a daughter-in-law. When Tulsi dominates in family affairs in the serial and features as a central figure, for men she becomes a source of displeasure, as occurs with Hemant Bhatt in an extract of the discussion quoted at the beginning of this chapter (p.104). He finds Tulsi's superiority in the family ridiculous and unrealistic. Both Hemant, twenty, and his father Dinesh, dislike the focus on women and the secondary status accorded to men in *Kyunki* and other family dramas, as they believe all members should be given equal importance. Hemant said that, it is 'exaggerated and unrealistic' that the wife Tulsi, is better than her husband in addressing problems or difficulties the family is shown to face. In reality, he believes no ordinary woman can do what Tulsi does, explaining 'she would think first, that the husband is the main or head of the household', therefore implying that she would consult her husband or leave it to him to take care of the situation. Thus, that a woman could be better than her husband in managing even family affairs appears problematic to this young man.

Similarly, for Vinod of the Trivedi family, who argues that it is not pragmatic to follow such ideals, Tulsi appears dominating and patronising, as he says, 'mostly she does what she wants and thinks what she says is only right…I would say ask others

and then decide…she is overbearing.' He finds it irksome that Tulsi makes decisions on behalf of the family, on her own will, without explicitly consulting others. Vinod considers Tulsi undemocratic because she takes it for granted that her decisions are always in the best interest of the family. It seems unlikely, however, that the same kind of discontent would have been expressed if similar actions were perceived to have been carried out by Tulsi's husband or another male character in the serial. Beyond the responses just noted, not many of men in the interviews offered explanations for their dislike or loss of interest in Tulsi. Instead, they spoke mostly about their dislike for the serial as a whole, in which they expressed objections to certain cultural representations and their displeasure with the narrative strategies the serial followed. But it was not hard to see from these discussions that the dominance of women in the narrative framework, as well as the ideological domination permitted to women in the serial, made it unappealing for them. There were, of course men who enjoyed the ethical righteousness of Tulsi, but none approved of her character wholeheartedly like women did.

Conclusion

From the analysis offered in this chapter, it is evident that the serial is a space wherein notions of womanhood, through the character of Tulsi are negotiated. And within this conception, ideas of gender, family and nation are included. The primary appeal is in the ideal Tulsi represents, which is constituted in two significant ways, one closely relating to patriarchal notions of womanhood, and other less exclusive to womanhood, where moral strength and integrity are glorified. This relates to values of righteousness and *dharma* that are more universal.

Now the values of this ideal while appearing to fit in well within patriarchal notions of womanhood, also serves to challenge these notions significantly. In fact this represents a complicated ideal, that on the one hand endorses the patriarchal structures in the way Tulsi is shown to battle for family unity. But on the other hand, Tulsi's loyalty to righteousness or *dharma*, makes her uncompromising of these morals, and allows her to assume a certain power in the family that challenges patriarchal authority. The juxtaposition of these two constituents of her ideal largely drives the narrative, even though outwardly they do not seem to be in opposition. This conflict is

at the core of how viewers judge Tulsi's character as both real and unreal, and underpins their admiration for her, while at the same time feeling confronted as well.

The subtle restructuring of power relations in the family exercised through Tulsi's character, are perceptible to viewers, and is the reason why men can be seen to largely oppose or detest her character, while most women unequivocally admire her. In situating Tulsi in between the real and unreal, the deliberations in viewers' minds, demonstrates the struggle that takes place to control meanings of womanhood in the serial, revealing that it is not just a cultural, but a political struggle as well. Aspects of this political engagement will become clearer in the next chapter, where we shall look at how family contexts influence meanings viewers make.

CHAPTER 6

Family Economy and Politics in Viewing *Kyunki*

> (*Kyunki*) is useful to train our children about family values. Nowadays young people are adopting western culture, so how to stop them? Stop in the sense that, not to forget our own culture.
>
> > (Mahesh, male, thirty-five, accounts clerk, who enjoys watching *Kyunki* with his wife and children)

> Earlier serials showcased India's culture, but what Star Plus is showing, what Ekta Kapoor is showing, considering India's culture, surely you can call it 'social pollution'. Their costumes, thoughts, lifestyles are all harmful to society.
>
> > (Gopal, male, thirty-six, mill supervisor, whose wife has now quit viewing *Kyunki*)

> This is a male-dominated society. We have to follow what men tell us. Listen to husbands, mothers-in-law. If mother-in-law lives with us, we have to ask her and do everything accordingly. I have been married for so many years now, but even today I don't decide. I have to ask her [mother-in-law] what to cook for dinner, in the mornings, I have to ask him [husband] what to prepare in the evening. I have to cook what he likes. It's not that we make anything of our choice. Even on Sundays, it's up to them. Thus we [women] have to sacrifice all the time.
>
> > (Gayatri, female, fifty-two, housewife and a non-practising Ayurvedic doctor, who watches seven serials in a day and whose husband is indifferent to her viewing)

In the last chapter, this thesis argued that the appeal of *Kyunki* lies in the way that the serial offers itself as a space for viewers to negotiate and forge social meanings. It identified the kind of social meanings and discourses that viewers dominantly engage with in *Kyunki,* and in further developing this discussion, this current chapter focuses on viewers' own micro cultural and discursive frameworks, through which they make sense of the world and the world of the serial in turn. Specifically, the chapter focuses on the economy into which viewers are placed by membership to their own families, and the role it plays in shaping the practices of viewing and in the way meanings are forged from the serial.

This chapter shows that, whilst there are many common threads and themes in the values, ideologies and attitudes experienced by participants in relation to *Kyunki*, within individual families, a particular 'family ethos' emerges in the discussion, and that this ethos plays a significant role in the way that families engage with the serial.

Family ethos refers to the microcultural ideological frameworks within which the serial is received in families. Particular to each individual family, it basically articulates the culture, norms, values and beliefs existent in families which constitute the discursive frame of reception for viewers. The last chapter demonstrated that the negotiations viewers make with *Kyunki* were shaped in part by textual frameworks such as characterisation. This current chapter shows how viewers' own discursive frameworks also significantly influence these negotiations. The linkages between text, audience and reception contexts that this chapter reveals, further demonstrate and confirm the political appeal involved in the viewing of *Kyunki*, where we can see viewers and their families attempt to reinforce or transform social power structures through the meanings they make.

Family Ethos, 'Moral Economy of the Household' and *Maryada*

The concept of family ethos that I develop through this study is based upon Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley's (1992) influential concept of the 'moral economy of the household' that I discussed at some length in Chapter one. To recapitulate, they conceive 'moral economy of the household' as an integrative social, moral, economic, frame, which shapes practices of consumption of communication technologies in households. Put another way, the term broadly defines a private system of meaning particular to individual households, which shares a dialectical relation to public systems of meaning via processes of household consumption of communication technologies, and possibly other consumer goods as well. In the application of this concept in my study of the consumption of *Kyunki* I have chosen the term 'family ethos' in place of it, on account of certain fine distinctions that arise because of the nature of the consumable being examined (text, not technology as I explained in Chapter one), specificities about the cultural context of India (as I will explain shortly) and in the desire to avoid the suggestion of unity and stability implied in the phrase 'moral economy of the household'. My usage of the closely related term

'family ethos' is both a very loose appropriation, as well as an adaption of the original concept.

In attempting to define 'family ethos, and to distinguish it from 'moral economy', I have also earlier mentioned the relationship my articulation of the concept shares with the concept of 'family *izzat*' or family honour that Gillespie (1995) discusses in her ethnographic study, and a more proximate variant for my study—family *maryada*. Particularly relevant to the cultural context of India, both *izzat* and *maryada* are as much public systems of meaning as much as they are private to households. Deriving from religious and ethnic culture to which families belong, *izzat* refers to honour and *maryada* refers to a moral code of conduct, conforming to which helps in securing *izzat* for families. They both come into relevance especially in relation to concerns about the overstepping of social and moral boundaries. Although *izzat* and *maryada* are interrelated, threats to *izzat* largely occur in reference to gender morality, especially the chastity of women, of which *maryada* is also instructive. Violations of other codes of *maryada*, unlike the code of sexual chastity, do not invite the same degree of shame and embarrassment, though it may call for other punitive actions. Thus *izzat* tends to be spoken largely in tandem with shame, while *maryada* is spoken of as a customary responsibility, and not so much in concern with reprisal.

In contrast, 'moral economy of the household' describes a more secular as well as intensely private concept that each family develops for itself. Whilst to some extent the social, economic and moral norms of each household are inevitably also derived from public norms historically formed in Christian culture, religious or ethnic linkages are a good deal less obvious in Australia or the UK, than in India.

If from the discussion so far, *maryada* can assume a normative form, it should be noted that it varies from family to family depending on the ethos of the family. While *maryada* offers normative discourses about the conduct of different social political relations, such as age, gender, caste, religious, dyadic relations etcetera, it manifests in families according to the ethos of the family. Each family therefore devises its own code of *maryada* in relation to these different forms of social and political relations, and in the process set themselves their own unique boundaries and codes. Each family

idiosyncratically shapes their own ethos while domesticating the socially available normative discourses.

For the purposes of analysis, in defining a pattern in the way families engage with the dominant discourses of *Kyunki*, family ethos has been broadly defined on the axis of progressive to conservative. There are two further important points to note before considering viewer responses in detail. First, the location of family on the axis of progressive to conservative surprisingly bears no correlation to socio economic classification of the households. Second, individual families do not necessarily fall into either polar end, as individual members within families disagree over significant points of ethos, or in some cases, signs of stifled dissent point to non-consensual ethos.

Changing Relationship with *Kyunki* in Families

As mentioned previously, the serial began airing in mid 2000 and is still currently on air, rating as one of the most popular shows on television. It is important to understand how, in the families interviewed, the relationships with the serial has evolved over the years. It debuted originally as a family serial, but over the years seems to have transformed itself primarily into a women's serial. This does not mean that men are not watching anymore, but my study shows that fewer men are watching with the previous level of interest. What had started as an activity that the whole family collectively engaged in has now become something primarily of women's interest. Nevertheless, despite their avowed lack of interest, the men and any other members who have lost interest in the serial, invariably find themselves watching, due to the spatial organisation of the homes. Predominantly in India, the television set is placed in the living/drawing room, where people largely spend their free time. Family members tend to use the private confines of the bedrooms only for limited purposes, such as retreating for sleep, and conduct most other activities in the public space of the living room. When other members in the family watch, they are unable to avoid the serial altogether. This situation recalls Silverstone's conception of 'double articulation' where he argues that consumption of communication technologies is influenced by both—'medium' and 'message'—not one *or* the other. In addition, it is also a testament to the serial's significance that women are still able to watch it even though its general appeal has contracted.

Claiming that viewership of the serial exhibits a gendered pattern, however, is not easy even while women are the dominant viewers in this study. Out of the sample of twenty families interviewed, there were only five families in which men do not watch serial. In the majority of eleven families, men described themselves largely as 'bystander' or non-participant viewers, as in watching without any particular interest. In the remaining four families, the men openly declared their fondness for the serial. In some families where there is more than one male member, there was consensus amongst the men, with most usually regarding themselves as 'bystander' viewers, leaving very few families in which there was any diversity amongst the habits of fathers and sons, or between brothers. Though the term 'bystander' viewer has been used here, we will see as the study progresses that the term is provisional, as few 'bystanders' viewers are dispassionate in their views about the serial.

In most families, because of the predominance of joint family structures, regular and devoted viewers of the serial comprise mainly of a collective of adult women in the family – mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. And in the fewer nuclear families in the study, it is usually a combination of mothers and daughters.

Thus, in nearly all the families interviewed, viewing contexts of *Kyunki* have changed over the years, whether in terms of actual viewing composition or interest in the serial. When the serial began, there was a kind of approval in the family about the serial and a united interest in it, whereas it is now being received in a much more complex and divided environment. Thus, for women what was formerly once enjoyed as a celebrated interest in the family has now become a guilty interest and is probably one of the reasons why women in the interviews were keen to clarify that their interest in the serial is now primarily out of a need for 'time pass'. This reason, however, does not seem very persuasive considering that the serial is broadcast late at night, at 10.30 pm. While this changed context is only illustrative of the proverbial shifting nature of audiences, it is also an opportunity to understand how viewers' encounters and responses to meanings derived from the serial, may have contributed to the shift.

The shift constituted primarily by men's declining interest in the serial is also characterised by another important aspect. Not only did men lose interest in the serial

or discontinue viewing, they developed a highly critical view of the serial. They commonly cite the repetitive nature of the serial's narrative 'they show one and the same thing' *(ek hi ek dikhate hain)* as a major reason for loss of interest, but the concerns and objections that they raise to certain discourses in the serial, also expose a struggle over meanings as an issue in this decline. Combining the criticisms the men make with the fact that women continued to enjoy the serial, the serial then emerges as a prime example of a cultural product constituting a space where meaning is contested. In addition, the critical discourses men offer also bring into light the fact that though they claim to have discontinued viewing or lost interest in the serial, they have not entirely disengaged from it. Their criticisms reflect their anxiety and concerns over certain discursive representations, outwardly seeming to be a worry about preserving culture, but inwardly relating to an anxiety with the consequent changes in power structures, or preserving patriarchal systems of hierarchy.

Women's continued viewing of the serial in this kind of discursive environment can then be easily read as a subversion of male power (Brown 1994). While it may play some part, this however, would remain a simplistic reading, as the complexities of being situated as a woman particularly within an overtly patriarchal system may not be adequately included in such a reading. From what I have observed in the study, reception occurs for women in a discursive environment where women are aware of male anxieties with the representations the women are viewing, and this awareness consequently mediates the meanings women make or would like to make from the serial. Women's eagerness to clarify reasons for their interest in the serial— particularly in those families where such a critical framework exists—is evidence of such mediation. Women in such families often insist that their interest in the serial is only superficial or cursory, described mostly in terms of 'time pass', 'habit', and 'curiosity about what will happen next.' Their reiterated claims—or reassurances— that they have lost interest in the serial speaks to the regulatory power of patriarchal criticism, even if the narrative may not be as interesting for them now. In addition to the disapproval in families, whether experienced in obvious or subtle forms, the lessening of collective family interest in the serial may contribute to the declining pleasure women seem to now find in the serial. The significance of the viewing contexts in the relation viewers share with the serial, also then confirms the inadequacy of the incorporation/resistance paradigm (Abercrombie & Longhurst

1998) or the text versus audience debate in media studies—in which structure-agency binary of classical sociology tends to be usually situated—as we can see audiences' agency negotiate not just textual structures, but also discursive contextual structures outside the text, in the processes of meaning making.

In describing the importance of family discursive contexts in constituting the reception of *Kyunki*, criticisms men have made about the serial thus form a major resource, in addition to the meanings that families draw from the serial.

Family Ethos and Reception of *Kyunki*

Family ethos draws on and is implicated in a wide range of social and political discourses. In this study, I narrow my focus to two particular discourses, patriarchal relations and nationalist notions, as the discourses that emerge as most significant in participants' discussion about their families, their viewing and their engagement with the serial. These discursive concerns generated by the serial are particularly evident in the criticisms coming from men and such responses offer important insights into understanding the ethos in the families. Thus family ethos has not been defined through direct questions posed to the families; instead it has been derived from a discursive analysis of families' interpretations of the serial, particularly in relation to the discourses of patriarchy and nation. Thus, as I have mentioned in describing my analytical approach in Chapter one, the linkage between family ethos and reception is revealed in this study through a paradoxical process, where appeal of the serial is understood through ethos, and ethos is understood through discussion of the serial.

The distinctions in family ethos can be seen in the diametrically opposed ways in which some families relate to the serial: one group, for example, is unconcerned about the serial, and instead, believes that the serial contributes constructively in defining family; while the other is deeply concerned about the serial and believes that it only serves in disintegrating families. These contrasting views also align with families' social and political perceptions, where some perceive modernity in the serial, while others find tradition. Those families seeing modernity in the serial maintain a hostile relationship with the serial, while those finding tradition are much more appreciative and accommodating of the serial. While the frameworks of reception are easier to discern in families situated on the two opposed ends, in many families those who fall

in the middle of this spectrum, the discursive frameworks are much more complex and cannot be grounded so easily.

Families Appreciating *Kyunki*

An illustration of the diametrically opposed views can be found in the comments of two families; for example, the Jadeja family who appreciate the serial, and those of the Acharya family, who unequivocally detest the serial. The Jadeja family, it might be recalled, is a nuclear unit of four members, comprising a thirty-five year-old couple Mahesh and wife Indu, and their two young children aged eleven and four. In this family, both Mahesh and Indu enjoy watching *Kyunki*, and believe that it is a useful resource to learn about family values as well as Gujarati and Indian culture and tradition. Neither Indu and Mahesh are graduates, but both have been to college. Whilst native Gujaratis by lineage, this couple has spent their childhood and formative years in Mumbai and only moved to Gujarat after their marriage (incidentally a love match and not traditionally arranged). Their Mumbai background may have contributed to their cosmopolitan manner, their good English, and uninhibited display of close rapport, even though socio economically they would only just qualify as middle class, as such characteristics are usually seen amongst the upper and elite classes. This following extract of the interview illustrates their about the serial and their relationship with it:

> Priya: Since when did you start watching *Kyunki* and *Kahaani*?
>
> Indu: From the start
>
> Priya: How did you start?
>
> Indu: There was a lot of publicity. Their way of introducing the programme, and also everyone was talking about the unusual name of the serial, and also that this Ekta Kapoor daughter of Jeetendra [popular film actor of 1970s and 80s] was producing the serial.
>
> Priya: You found the name interesting?
>
> Mahesh and Indu: Yes, *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Because Mother-in-law was Once a Daughter-in-law)
>
> Mahesh: It was unique, then we wondered what about *saas bahu* (mother-in-law daughter-in-law) will they show?
>
> Indu: Is it about *saas bahu* conflict, what is it?
>
> Mahesh: That created some interest.
>
> ….

Mahesh: It looked different; we had not seen similar serials in all these years. You know family serials, in which internal problems of family, all that happens in families was shown. So we felt it was a new concept. We started watching and got hooked to it. Like so and so character is good, the importance they have given to that character.

Priya: Tulsi?

Mahesh: Yes, like the dialogues, the themes. And that's how it established the interest.

Priya: What according to you is the theme in the serial? What is it trying to say?

Mahesh: Like about our culture (*sanskar*). It's useful to train our children about family values. Nowadays young people are adopting western culture, so how to stop them?. Stop in the sense that, not to forget our own culture. Like how to respect elders and our grandparents in the family, and they portray that respectful behaviour. That you must not speak in front of [oppose] elders, you must exercise certain limitations. And if our children learn all this, it is good. Actually it should be a part of our culture, we are Hindus after all, and these are imperative in our culture. So we give these serials importance. It's good. We don't stop them from viewing. If they are grasping anything, they are taking the good things not bad things.

(Family 2)

This discussion sums up the positive relationship the couple share with the serial. Besides family values, they also spoke frequently in the interview about the serial being a useful cultural resource for their children to learn about Indian traditions in terms of dress, festivals and functions, and particulars of rituals involved in such celebrations. They regard such instruction as all the more effective and accessible for being visually presented. It is worth noting, however, that their young children aged eleven and four, do not watch regularly as it is scheduled too late at night for them, but are restricted to viewing during vacations and holidays. Nevertheless, even if the children are not participating daily, the fact that Indu and Mahesh regard the serial as good for their children underlines the significance they give to it. In this appreciation, however, it would be incorrect to assume that they view the serial entirely as realistic; in fact, a glimpse of this perspective is evident in the last statement in the above quote where Mahesh says, 'they are taking the good things not bad things.' Mahesh and Indu are well aware of melodramatic characteristic of the serial, and situate their engagement within this awareness, as Mahesh put it at another point during the interview 'realistic…there is nothing *per se* realistic in it, its what you want to take from it, and believe that such and such can possibly happen in real life'. Thus, it is also worth noting that these parents are not seeing educative elements specifically in the narrative, but instead mostly in the incidentals, the *mise-en-scene* and settings.

The absence of any reference to patriarchal gender relations in this extract also illustrates the lack of concern the family have with the issue. The relations that husband and wife share with each other, as evinced by their conduct and body language, correspond with their comfort with shifts in patriarchal structures represented in the serial.

Families Concerned about *Kyunki*

In contrast to this family, the Acharyas who detest *Kyunki*, are a large joint family, well educated, and also economically much better off. The two adjacent large apartments in which they live in an upmarket suburb, along with the two premium cars they own, point to their affluence. In this middle aged family, with a total of nine members comprising two brothers, their wives, three children, their elderly mother and a grandaunt, most of them have discontinued viewing the serial after following it for two years, with currently only the two elderly women in the family watching the serial regularly. Their household has two television sets; one kept in the bedroom of one of the elderly women, and the other in the lounge room of the younger brother's apartment. The decision to move the television to the bedroom was only recent, mainly to facilitate the viewing of the frail elderly women, but also to discourage television viewing among the children. Access to this bedroom is however, hardly restrictive, but only perhaps curtails viewing slightly. The apartment where the elderly mother and the elder brother live with wife and child is regarded as their main family home, with cooking for the entire family done there.

Unlike the Jadejas who clearly value the serial, the Acharyas are highly critical of it. The responses quoted may initially appear a little irrelevant in the beginning, but I have retained the whole extract in the interest of continuity. The four members in their family, who mainly participated in the interview, are the two brothers, Sushil, forty-eight and Shrikant forty-five, and their wives Padma forty-eight, and Pooja, forty-three respectively.

> Pooja: He [Sushil] at least takes sister-in-law [Padma] to the movies sometimes, but he [Shrikant] has never taken me…
> Shrikant: No it's not like that, we have been to several movies.

Pooja: They used to go more earlier, but he...never.

Priya: Does that mean he has no interest in movies at all?

Pooja: Like when we go to my mother's house, they maybe watching serials, and he will start, 'stop this' 'why are you watching this, don't you watch it every day?' My brother lives nearby, if we go there, he does the same, 'didn't you see this yesterday, switch it off now.' When he comes homes if the TV [in their lounge] is on, he will switch it off. He will start, 'what is this your are watching, it doesn't seem good.'

Priya (to Shrikant): You don't like TV at all?

Shrikant: No it's not like that, I always feel there is nothing interesting to watch.

Sushil: Actually…

Shrikant: Actually if you need to create conflicts in families, then you need to watch the serials. And for that you must specially watch *Kyunki* very attentively, and *Kahaani* also. Ekta has made it very well, how to create sophisticated conflicts in families. You know it's good, in fact it's God's grace that four generations of us are [harmoniously] living together. And we want our children to continue with this.

Priya: So you think, watching these serials can…

Shrikant: I most definitely believe so.

Sushil: No. I don't feel like that, because being a mature… err… It may be true for ordinary people. But we don't feel that in our family stopping…

Shrikant: I am saying in general.

Sushil: In general it's okay [true]. But then we also wonder 'what is all this' that every male in the [serial's] family has an extramarital relationship.

Shrikant: Yeah yeah

Shrikant, Padma and Pooja together: Three to four times they marry …ha ha ha

Shrikant: We are exhausted with one itself…

ha ha ha

Priya: So you think it is passing on wrong ideas?

Shrikant: I think once it becomes monotonous [habitual], it is possible that people don't realise that it happens only in fiction and that it does not happen in reality.

Priya: So people can take it as reality?

Shrikant: I definitely think so

Sushil: See I am a practising lawyer and many matrimonial cases come to me. I can see that [effects of the serial]. Like earlier problems would be with mother-in-law. Later then there was a phase where couples could not adjust temperamentally. But now if you see, wives' extramarital relations emerge. Even husbands'. It is not happening overnight. Watching all such [serials] leads to these things. Could be the reason why the society is heading this way.

(Family 5)

It is quite clear from the conversation that this family, particularly its men, find the serial a threat to stable joint family relations and also spousal relations. When

discussing the same, there is some discomfort also with the inference it leads to, especially for Sushil, perhaps being a lawyer, that his own family is incapable of dealing with such threats and therefore he seeks to clarify that the argument is particularly valid for others and not them. In the threat they see from the serial, the anxieties over discourses of extramarital relations seem to be most emphasised, as in the above quote. Since the term 'extramarital relation' usually carries connotations of indulging in infidelity, I may clarify at this point that the reference they make is primarily to the issue of multiple marriages in the serial. Characters are seldom shown as unfaithful, instead they are usually shown to enter into a new relationship, after a breakdown or conclusion of a current relationship, as in a spouse's death or disappearance or slide into a comatose state or some such plot development; and after a new relationship has begun, the narrative complicates it for the character, by retrieving the earlier spouse from those incredible situations. Thus, these kinds of justifications that the plot offers and the way the serial largely circumvents infidelity and promiscuity, is perhaps reason for the absence of concern many other 'conservative' families showed with the issue of multiple marriages despite its unconventionality, as for most in India, marriages are, indeed, for life. To understand why it seems to dominate the Acharyas' perception of the serial, an understanding of the ethos in the family is thus important.

From further discussions with this family, it also becomes clear that they are extremely sensitive about sexual modesty especially as embodied symbolically in women. The extent of this sensitivity can be gauged from the family's introduction of *salvar kameez*[24] as the preferred attire for their women in seeking to protect their children especially from exposure to immodest images, because in their view, sarees presented a potential for inadvertent exposure of the women's bodies. In this study, this family is not an isolated case in its designation of female modesty, particularly in attire, as emblematic in defining identity. While the Acharyas regard the saree as immodest, in another family, one of the male members insists that women in the family only wear sarees, to continue with traditions. Whilst this male member's lack of authority allows the women in his family to ignore his demand and exercise their own choices, the broader point remains that notions of tradition and modernity and

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[24] A costume comprising a knee length tunic (*kameez*), loose trousers (*salvar*) and shawl (*dupatta*), worn traditionally by Punjabi women, but widely accepted now in all parts of India.

expression of sexuality in dress are contested and confused areas of signification. In this interview, this male member was relatively powerless to enforce his pro-saree stance as the women in his family held the economic power. He tried for persuasion instead, arguing that, 'the way saree graces a woman, pant shirt cannot' (Chinmay Nagar, Family 18). While these examples are on the one hand only demonstrative of the subjective and variable meanings of certain attire, on the other, they are also perfect illustrations that in patriarchy dress and attire are often used as modes of controlling women and their bodies. Another comment by Shrikant of the Acharya family, offers a better insight into the way women's bodies are frequently appropriated to symbolize identity and culture. Referring to the character Komolika, known for the villainous role she plays in another of Ekta Kapoor's serials, he says,

> What kind of clothes does she wear? See for your self. I mean if she doesn't wear anything it is good for us, but it definitely leaves a bad influence on children. Even our children used to point and say, 'look what she is wearing'. Now do we want to give these values to our children? (Shrikant, Family 5)

From this comment, it is clear that Shrikant's objections to this character are not based on a sympathetic consideration about sexualisation of women, in fact his views reflect the contrary, as he says, 'if she doesn't wear anything it is good for us [men]'. Instead his objection is the way this particular character's dress symbolises womanhood and nationhood to the rest of his family, particularly children.

For the Acharya family, notions of family, gender and nation are deeply implicated in ideas of marital and sexual relations and in symbolisation of women. Their need to introduce into the family a costume for women that covers their bodies better than sarees is thus significant here. In the anxieties they experience with representations in the serials, strong links to their own sensitivities and anxieties, as existent outside of the serials' texts, are visible. The discomfort they experience with the serial then is perhaps only a reflection of their anxiety with the modernity that they encounter both outside and inside the text. Sushil's lament about the way the society is heading at the end of the conversation (quoted earlier) is an indicator of their displeasure with the way they perceive modernity and correspondingly the serial as intervening in society.

Furthermore in the Acharya family, as mentioned earlier, only two of the elderly members now follow this serial, with the younger women also having quit viewing about two years ago. In the interview, these younger women who participated showed agreement with the men's view by and large, but the extent of their belief was difficult to judge in the presence of the obviously assertive men. Pooja (the younger brother's wife) did, however, leave the question open if (the) women did indeed share the same opinions of the men. Pooja complains, if somewhat obliquely, about Shrikant's domineering attitude to their and other extended family's television viewing, when he forced everyone to switch off the television. It seems very likely then that the way in which the men in this family—at least the way Shrikant exercises authority—may not have much choice for the women than to give up viewing and in practice to agree with him.

Similar to the Acharyas, concerns about the protection of the young generations, which echoes anxieties about defining identity or nationhood, emerges in quite a few families, mostly among those who believe that the serials present a negative influence. An example is the Thakkars, who now find that the serial does not suit their moral sensibilities and India's culture (*Bharat ni sanskruti).* Narrowly qualifying as middle class, they are a family of four members, comprising Gopal and wife Sheetal, a couple in the early thirties, and their two young children aged eight and four. Referring to *Kyunki* and all of Ekta Kapoor's serials as social pollution (*samaj nu dushan*), their views reveal a fairly pronounced belief in systems of patriarchy. They believe that the dress, thoughts and ideas portrayed in the serials are harmful to society, particularly for young girls. For them, the overall lifestyle represented in the serial is not systematic (*vyavasthit),* referring to the conventional codes of *maryada*. Amongst the many objections they cite (commonly cited by other families also), are the revealing blouses the women characters wear and extramarital affairs shown in the serial. One distinctive point they raise is their objection to women in professional positions, as some characters are shown to be in the serial. They believe that women and power could, or rather, should never, mix, because, as Gopal put it 'if woman has power, then *maryada* will be breached'. They do not explicitly state that they object to women working outside the home, but their disapproval is quite apparent; Sheetal says, 'basically woman's *maryada* is her home, and only if she remains in *maryada* will it be good'. Gopal, too explains that otherwise it would cause disturbance in the

family, which Sheetal further clarifies in the following way: 'If in a family a woman rises then the man will lose all his value. And that cannot be [allowed], because man is the head of the household'. This statement appears to implicitly point to the ideological objection they have with the serial, though they do not articulate it clearly in reference to the serial. The disapproval that they show of lifestyles in the serial also appears to refer basically to the shifting power relations between genders in the serial, than to questions of the family's extravagant displays of affluence. At the time of the interview, they had discontinued viewing the serial, as they told me the deception and fraud shown in the serial is beyond their acceptable thresholds. Formerly when they enjoyed the serial, it had represented an ideal family to them, particularly the love and unity they said family members in the serial shared. From the interview, it appears that the man's authority in this family is exercised in much more subtle ways than, for example, in the Acharya family, but is equally influential as the Acharyas in defining the ethos of the family. It did not seem that Gopal forced Sheetal to quit viewing, like Shrikant forced the women in his family; but perhaps somewhat hegemonically Sheetal had been influenced to quit. Leaving aside the question of its influence over the meanings women make from the serial, this discussion reveals the significance family ethos has in determining women's viewing.

While the Acharya and Thakkar families represent some of the extreme examples of how male authority significantly contributes to the ethos of families, the study also shows that such authority in families is mostly shaped by the dyadic relationship between men and women in the family. For example, wives are most likely to share and accommodate husband's anxieties with the serial whereas in other relationships— with mothers or sisters—the men's anxieties and criticisms would be acknowledged and recognised, but the women would not feel a need to comply entirely to the men's criticisms. Regardless of their relations, that women are unable to completely ignore such criticisms and freely enjoy the serial is further illustrated by the Ramila Trivedi family, whom I have introduced earlier. As may be recalled, this family comprises: Ramila sixty-five, husband Narendra seventy, and son Vinod thirty-one live in joint family that includes in addition to them, Vinod's wife Neela, thirty. As this conversation progresses, Ramila defensively seeks to distance herself from having an ideological engagement with the serial:

Priya: Can you recall some of programs you liked before the cable era?

Ramila: *Hum Log, Nari tu Narayani, Tamas*

Priya: Did you consider them good?

Ramila: Yes

Priya: And now the serials that you watch like *Bhabhi, Kumkum, Kyunki*, do you find any difference in them compared to the old ones?

Narendra: Wish these kinds of serials would stop.

Priya (to Ramila): You think so too?

Ramila: …(indecipherable)

Narendra: It's all about extramarital affairs, and divorce and keeps on and on about the same thing. Three to four generations…

Vinod: We can figure out that now such and such has happened; now they are going to drag the story for a while, have done this for five years now…it will be good if they change certain things. Another thing is that sanctity of marriage is being lost. One marrying another, then another…it's all become very cheap. Marriages and divorce are made to appear cheap and easy. The young generation gets a very wrong impression. And the first to blame would be Ekta Kapoor. I would say it to her on her face that she is misleading the young… Also the character of woman, she has spoilt despite being a woman herself. Third in none of these serials there are poor people, all 'hi-fi' [elite]. So now middle class people are aspiring to be 'hi-fi'. Now if there are burglaries, we can blame Ekta Kapoor first. Look at the way women talk [in the serial], they are wearing stuff they say cost lakhs[25]. 'What I am wearing costs five lakhs' 'what I am wearing costs three lakhs' and so on. If the middle class tries to emulate this, we will be destroyed. Their themes are all similar based on a few like divorce, rape, kidnapping, and ultimately hold functions [social functions] when they should be conveying social messages like *Hum Log* or *Tamas* did. […]

Priya: But these serials are very popular.

Vinod: There is a reason for that. It's popular with women, on account of the fashions, jewellery, sarees…

Priya: So you don't think women cannot understand this [negative influence]?

Vinod : No I don't say they are stupid. But they cannot get over the influence of material pleasures like sarees, dresses, jewellery, bindi etc.

[…]

Vinod: Why doesn't *Kyunki* and others give any importance to education…You tell these serial makers to make something educational and meaningful, if we want to take our future generations on the right path (*sidhi line*).

Priya (to Ramila): You think so too?

Ramila: He is right

Priya: But you do watch these serials regularly.

Ramila: My interest is what will happen next. That is my only reason, nothing else.

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[25] Lakh is an Indian measure. One lakh is equal to a hundred thousand (100,000)

Priya: You don't think it could influence you in that way?

Vinod: No, she is mature.

(Family 10)

In face of all the criticism Vinod offered, it is not hard to see why Ramila chose to explain her engagement only in terms of narrative and not in terms of pleasure in the fashion spectacle or ideology. When she goes into a defensive mode however the son tries to be a bit more supportive of her, saying she is mature and thus seeks to exempt her from possible contagion. In this family then, men's authority is not able to stop Ramila from choosing to watch the serial, but it is clear that the viewing takes place in an environment where Ramila is well aware of the disapproval men have of the serial. Her continued viewing in such a context can well seem a subversive action, but this seems an incomplete interpretation, considering that when engaging with meanings in the serial, she does face a struggle in situating them within the discursive and moral framework or ethos in her family. This is particularly reflected in her trying to place meanings of Tulsi. Referring back to the conversation discussed in the previous chapter (pp.123-4), we can see that, though Ramila holds an explicit admiration of Tulsi, for the way in which the character stands for truth and 'the betterment of everyone in the family' (to quote Ramila), she also says that no woman can be like her or, in fact, should be like her. Ramila recognises and even admires Tulsi's moral superiority, but finds it difficult to situate such superiority within the framework of her own family.

The Modi family whom I had introduced in the last chapter also demonstrate such complexities. They are a middle class nuclear unit of four members, Jayesh sixty-two, wife Vanita fifty-seven, son Bhavin twenty-eight, and daughter Karishma twenty-six. As I have mentioned previously, in this family mother and daughter mainly enjoy watching the serial with the retired father who also ends up viewing along with them, while the brother detests *Kyunki* and all the similar brand of serials. From discussions with them, it became clear that the men are not very appreciative of the serial, but did not zealously oppose it, at least in the interview, the way men in some other families did. The ethos in this family reflects a relative lack of anxiety with, but a subtle disapproval of, the changing position of women in the family and social structures. In fact it would be more accurate to say that the elder male in the family is less anxious

about these shifts than the younger male. The younger man, quite like the men in the Acharya family, believes that the serials only serve to incite conflict in families and to disintegrate them. This lengthy piece of conversation illustrates some of complex elements at play in the way discursive frameworks of the family intersect in its reception:

Priya: Do you find any difference between old serials like *Humlog, Buniyaad* and the contemporary serials?

Karishma (daughter): We used to watch that. There is a lot of difference.

Vanita (mother): Those were social (*samajik*)

Karishma: They showed about lower classes in that. But in these [current] serials they show big fancy houses.

Bhavin (son): They speak only in *crores*.[26]

Karishma: They were struggling for money [in the old serials].

Vanita: *Buniyaad* was very good.

Priya: But is there any difference in the position of women in the two?

Bhavin: Earlier, they were not powerful, now they are shown powerful.

Karishma: Yes.

Priya: Powerful in what way?

Bhavin: These women…

Karishma: These women are err…what do you say…

Bhavin: Modern.

Karishma: Modern is all right, but now the woman is willing to fight, earlier she was not shown like that. Women would remain in the *maryada* like 'we should not speak so much or come forward'.

Priya: Do you remember Rajni? [a strong female character from an earlier serial of the same name]

Jayesh (father): Rajni was different.

Karishma: Rajni was an exception.

Jayesh: The focus [in that serial] was to change social life.

Priya: And in these current serials?

Jayesh: Now we don't have serials like that.

Karishma: At that time…

Bhavin: *Udaan* also.

Karishma: Yes Kalyani in *Udaan*.

Priya: Were those characters not strong?

Karishma: Yes they were, they had risen in their lives.

Priya: Is there any difference between them and current characters?

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[26] Crore is another unit in the Indian measure, one crore equals ten million.

Karishma: Umm...Can't say.

Vanita: In the current serials untrue/fiction occupies a lot of space *(khotu khotu vadhari de che)*. More untrue, so everything seems a bit over [excessive].

Karishma (explains to Vanita): No she is asking what are differences between old strong women characters and the current characters.

Priya: No no, that's fine let her speak.

Vanita: They drag an event [in the plot] over three to five episodes now, whereas earlier they would be showing exactly as it happens in reality.

Bhavin: In short that was realistic, it was possible, plausible.

Vanita: We could believe it easily, but now most of it is *khotu* (fictional/untrue).

Priya: So the current serials are not real?

Vanita: No [they are], but not in the same way as the earlier serials.

Karishma: Yes the current ones seem a bit over the top. Earlier it was more realistic.

Priya: Do you think women are watching because women characters are powerful?

Karishma: I don't think I am watching because she [Tulsi] is powerful. I am only curious what will happen next in the story.

Priya: But if they showed a story of a powerless woman, would you be interested?

Karishma: Umm…no, I don't think so.

Jayesh: This generation is like that, women are no more the weeping and wailing types, she is more the type who will makes others weep.

All laugh: Ha ha ha

(Family 1)

In this conversation, we can see that the men in this family are highly tuned to the changing position of power of women. This is clearly indicative in the explicit comparison that Bhavin makes between previous and current female characters, and also in the comment that his father Jayesh makes—even if in jest—that the current generation of women are not the types who bewail helplessly, but instead are uncomfortably assertive and uncompromising, certainly implying both women in and outside the serial. The Modis are in fact one of the few families in this research where women's relationship to power was openly discussed in relation to the serial. In the interviews, bearing in mind that discussing axis of power in families may be too sensitive a topic for me to raise, it was considered in my best interest to wait for the discussion to naturally lead to it, than attempting to prompt. Thus in most families, references to power appeared in indirect forms, as is evident in some earlier discussions in this chapter.

In the Modi family, even when the discussion on power emerged naturally, we can see a clear discomfort for women when engaging with it, at least in a rational discussion with other male members of their family. For example, Karishma is less willing to admit that the portrayal of power in women may be appealing to her in the serial. In a roundabout way however she does admits to it, when she says she would not be interested in the story of a powerless woman. That the power in the character does appeal to her is also confirmed by referring to another part of the interview with this family, which I have quoted in the previous chapter on page 115. Here Karishma states that one of things she most enjoys about the serial is watching others pay a price, or regret for not listening to Tulsi. The moral superiority of Tulsi and the power she exhibits thus undeniably appeals to her.

Furthermore in this conversation quoted above, we can also observe Karishma's unease with the conception her brother puts forth that the current generation of women characters are modern, and are therefore powerful. While not directly challenging this conception, Karishma attempts to clarify that power in the women characters stems not necessarily from modernity, but from a reluctance to further be confined by *maryada*, and instead in their willingness to step out and fight for her rights. In making this distinction, we can observe the oblique way in which she tries to justify the power the characters assume. Rather than simply constituting it as a 'modern' attribute like her brother does, which carries connotations of individualism and selfishness; Karishma relates it as feminist fight against constraints of *maryada*. This again is reflective of some of the differences in men and women's perceptions of the serial, where most men tend to categorise the serials and the characters as modern, while women seem to relate it to tradition. In classifying it as modern, men tend to reject the changes in gender power structures offered in the serial, and women, in trying to classify it as traditional, are negotiating for a political transformation in such structures.

In furthering this argument, we can take, for example, the reference that the men in this family make to some of old characters like Rajni and Kalyani. The admiration the men show for these characters, while ridiculing—even if in jest—the power represented in Tulsi and Parvati, in fact is very potent for the argument this study pursues. Both these characters who featured on Indian television during the late

eighties and early nineties, are widely accepted in social discourses as empowering role models for women. Rajni, who played the role of a social crusader in *Rajni,* or Kalyani the police officer, in *Udaan*, assumed power primarily within their professional and public roles. However in their simultaneous personal and familial roles, they were situated perfectly within the patriarchal principles in the prototype they offered, with Rajni configured as a dutiful wife and Kalyani as an obedient daughter. Thus they were not so much a challenge to systems of patriarchy unlike Tulsi and Parvati, who in the prototype they offer represent power very much within domestic realms and not public realms. The subtle restructuring of power relations in the family exercised through these characters, then seem more threatening to men, and hence the dominant opposition from them. While making this claim, I also need to mention that hardly any women in the interviews spoke explicitly of this restructuring that Tulsi or Parvati offer. But the fact the women find the moral superiority of these characters and the assertions of it appealing, does suggest a fascination with the idea. Moreover, the difficulty the viewers find in defining the character in relation to issues of realism reflects the power of their own family ethos and discursive frameworks, which would make such an idea unrealisable for them.

Families Indifferent to *Kyunki*

Thus, so far, in demonstrating the influence of family ethos or discursive frameworks in viewers' interaction with the serial, I have mostly referred to families where men's anxieties in relation to the serial are fairly obvious. Now I would like to refer to some of those families where men seemed to show a total indifference to women's viewing of these serials, and the way such an ethos in the family influences viewing. The discussion below will show, however, that it would be erroneous to assume that such indifference means men in such families are truly accommodating and liberal about patriarchal relations. An example lies in the Pandit family, comprising four members Rajesh fifty-five, wife Ratna fifty-two and two daughters Mallika twenty-seven and Nirmala, twenty-five. They are a fairly affluent family, who live in an upper class neighbourhood in an opulently furnished apartment. Their two premium cars offer further testament to their affluence. All members of their family are engaged in gainful work, with both parents working from home running a trading business, while the daughters are employed outside – one with a private bank and the other with a law firm. To the extent that the daughters are well educated and well employed, and also

considering that the parents have provided their daughters with a television in their bedroom—as well as a computer—the family comes across as fairly progressive. But when the father later in the interview expresses fairly conservative views, especially when he speaks of women as symbols of culture and also in his deploring of 'modern' women, the ethos of the family appears less clear cut.

Referring to dress and general social values of his daughters in particular, Rajesh takes pride that the women in his family never overstep and always stay within the patriarchal *maryada.* Whilst he offers such conservative views, when discussing the serial, however, he offers few comments, and on the whole seems to lack any sort of anxiety with the women's viewing of it. He informs me that he was also a regular viewer of the serial formerly, but has stopped viewing, ever since he began finding the narrative very repetitive. Rajesh's lack of anxiety about women in the family viewing the serial, unlike the men in other families, can perhaps be explained by the fact that the women in his family are also not overly involved with the show even though they watch regularly. For example, the women show no intense admiration of Tulsi, the way most women in the study do, instead they seem to regard her simply as an important character in the serial's narrative. They seem more rapt by the representations of joint family traditions in the serial: 'Joint family concept is crumbling, people now want an independent life, be individualistic. But they [serial's producers] are saying that we should not be selfish, but bring back the concept of 'us' instead of 'I'' (Mallika, Family 11). Apart from the women's lack of interest in the gendered discourses of the serial, Rajesh's comfort with the women's viewing also seemed to come from a confidence that he could counteract any undesirable influences on women in his family. For example, to ensure that his daughters do not go to cybercafés or chat with strangers online, which he believes only 'characterless' women engage in, he brought them a computer with an internet connection, which I noticed was placed in the public space of their lounge room. Rajesh's confidence can also be understood from the views the girls expressed about gendered discourses. To a specific question about whether the representations of women in the serial were regressive for their almost exclusive emphasis on domestic lives, the girls disagreed. Firstly they pointed out that there were professional women characters in the serial, if only a few, and secondly they said, that being a professional woman does not necessarily mean empowerment. But in the context of the interview, with Rajesh also

present, it could not be ascertained whether they were speaking of their own situation, or were referring to some other form of philosophical or moral empowerment that Tulsi represents. Thus Rajesh seemed to enjoy a confidence that despite the meanings the women in his family make, they remain within the traditional *maryada*. Considering the dominance of gender discourses in the reception of the serial that I found in most families, it was indeed surprising that the women in this family were not interested in such a discourse. Perhaps given the freedom and liberty that they seemingly enjoy in their family, the serial does not activate any significant gendered concerns for them.

In another family too, where the man shows total indifference and allows his wife watch as many serials as she wishes—occasionally also joining her to watch—presents quite a misleading picture about his indifference. In this financially well-off upper middle class family of four comprising, Umesh fifty-three, wife Gayatri fifty-two and daughters Heena twenty-one and Gauri nineteen, both husband and wife are ayurvedic doctors, but the wife, however, is mostly non-practising and is primarily a housewife. Their daughters are both pursuing higher education as well as working. Heena is doing her postgraduate degree in commerce and also working fulltime as an accountant in a small firm. Gauri, the younger daughter, is in the second year of her undergraduate course, and works part-time as a receptionist at a nearby hospital. For Gayatri, who is the most avid viewer of the serial in this family, the serial is a close reflection of reality, especially about family relations. She and her daughter Gauri who also participated in the interview, regard the characters as educative role models of daughters-in-law, and provide an understanding of roles and duties of a daughter-in-law towards her marital family and, similarly, of the family's obligations towards her. Besides such discourses on family and daughters-in-law, they also enjoy many other narrative elements in the serial, like the fashion, lifestyle and so on. For Gayatri, television is indispensible. Being home, she keeps the television switched on most of the time. From morning till afternoon as she goes about her household chores, she puts on religious channels and listens to them mostly and watches occasionally. In the afternoon she watches a couple of serials, and then without fail in the evening from 8.30 pm onwards till 11.30 pm she watches almost the entire range of serials shown on Star Plus. The five serials she watches are: *Kasauti*, *Kahaani, Kyunki*, *Kahin to Hoga* on Star Plus and *Kkusum* on Sony, all family dramas produced by Ekta Kapoor.

While Gayatri is the most devoted viewer of television—and of these serials—in this family, the others are less attentive but regular viewers, as the television—as with most homes—is kept in the living room.

Although at first from the viewing patterns Gayatri described, and in also taking into account the education and employment of their daughters, it appeared that gender relations in the family are fairly liberal, yet as the interview went along my initial impression underwent a change. It became clear that the free hand—at least in terms of Gayatri's television viewing—was a kind of compensation for the liberty largely denied to her in other aspects of her family life. The following extract of the interview reveals this and also explains her interest in gender and family discourses of the serial. Her disclosure of her private lived experience reveals why she engages with the discourse in an empathetic manner similar to what Ang's calls the 'tragic structure of feeling', rather than in an aspirational manner evident in most women in this study:

> Priya: …I was also asking about the portrayal of daughters-in-law – sacrificing, family centered – do you find it right?
>
> Gauri: Even in real life it's like that, the daughter-in-law has to adjust a lot. In my parents' home I can be free, do what I like, meet friends and so on, but there [in my future marital home] I don't know how it will be. They will have to adjust with me and I will have to adjust with them. When anyone gets married they have to make lots of adjustments. There might not be a single woman who may not have made adjustments or compromises upon marriage. You have to sacrifice a lot too. I might not like [whatever], but for them if they like it, I have to make that sacrifice.
>
> Priya: Do you wonder why only women are expected to do that?
>
> Gauri: That's the way it is. Women are the ones who have to sacrifice.
>
> Gayatri: That's the way it is. This is a male-dominated society. We have to follow what men tell us. Listen to husbands, mothers-in-law. If mother-in-law lives with us, we have to ask her and do everything accordingly. I have been married for so many years now, but even today I don't decide, I have to ask her [mother-in-law] what to cook for dinner. In the mornings, I have to ask him [husband] what to prepare in the evening. I have to cook what he likes. It's not that we make anything of our choice. Even on Sundays, it's up to them. Thus we (women) have to sacrifice all the time.
>
> […]
>
> Gayatri : We feel if we had a mother-in-law like Ba it would be so nice…..She treats Tulsi so well.
>
> (Family 3).

Gayatri quite openly discussed her feeling of powerlessness and complete subjugation on account of her gender and position in the family as daughter-in-law (*bahu*) of the household. Besides decisions about meals and cooking seen in the extract, in the interview she discussed other ways she is restricted. She said even to go outside the house she was expected to seek permission, either from her husband or mother-in-law, whenever the older lady came to stay with them. She appears less forgiving of her own mother-in-law than her husband for such state of affairs in their home, saying that the relation between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is formed from a vicious cycle, where mothers-in-law make sure to pass on to daughters-in-law the oppression they may have once endured as a daughter-in-law. Thus even the title of the serial *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (*Because Mother-in-Law was Once a Daughter-in-Law*) is filled with meaning for her. I may add that all this resentment was divulged in the presence of her husband Umesh in the interview, and he did not attempt to offer any defence or justification.

Though it is hard to say whether Gayatri uses television viewing as the only space where she can assert herself, or whether her husband is granting her, in her viewing habits, the space she is denied elsewhere, her reflections indicate the role discursive and performative moral frameworks in families play in activating readings. Whatever the case, the pronounced operations of patriarchy in their family seem to allow her husband Umesh to enjoy a complete lack of anxiety about the ideological restructuring of gender relations in the family that the serial offers to many.

In another family in this study, in fact the only family in the sample in which the system of patriarchy appeared significantly challenged, the interrelationships between family ethos and discursive engagement with the serial are even more evident. In this upper middle class family of three adults comprising Sudha, forty, her father Manohar seventy-five and brother Chinmay thirty-seven; Sudha is the only employed and earning member in the family. Both Sudha and Chinmay are unmarried, out of circumstance than choice, while their three other siblings have married and moved out from their home. With Sudha's financial command in the family, the traditional patriarchal order is significantly challenged, although her younger brother shows a keen desire to reinstate it regardless of the financial dynamics. This is the same man I

had mentioned earlier in this chapter who insists that women in the family only wear sarees. Sudha, being his elder sister and importantly the only earning member in the family, is able to completely ignore his demands. In fact, Chinmay wishes to enforce his views on his other younger sister whenever she visits them, but as she is also an independent employed woman, he realises that it is perhaps smarter for him to remain quiet, as he wittily remarks 'she is a lawyer so I can't (enforce it).' And in this tussle between brother and sisters, it seems the elderly father no longer plays any effective authoritative role. Thus in this family, there is an evident lack of consensus in gender relations they follow.

In terms of their viewing of *Kyunki*, Sudha is the main and regular viewer while Chinmay speaks of himself as a 'bystander' viewer. Chinmay's readings of the serial, like those of many young and middle-aged males in this study, reveal concerns about modernity and conceptions of nation. For example, multiple marriages and the issue of older people marrying as shown in the serial, for him contradicts Indianness and is a result of Westernization. On the other hand, Sudha (without appearing to directly challenge him) tries to point out that those issues are not as foreign as imagined in reality. The conflicting views between brother and sister can also be seen in the intense disapproval Chinmay shows for the women's dress in the serial, where women wear revealing blouses and tops. Whereas for Sudha dress is irrelevant, saying it is not dress that makes women progressive or regressive, but '*vicharo*' (thoughts and perceptions). From the views Sudha expresses, it seems that the serial appeals to her not so much in terms of gender discourses, but in the discourse of family, where conflict, deceit and selfishness have become everyday realities. The question of ethics—right or wrong--that the serial often opens up through its characters' actions, is a question that Sudha enjoys discussing with her colleagues at work. For example, with reference to the sequence in the serial where Tulsi kills her son Ansh, Sudha was among the very few women in the sample who offered an ethical judgement of the episode, whilst other members in her family focused on moral critique. Sudha tried to present reasoned arguments about the circumstances which forced Tulsi to take such action, also reminding the men that, 'sometimes what is right or wrong according to our perspective, may not necessarily be so' (Sudha Nagar, Family 18). Thus Sudha's own position in the family does not necessitate defense of her viewing unlike many women in the interviews who appear defensive of their viewing when faced with

criticisms from other family members. At the same time, she does not feel a need to rely on the moral superiority of Tulsi also in seeking a transformation of gender power relations.

In the families where men appreciated *Kyunki*, again it did not necessarily mean they were unconcerned about preserving the power of patriarchy. Only in two families were such concerns invisible, while in another two families men enacted their pronounced patriarchal privilege. In one of these latter families, the husband exercised his authority most obnoxiously in matters of cooking. His fastidiousness about the taste of each dish prepared can be understood by the fact that he would make his wife cook each of those dishes again, for the same meal, if it did not meet his expectations. His wife was quite frustrated with this behaviour and had carried such a frustration on from the previous night to the day of the interview, and thus perhaps was unable to contain herself and disclosed his behaviour in the interview. She hardly appears submissive or docile, and is in fact rather enterprising, running a small cosmetic parlour and primary school tuition from her home. While her husband's pleasure in the serial seemed mostly aimed at the actor playing Tulsi, rather than the character of Tulsi, like many of the men who showed indifference, he too showed no anxiety with his wife's pleasure in the serial, perhaps due to his confidence in his patriarchal authority.

In the families where male anxiety was invisible in this study, women did seem to enjoy a much more equitable position; for example, the Jadeja family who I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, and the Chauhan family who, despite being one of most economically poor families in the study, showed the least hierarchal structuring in the gender relations of their family. One of male members in this latter family who enjoyed the serial, was the only man who clearly stated that he enjoyed Tulsi's character, because 'Tulsi despite being a relatively younger member in the family, was able to manage the family…and get everyone on her side" (*nani che to pan sambhali shake che…..badhane potanu kari nakhe che*) (Sameer Chauhan, Family 7). Very few of my male participants shared with Sameer this appreciation of a woman who can manage the family by herself and decide what is best for the family. When relating his readings to the context of his own family it is evident that this family is not so overly concerned by patriarchal ideologies or the restructuring of

such ideologies that the serial offered. The reason for this may be that Sameer appreciated that his mother had raised him and his brother single-handedly after being widowed at a young age. He and his wife showed a clear regard and sympathy for his mother, for the unfortunate and tough life she has had, and they were clearly grateful for her efforts in raising them as best as she could. From what I observed in this joint family, in which Sameer lives with his mother, wife, brother and his two young children, they all seemed to share fairly cordial and contented relationship with even no aspirational worries about their financial or class situation. Both mother-in-law and daughter-in-law also share an obvious respect for each other. Moreover, unlike many other joint families I came across in the study, the daughter-in-law Jigya appeared to enjoy quite a central place in this family's structure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates the conflicting, contradictory and even at times diametrically opposed appeal of the serial for its viewers. And further in viewers' complex and conflicting responses, the chapter illustrates the role of family ethos in activating such readings. Thus in exploring the inter-bound triangular relationship shared between viewers, text and context, this chapter has articulated the processes through which the text or the serial in this case, takes the form of cultural product, offering itself as a space or site for social and cultural negotiation. And further within these negotiations, the chapter demonstrates the subtle, indirect and at times covert attempts viewers make to engage politically with social power structures.

CHAPTER 7

Textual Appeal: Influence of Genre and Form of *Kyunki* in Viewing

In the previous two chapters, this thesis has focused on the cultural and ideological interpretations viewers make from *Kyunki*. Arguing that the serial forms an engaging political space for its viewers and even non-viewers, Chapter five in particular has demonstrated that ideas of womanhood, family and nation are deeply implicated in the reception of *Kyunki*. In demonstrating how viewers engage with such ideas and discourses, Chapter six further focused on the influence of families' social and moral frameworks and the broader discursive environment in the reception of the serial. In continuing to explore the appeal and significance of *Kyunki* to its viewers, this current and final chapter of the thesis will now return to questions about the role of generic structures and features of the serial. I have already introduced these questions in Chapter four, and concluded that endless seriality and melodramatic conventions of *Kyunki* play a significant part in its appeal; however, that argument was based on a critical analysis of relevant literature, rather than on empirical analysis. Thus in this final chapter, I will revisit some of the discussion in Chapter four, but this time with support of my ethnographic findings and in light of the cultural and ideological appeal we have seen of *Kyunki* in Chapter five and Chapter six.

From the study so far it is clear that issues of gender are dominant markers in the viewing of *Kyunki*, with women showing a fascination and investment in the serial, and men assuming a largely critical stance towards it. The previous two chapters on ethnographic findings have suggested that ideological and political concerns, particularly of womanhood and gender roles in families, are significantly involved in the constitution of such differential relations with the serial among men and women. Men experience notable anxiety with the ideal that Tulsi represents, while women experience a definite fascination with the ideal. Moreover women often watch the serial in quite a charged domestic environment, because of the anxiety their families feel with the representations in *Kyunki*. The meanings and pleasure the women viewers draw from the serial then, are shaped by such anxieties, as women's own lived and discursive contexts, and their own political motivations and interests. Further considering that families are dominantly ordered by patriarchal beliefs, women's continued viewing of the serial, despite the disapproving environment,

offers up the potential to interpret the act of viewing as an act of resistance and assertiveness. It is not surprising that none of the women in the study define their viewing as resistance, especially as their viewing seems to occur within a sort of permissive consensus in families, whereby women are granted the time they seek with the serial. This chapter will explore how the formal properties of the text contribute in diffusing the anxieties and concerns in families and assist women in negotiating their desire to watch. It will argue that the scheduling, the feminine narrative and melodramatic mode of the serial—all of which are important parts of its appeal—also allow women viewers to continue to engage with the serial without creating any friction or confrontation in families, even in cases where the men in their families would like them to stop viewing. In understanding the distinctive appeal of textual properties for the serial's viewers, and the way in which these properties also facilitate viewing in the context of ideological opposition, this chapter will now take a detailed look at some of the text's formal properties that were found significant in the study.

Scheduling and Seriality of *Kyunki*

The serial is shown five days a week, and repeated daily—as I have mentioned before the original episode is shown late night at10.30 pm and the repeat broadcast is on the afternoon the next day—which gives viewers much more flexibility in their viewing, particularly in comparison to the earlier serials of India, which were mostly of a weekly format and of which repeats were rare. Nevertheless, despite the flexibility viewers have at hand, the study shows that most viewers mostly prefer to watch the original broadcast every night and, as far as possible, they ensure that this occurs. It appears from the interviews that this late night schedule is particularly convenient and suitable for female viewers, as it enables them to finish their household chores, including cooking dinner and doing the dishes, and then to seek some time solely for themselves, without incurring any guilt for neglecting family duties or responsibilities. Many women spoke of the serial as a good means of 'unwinding' or 'relaxing' after their day's work. For others it has become a habit. The timing of the serial seems convenient to most women, as far as being a fairly non-invasive time where fulfilling their duties to the family are concerned. Nevertheless, in the following extract that I quote with the Sukhadia family, we can see that, despite the relative non-intrusiveness of the schedule to the family, men are still not entirely

willing in letting women enjoy the serial even though they grant women the time they seek for themselves.

The following extract is from an interview with a fairly large joint family of eleven members, formed from two family units of two brothers Nilkanth sixty, and Pradeep fifty-five. Eight members in this family belong to Nilkanth's family unit, which includes, beside himself, his wife, their two sons, two daughters-in-law and two young grandchildren. Pradeep's unit includes his wife and his teenage son. Although both the families live together, and share spaces of their home, Pradeep and his family have a separate kitchen to cook and eat separately. They live in one of the *pols* of Ahmedabad in the old part of the city, in a fairly spacious house formed of five floor levels. But the spaciousness of the home is not reflective of their social status, as they would be classified largely as a middle class family when taking into account other indicators. In this family, although traditional patriarchal relations are evident to the extent that the men work outside and earn, and women stay home and care for the family, in the interactions, between the members hierarchical structures are less in evidence. None in the family came across as authoritarian, in contrast to many other families in the study, and even the daughters-in-law and mother-in-law displayed quite an easy and cordial relation. In this family, television is granted primacy as women's domain, and on weekdays during prime time—that is from 8 pm to 11 pm when the serials are on one after another in succession—the men are rarely allowed to watch anything of their choice. If the men are watching at all—the news, for example—they are forced to fit their viewing into the advertisement breaks in the regular serials, but the trade-off is a complete handover of the television to men on weekends. The women in this family are regular devoted viewers of *Kyunki*, but the men also quite often join them in watching; not because they are interested, but because they are around with nothing else in particular to do and also to join in a shared family activity. In the interview, men in this family mostly ridiculed and criticized the serial, but rather than appearing condescending, the banter was offered as a kind of camaraderie, and jovial spirits was prevalent throughout the interview between all of them. In the following extract we can see Nilkanth's sons, Kiran thirty-two and Jayendra twenty-eight, and their respective wives Gunjan thirty-one and Sonal twenty-five participate:

Priya (to the women): Do you have to make any changes or adjustment to your household chores and routines to watch the serial?

Kiran: Yes yes!

Gunjan: No. We try to finish our work before it starts. It's not that we neglect our work to watch the serial.

Kiran: No, from 9.45 onwards she will start "oh God, I will miss my serial".

Sonal : We make small adjustments between ourselves [in sharing chores] too.

Kiran: They are watching for so many years and its almost a habit now, so they will say "Its about time now…Its 10 o'clock…it will start soon". So they quickly finish whatever work they have. Or sometimes if it is not possible, it's like "okay I will catch up tomorrow in the afternoon…I will let it go today".

Priya: I understand, we [women] don't leave our work for it, but do make an effort also to fit it in our schedule.

Jayendra: No its like Papa is back home from work, so "he will take care of the child now, and let me go and watch my serial"

Priya : Is it?

Sonal : Yes sometimes, I tell him, that I will come back [after the serial] and look after the child.

Jayendra: Yes yes by the time the child is asleep [Ha Ha]).

(Family 4)

Even if in light banter, the men portray the women as desperate to watch their serials, to the extent of being somewhat neglectful of their domestic duties and chores. But the women make clear that their efforts are only directed at fitting the serial within their family responsibilities and are in no way neglectful of them. They also speak of how, amongst themselves, they share or divide their work in such a way that each of them can watch the serials they like. Although the men in this family are quite accommodating of women's viewing, by giving the control of television to women entirely on weekdays, and in helping in small ways – as in Jayendra's comment about the care of the child – their jokes still reveal that they do not entirely consent to the women's claims for time with the serials. Nevertheless, from the lack of complaints with this time schedule, and the fact that none of the women speak of distracted or interrupted viewing of the serial, it can be inferred that this timing is only suitable and convenient to the women. Similarly, other women in the study also spoke of the serial and the schedule as a relaxing hour, between the completion of their chores and finally retiring to bed. The non-intrusive timing and flexibility in the viewing schedule seems to make it easier for women to negotiate their viewing of the serial,

when knowing well how critical the rest of the family, mainly men, are of the serial and their viewing.

The repeat broadcast on the next afternoon, also gives the women a sense of relief and alternative when they are unable to watch or are forced to miss the episode at night. The usefulness of the afternoon schedule to women is, for example, illustrated in the following extract of the interview with Ruksana and her new daughter-in-law Mumtaz, the Muslim family, whom I have quoted in the earlier chapters. In this family too, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are the regular viewers of the serial. Both men in the family dislike the serial. Ruksana says her husband Javed often asks if the squabbles at home are not enough that they (the women) watch more on television, but this was said in humour rather than in serious objection:

> Priya (to Mumtaz): Were you watching this serial before your marriage as well? How did you start watching?
>
> Mumtaz: My mother loves it.
>
> Priya: So you got interested because of your mother.
>
> Mumtaz: Yes.
>
> Priya (to Ruksana): How about you?
>
> Ruksana: When I saw the promos and title I was curious and thought it might be good.
>
> Priya: Unusual title?
>
> Ruksana: Yes, it was different and that's how I started. But then when the men come home you cannot watch. They say you watch the repeats, we need to watch news.
>
> Priya: So they don't allow you to watch?
>
> Ruksana: No, they mostly put on news or English movies.
>
> Priya: Your son too?
>
> Ruksana: Both son and husband.
>
> Priya: And you cannot protest?
>
> Ruksana: No. They say you watch television all day, so we will watch what we like when we are home.
>
> Priya: How was it in your home Mumtaz? Did men have the preference when they are home?
>
> Mumtaz: No we did not have any clashes as such. Everybody had different timings.
>
> Priya: So you would be watching the serials at night?
>
> Mumtaz: Yes most of the time.
>
> (Family 12)

In this family, the women are more frequently forced to watch the repeats in the afternoon, as men claim entitlement to television whenever they are home. However, such a scenario was seen in very few families in the study as most women stated that they manage to watch at night, and the afternoons mostly figured as an alternative in case they happened to miss the nightly episode. In case the extract creates the impression that men in this family are completely overbearing, I should also clarify that elsewhere in the interview Ruksana had also spoken of their obliging nature and of letting the women watch the serials that they look forward to so eagerly. She said both son and husband, occasionally also excused themselves and went outside for a chat with their neighbours or some such activity when the serial would begin. There were very few women in the study who said they had never watched the afternoon broadcast. For most the afternoon served as an alternative whenever they have had to miss their regular schedule.

The narrative format of the sprawling and relentlessly ongoing text of *Kyunki*, results in a slowing of narrative progression (common to soaps as noted in Chapter four). In addition to the repeat broadcast and the late evening scheduling of new episodes, this slow pace is tailored to women's need for flexibility in their viewing. This brief extract of the discussion with the two members of the Raval family, whom I have discussed earlier, bear this out, and demonstrates that, while repeats serve as an alternative, the narrative format also builds in narrative redundancy, at least as can be inferred from the younger woman's comments. In this family, as previously described, the husband shows an indifference to his wife Gayatri's compulsive viewing of serials. In this quoted discussion, Gayatri, fifty-two and her teenage daughter Gauri, nineteen, are seen participating.

> Priya: Do you have to make any adjustments for your viewing?
> Gauri: No we just try to finish our work before that. Or sometimes if some guests or somebody comes, then we may not be able to watch.
> Gayatri: Yes like if there is a guest or if I have a patient [Gayatri is a ayurvedic doctor] then we would miss the episode and switch off television.
> Priya: Do you then catch up the next day afternoon?
> Gayatri: Yes I catch up, but they [the daughters] miss it.
> Priya: And then you tell them the developments in the episode?

> Gauri: No, we [Gauri and her sister] get an idea from the recap shown before the episode starts.
>
> Priya: Do you make some efforts in your routine schedules to watch?
>
> Gauri: No nothing like that. It's okay if we miss one or two episodes. Like when we are back from work, sometimes we feel too tired sometimes, so just go to bed [and don't wait for the serial].
>
> <div align="right">(Family 3)</div>

Gayatri chooses not to miss any details, and thus she makes sure she watches the repeat whenever she misses the nightly episode. The younger woman, however, who is employed and works in split shifts at a hospital, has a more flexible viewing routine, missing an episode or two. Her comments imply that not many developments take place in the narrative within the span of two episodes given its decidedly endless narrative, and as such she would not miss much if she did not watch a couple of episodes.

So far I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which the scheduling and the format of the serial contribute to the reception of the serial, particularly when the environment in the family is not exactly favourable to women's viewing of the serial. In such circumstances, timing and a twice-a-day broadcast certainly seems to facilitate their viewing of the serial. Besides these aspects, some viewers also spoke of how the current structure of programming influenced their continued viewing of *Kyunki*. The predominance in television currently of the new genre of long running of serials containing several overlapping narrative threads, makes it difficult for viewers to switch to a different serial that they have not been following from the beginning. The lack of continuity they experience and unfamiliarity with the 'backstory' (the narrative history) of the other serials, essentially discourages them from change. Whether this was intended as an excuse for continuing to watch *Kyunki* was unclear, but it demonstrates the influence of broader television culture in instilling loyalty and devotion to the show.

In further discussing the contribution of generic and formal properties, the following section focuses on the 'feminine' form and narrative of *Kyunki* and discusses how these elements figure as important parts of its appeal, as well as assisting women in realising their wish to watch the serial.

Feminine Form and Narrative in Viewing

It appears from the interviews that the increasing recognition of the serial as a feminine or women's genre is also advantageous for women in negotiating their viewing in the family. Its characterisation as a particular form of entertainment appealing to women and, conversely, something beyond men's logic, seems to assist women in claiming the time of the serial for themselves. While such gendered characterisations of the serial recall Brunsdon's (1981) discussion of generic competencies in one of her early studies theorising the pleasure of soaps, from my previous chapters on ethnographic findings it is also clear that, in the reception of *Kyunki,* generic engagement is not simply an issue of competence alone, but also of ideological and political motivation. That women develop a favourable attitude to the serial and adopt an open and flexible approach to the serial's generic elements—to while men largely do not—further strengthens the argument about political interests being involved in the reception of *Kyunki*. Women viewers are able to overlook inconsistencies in the serial's narrative and discourse, and continue to engage with the serial, whereas for men the very same inconsistencies further distance them from the serial.

One of the aspects where differences between men's and women's approach to the narrative features can be seen is with the open narrative structure of *Kyunki* whereby narrative resolution is always denied. The closure of one subplot merely provokes further complications in the narrative and entanglement in a story without end. Whilst women did not specifically speak of a particular fascination with a never ending story, the fact that few *complained* about the span of the serial, in contrast to men, indicated that women did not really mind this narrative form. Men regard the endlessness and other narrative devices as a commercial strategy to exploit and keep consumers hooked, whereas women seem to enjoy their ongoing entanglement in the characters' lives. Some women spoke of a desire for tighter plots, and fewer characters, but largely it was not a concern for many. The narrative device of ending each episode at a high point of suspense or mystery and continuously delaying and frustrating resolution, which is part of the open narrative structure, continuously generates curiosity amongst viewers and encourages their return to the serial in the next episode. For Gayatri Raval the point of suspense at the end of each episode left questions to

ponder over until the next episode, or as she says 'food for thought throughout the day'. For Ruksana also when the suspense was too much or the events were too exciting in the narrative, waiting for the next episode to her, felt 'almost as long as an era'. Such 'strategic interruption of narrative' (Allen 1992) seemed to charge these viewers' imaginations, bearing out much discussed claims by Fiske and others about the 'active' readers and the appeal of hermeneutic prediction (Fiske 1987; Schroder 1988). Also this kind of speculation for viewers appeared to constitute not just a game of solving puzzles, or 'whodunit', but very often the suspense related to social, moral and ethical dilemmas, aligning their responses with the textual qualities Gledhill perceives as germane to the moral project of melodrama. Such dilemmas formed the food for thought and social interaction, while keeping viewers engaged. For example, Ruksana cited a recent storyline that she found interesting: when after several years of Karan's second marriage, his first wife Nandini – apparently his true love – recovers from a long coma, unaware of his second marriage to Tanya (an instance of one of those troubling multiple marriages discussed in Chapter six). The dilemma arising then is of choosing between the two women—whom would or should he choose, and the plot for a long stretch keeps this unresolved. Ruksana offered an unusual solution—that he keeps both wives. Under Islamic personal laws in India such an option is perfectly ethical, and a quite acceptable solution for Ruksana,[27] but for our purposes in understanding the appeal, it further reconfirms that such narrative issues become a site for viewers to revisit, reinforce and negotiate their social and cultural ideologies. Such activity seems to be a compelling facet of the narrative engagement and perhaps it is these devices that further drive women viewers to assert their claim on the serial, even when they know the family despises it.

In a related aspect of gendered reception, what men often complain about as repetition—'they show one and the same thing over and over' (*ek hi ek dikhate hain*) (Dinesh Bhatt, Family Twelve)—is what women seem to find enjoyable in the serial. Allen (1985) has explained this aspect of appeal in the structure of soap opera narrative in terms of 'paradigmatic complexity'. The relevance of this theoretical conception to *Kyunki*, is that the appeal of the serial lies predominantly in characters

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[27] Under the Hindu civil code in India, to remarry without termination of the current marriage or death of the spouse, would very well be illegal, but is permitted within the Islamic personal laws of the country.

and secondly in plot lines. The consequence of each action is explored, examined and debated from the various viewpoints of differently involved and invested characters, and this forms an important part of viewers' engagement with the narrative. For example, in the plot instance Ruksana cites, of Nandini's return from a coma, the interest is not simply about which woman Karan will choose, but is also about what will happen to Tanya. How will the family weigh up the feelings and emotions of both women? How will Nandini and Tanya relate to each other? In this way the serial offers a microcosmic perspective on the way larger social issues manifest everyday in society.

The appeal for women viewers of elements of excess in the serial, which men frequently cite in their criticisms, is another illustration of the differing approaches men and women assume to the generic devices. Women viewers enjoy the ostentatious representations of wealth, for example in the dress, jewellery and lifestyle of the women. It appears that women viewers have complex and multiple investments, and are able to view the serial with a pleasurable regard for both the 'reality' of family relations and gendered roles, and the 'fantastic' trappings of rich display. For example Gayatri Raval, on the one hand, finds the serial a significant site for learning about joint family living, the roles and obligations of a daughter-in-law towards her family, and of the family towards the daughter-in-law, particularly for her daughters who have reached a marriageable age. On the other hand, she also has a playful enjoyment of the way the female characters dress and live. She said she fancied the idea of dressing in expensive sarees and jewellery when at home, even though she realised that it was not possible in reality for her considering the housework she needs to do, which would ruin such clothes. Gayatri and her daughter seek to realise this fascination to an extent, by buying from the market the fashions – mainly sarees and jewellery – they see in the serial. They reported widespread interest in fashion trends set by the show, with Gauri complaining that sometimes the featured styles become so commonplace in their society and circles, that they now prefer to go to retail outlets that provided some greater exclusivity. Women from many other families also spoke of their interest in the fashions and designs in the serial. But from the following extract of an interview it will be clear that fashions are not simply an element of whimsy for women, but a further sub-space in cultural and political negotiation. This interview is with the Desai family, a upper middle class family of four members,

which includes Vivek, thirty-two, his wife Shruti, thirty, mother, fifty-two, and a year old daughter Aditi. Both husband and wife work: Vivek as a secondary teacher at a local school (as well as establishing a business in private tuition), and Shruti as an administrative assistant with a local Gujarati newspaper publisher. Hemlata is the only person regularly watching the serial, with her daughter-in-law Shruti joining in occasionally. Vivek is also forced to watch sometimes when he is home at that time, but he holds an extremely critical view of the serial.

> Priya : What about fashions and lifestyles in the serial?
>
> Shruti: It is exaggerated. Who wears such expensive sarees and jewellery [in reality]?; we only wear such clothes at weddings.
>
> Priya: Do you enjoy them?
>
> Shruti: We can learn about fashion trends and update ourselves.
>
> Priya: Do you look for such stuff in the market?
>
> Shruti: We cannot wear such clothes. Those characters they just wear anything.
>
> Priya: You mean it is for a particular type of people only?
>
> Shruti: They wear offensive clothes, like for example, backless blouses. Now we cannot wear them in reality. What Komolika or Pallavi wear, it looks good, but we can't try such clothes. It only suits them.
>
> Priya: So mainly negative characters wear such offensive fashions?
>
> Shruti: Yes.
>
> Priya: What about the *bahus* (daughters-in-law)?
>
> Shruti: They should show realistic fashions like the way a daughter-in-law lives.
>
> Priya: Like Tulsi and Parvati?
>
> Shruti: But their fashions are not so interesting. I mean the jewellery they wear is good, but we can't call them fashionable.
>
> Priya: So fashionable women are negative?
>
> Shruti: Not really
>
> Priya: Does the serial seem to say that?
>
> Shruti: Yes to an extent.
>
> (Family 14)

Shruti's discussion about the fashions, particularly of women's dress shown in the serial, reveals how cultural meanings are implicated in dress, even though at the same time issues of dress may be dismissed as trivial. Her comments show how closely intertwined notions of womanhood are with dress. The negative connotations of provocative clothing and the unexciting dress associated with idealised women in the

serial, makes Shruti seek her own culturally appropriate style drawing on those trends and fashions which relate to her discursive and lived standpoint, rather than simply imitating the fashions she sees on the serials. While the above extract offers scope for a much wider discussion about cultural meanings arising in the serial, I want to focus here on how these discussions reveal the willingness of women to negotiate through the 'excesses' in the serial—even in terms of dress, fashions, lifestyle—in contrast to men who simply tend to dismiss all these with a uniform brush of 'unrealism'. These elements of excess in the serial also appear to allow women a pretext to enjoy subversive ideological readings, as some men in their families tend to think that it is their fancy of such 'materialistic' pleasures that mainly attract women to the serial.

Even if 'trivial' feminine interest in fashion provides a cover for taking pleasure in the agency and power of women embedded in joint family structures, many men remain anxious about vulnerable women in their families interpreting extravagant melodramatic actions as real and being adversely influenced by these less fanciful aspects. This concern is encapsulated in the statement Dinesh Bhatt, the man of the Bhatt household makes, 'as long as we take it as entertainment it is fine' when discussing viewing of the serial in his family, where his wife is a regular and devoted viewer. He, implicitly, is saying to his wife that it would be better to adopt a detached mode of viewing rather than engage with the serial as representing reality.

From women's discussions about the serial, however, specifically in relation to its generic elements, it is evident that women are much more competent than the men tend to think, as not a single woman in the study spoke of the serial as entirely realistic. The struggle the women viewers continuously face, for example, in attempting to locate Tulsi in the realm of ideal, real and unreal, as well the contradictions or flaws that they point out in the narrative elements, reveals their awareness of the serial as an inherently fictional construct. But rather than dwelling on the fictionality, like men do, women seem more interested – in the interview at least – in discussing the various notions of reality the serial addresses and challenges.

Examples of women's awareness of the formal and generic elements of the serial can be seen for example in the interview with the Raval family, wherein Gayatri reveals an implicit recognition of the serial's constructed reality. Gayatri, who has a great

opportunity to hone her generic competencies during the seven shows she watches in a day, notes a formulaic pattern of plot developments in the Ekta Kapoor brand of serials. For example, she says, if there is a murder in one of the serial's narratives, it would soon follow in the other serials too. She recognizes the 'hermeneutic effect', and its role in keeping her drawn in. But rather than see this as a strategy on the part of producers to entice viewers, she instead finds pleasure in it; as I have explained before, she says its leaves her 'food for thought throughout the day'. Even her daughter Gauri's discussion about strategies adopted by producers to drag or stretch the narrative, which she said often put her off, further revealed her lucid understanding of the show's industrial and generic nature. From the discussion with this family it seems that, in contrast to men's fears and assumptions about women's *inability* to distinguish between reality and fiction, women rather have little *investment* in drawing such distinctions. Taking the fictional aspects as given, they seem engaged in a search for realities that are important to them. The strength of narrative themes, like family relations and gender roles, seems to override all else for them.

The views expressed by Vanita from the Modi family provide another example of women's awareness of the fictionality of *Kyunki*. Although clearly enraptured by Tulsi, as I have shown in Chapter six, Vanita also recognises that *khotu* (fictional or untruth) occupies a great deal of space in Kyunki and similar such serials. In defining the realism in this genre, she feels that the current genre of serials are not necessarily unreal, but pursue a mode of realism that is different from the earlier serials in India. Similar views resonate also in the following statement that Jashoda of the Lohana family, makes: 'There are some good things in it, it's not like it is meaningless'. This comment reveals her recognition of the widely perceived unrealism and meaninglessness of *Kyunki*, but she seeks to clarify that it is not necessarily the case, as there are some good, in other words, realistically relevant, things in it too.

Women's discussions of the realism and unrealism in *Kyunki,* both in terms of ideological realities and 'generic verisimilitude' contrasts significantly with the unrealism and fictionality that men primarily see in these serials. I have argued in this thesis and in this chapter that the differences in the way men and women approach or position themselves in relation to the serial involves ideological concerns as well.

Further example of this can be seen in the refusal of Hema, the young businesswoman and daughter-in-law of the Lohana family, to engage with the serial. Her refusal is based on a feminist perspective, rather than the ideological anxiety men experience, where she finds the serial as a regressive representation of women. In the interview she cites the example of a woman character in the serial who was once a working professional and who, after marriage, chooses a completely domestic life. Hema finds it difficult to relate to such notions of womanhood ideologically and as a result tends to paint the serial as predominantly unrealistic. Thus she, unlike other women, is less forgiving of the narrative inconsistencies and the melodramatic mode of the serial.

A nuanced understanding of the function and role of generic elements is offered in the interview discussion with Praful Prajapati, a male viewer who enjoys watching the serial. His wife Veena also watches the serial regularly, but Praful appears a more habitual and devoted viewer than her. In this following extract Praful offers a philosophical and nuanced appreciation of contemporary serial narratives:

> Priya: Comparing *Humlog* and *Buniyaad* with current serials do you see any differences?
>
> Veena: In those serials, they would wear very simple clothes.
>
> Praful: *Buniyaad* was realistic while the current serials are more about style. Not just clothing, but the whole culture is different. Old serials contained and reflected *Bharatiya sanskruti* [Indian culture].
>
> Priya: So the current serial you would say are not *Bharatiya* [Indian]
>
> Veena: No they are.
>
> Praful: It is about Indian culture, but it is about family conflicts and trivialities, whereas the earlier serials were educative.
>
> Priya: Meaning it was not so much focused on the domestic?
>
> Veena: In the earlier serials they would not change dresses so frequently, but now in every new episode the women are wearing new sarees. The importance given to clothes and jewellery is much more.
>
> Praful: Imagine Dileep Kumar or Dev Anand[28], in those days nobody was bothered about clothes and style, performance and acting was more important. But now style, clothes, shoes, lipstick all these matter. *Zamane ke hisab se sab badalta hai* [As times change, everything changes accordingly].
>
> Priya : So do you think these times are better or was it better back then?
>
> Praful: It is to do with 'time'. If you show those serials now, nobody will like them.
>
> Veena: Yes it was good in its time, not anymore. People want to move forward not backward.

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[28] Popular heroes of Hindi films during the 1950s and 1960s

Praful: It is not about forward or backward. It is about our 'today'. What we are seeing today is to do with our contemporary thoughts. Those old thoughts have changed, or say have ended (*khatam ho gaya*). If directors try those old tricks, those styles and those actors, it will not work today.

(Family 6)

In this discussion Praful points out the significance of time and space in the popularity and appeal of narratives. He argues that narratives need to resonate with the 'zamana' (current times). And since the current *zamana* gives a lot of importance to style and presentation, he thinks that old modes of realism may not be a successful strategy.

The discussion in this chapter shows that regardless of gender those viewers, who are ideologically sympathetic to the serial, are able to develop a more open and appreciative view of the generic elements of the serial, which as I have argued previously, closely adheres to melodramatic forms. This chapter has further demonstrated the various ways in which the properties of this generic form not just appeal to viewers, but also contribute significantly in allowing viewers—especially women viewers—to continue watching the serial, even when the discursive environment is not particularly approving or favourable to their viewing. Thus, it appears that a strategic combination of the television culture in India, textual properties of the serial, and the cultural and political significance of the discourses in it, together plays an important role in the popularity and appeal of the serial.

Conclusion

In its investigation of the popularity of *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, a serial of significance in respect to its long duration, social profile and initiation of a distinct genre of serial programming in India, this thesis has explored the social, political, industrial and textual landscape of Indian television. This 'multidimensional' approach (Morley 1999) has taken the form of locating this study within the context of the neo-liberal opening out of the television marketplace and the consolidation and expansion of cable television delivery in India, and examining programming modes consequent to these changes. It has then involved analysis of the structural and generic qualities of the serial form, and the specific hybrid nature of Western and Indian traditions and conventions emerging in the K serials. Whilst drawing principally on ethnographic perspectives to explore the micro-social dynamics involved in the reception of the serial, the thesis has also combined these insights with this examination of the textual properties of the serial. The approach has yielded significant insights into the various dimensions involved and intertwined in the reception and popularity of *Kyunki,* and also addressed some of the epistemological and methodological concerns being debated in contemporary audience studies.

This thesis has argued that a significant part of the appeal of the serial is in the way it forms a *political space* for viewers to forge and negotiate social meanings, and thereby, structures of social power, and it has examined the nature and dimensions of 'the political' in respect to family viewing of *Kyunki*. The intricate and complex family dynamics involved in the reception of the serial that the thesis illuminates, demonstrates quite unambiguously that popular television occupies an important part of the way contemporary society politically constructs itself.

In respect to its theoretical location, I have noted that even though in the initial conceptualisation, the study focused on examining taste cultures and programme preferences, this thesis from the outset was located within a cultural studies framework, and this framework informed the ethnographic and broadly empirical approach I identified as appropriate to fulfilling its research objectives. More specifically, this research project can be located within the recent and evolving 'third generation' of audience studies; the utility—or the necessity—of approaches falling

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into this 'generation' only became apparent during the process of data analysis. The unanticipated degree of discord, contestation and debate that the study found within viewing families over meanings of the serial, demanded an open and flexible framework for analysis. The 'resistance' to analysis generated by the various contradictions and complexities within it—which became evident in attempts to correlate appeal and viewing behaviour to socio-economic class or some evident family typology—prompted the realisation that audiences are much more fluid, unstable, and undefinable than is imagined. Initial attempts to comprehend the data, then lead my approach towards the 'third generation' of audience studies, determining that discourse, rather than social or cultural typologies played an influential role in the formation and activity of audiences. This was particularly evident from the study's initial finding that although gender formed an important part in viewer's engagement with *Kyunki*, a clear gendered pattern is evident only in limited and specific ways in respect to the appeal or reception of the serial. This led to the conclusion that rather than as a category, it was gender as a discourse that was involved in audience's engagement with the serial.

This study is unusual in focusing on viewing families and the reception of a specific text, rather than on individual viewers, and this focus also contributed significantly in drawing it closer to the 'third generation' of studies—of studying media as a whole, as embedded in the culture and everyday life of audiences. Prior studies on the reception of specific media texts have tended to examine the interpretations and responses of individual viewers, with few to my knowledge interlinking and contextualising viewer responses in respect to viewing situations, circumstances or broader discursive frameworks within which viewers or readers are situated. My study's focus on the family has noted and identified the distinct moral and cultural frameworks within which each viewer is situated, and this has been a significant contribution to work in this field. It is through the inclusion the family, rather than simply viewers of the serial, that the discursive frameworks in families and their important role in shaping reception and appeal, has come to light. For example, men, many of whom were 'bystander' or uninterested viewers of the serial, through their discussions revealed their anxieties with the representations in the serial, providing insight into the complex, non-unified nature of the discourses the serial activated in families, simultaneously also revealing the struggles and negotiations that occur in

families over discursive meanings. The subtle ways in which viewers and their families sought to reinforce or transform the meanings of womanhood and different family roles as demonstrated in my discussion of my interviews, has illuminated the mediating role of popular artefacts, such as serials, in the ongoing discursive labour of constructing society.

Specifically with respect to *Kyunki*'s appeal, the thesis shows that for women viewers the serial is a place to confront and negotiate notions of womanhood, primarily through the character of Tulsi. Indeed, woman and womanhood form pivotal points through which notions of gender, family and nation simultaneously develop, and this is the central site of the serial's political social significance. A primary appeal of Tulsi is in the ideal she represents, an ideal in a mobile relation to notions of reality and fiction for viewers. The thesis has demonstrated in some detail that this ideal is constituted in two significant ways: the first closely relates to patriarchal notions of womanhood, where family remains a woman's responsibility; and the second to notions less exclusive to womanhood, where the ethical integrity and strength of the character is glorified. This second element of the ideal, in relying on universal values of righteousness—while also closely evoking notions of *dharma*—draws attention to a yet unresolved tension for women, between gendered morals and universal ethics or principles of righteousness. By giving precedence to ethics over gendered obligations, the ideal challenges some core beliefs about women's roles and responsibilities, particularly when set in the context of family. Thus together the two elements in the idealisation of Tulsi creates conflict for viewers and this conflict reflects Tulsi's role as a reference point and symbol of the meanings, morals and conventions of 'modern' India. For women viewers in particular, while the ideal of devotion to the integration and unity of her family fits well and conforms to conventional expectations of relational roles, such as that of daughter-in-law and mother, Tulsi also *challenges and exceeds* her given familial roles. Moreover, she challenges them from *within* the family, from within *domestic* space, rather than for example, mounting a challenge by taking a 'masculine' position in the public sphere of paid work. The power the character assumes through her moral integrity enables her to challenge patriarchal authority, in being ethical and righteous. Such righteousness elevates her in the family, even in respect to other male family members. Women viewers clearly find such moral superiority fascinating and admirable, even if in the economies of their

own families, and their discursive embedding in patriarchy, lead to recognition that she represents an unrealisable ideal. The dimensions of these responses to Tulsi, as simultaneously admirable and confronting, at once real and unreal, are evidence of the nature of the 'political space' of the serial and its reception: a micro-politics of familial organization and gendered morality and ethics.

The discursive struggles over meanings as also the negotiations that take place in families over viewing the serial, reveal some of the different dimensions of 'political' participation. The responses of many men interviewed reinforce the politicised nature of the spaces created by the interactions of text and audience.

The subtle restructuring of power relations in the family that Tulsi's character seems to propose creates significant anxiety, particularly evident in the criticisms that men fervently offer of the serial and its characters. Quite a few men were disconcerted by the vision of women assuming a leading moral role in the family, and in the serial itself. These concerns (about narrative and family dominance by women) remain at the heart of the criticisms they make, even though they mostly tend to express their critique in terms of modernity's challenge to venerable traditions. The men's ridicule and criticisms then, can be seen as an attempt on their part to discourage women from engaging with meanings that challenge traditional conceptions of gender and family roles. Concomitantly, women's continued viewing of the serial in the face of such discouragement reveals a significant political process in contemporary society, taking the form of a struggle to control social meanings and social power. Men attempt to privilege patriarchal notions through their negation and criticism of the serial, while women viewers seek to transform these notions and meanings by finding significance in the serial.

These conclusions fit uncomfortably alongside my claim that reception is not gendered in any straightforward way (for example along binary lines), however, it is also a significant finding that not all men and women interviewed in the study fit into this emerging dichotomy. Just as some men loved the serial and Tulsi, some women found it difficult to engage with the character. In explaining these differences, the thesis has sought to characterise and define the 'family ethos' of these study participants and explain how it influenced their views. The thesis has argued that

those men showing least concern with the representations in *Kyunki*, belong to families with less pronounced patriarchal organisations, whereas those showing concern with the serial belong to families patriarchal structure was clearly evident. In contrast, women showing concern with the serial and its representations do not appear to be privileging patriarchal notions, but instead reveal the influence of feminist discourses, and particularly the feminist view that such traditional roles of women are socially regressive. Such ideological negotiations in the viewing of the serial are further evidence that the appeal (or dislike) of the serial is not simply social or cultural, but is inherently political as well.

In sifting through the political negotiations that ensue amongst viewers through the serial, the thesis has explored also the influence and significance of contemporary structures of television in India, and the textual properties of the serial. It examines the serial's close identification with Western soap forms particularly in its continuous seriality and melodramatic mode, and also locates the explicit emphasis on religious traditions and culture in the serial as a distinguishing feature of this new hybrid format.

I have proposed that the continuous seriality and melodramatic mode of the serial assists viewers in negotiating their way through viewing environments that are sometimes conflicted or rife with disapproval. The scheduling, the two broadcasts a day, and the daily format of the serial—characteristics consequent on the advances of contemporary broadcasting systems in India—provide women with the means to claim their time with the serial in the face of familial censure or displeasure. Moreover the melodramatic format of the serial serves a pacifying function in respect to ideological concerns provoked in families, as some ambiguity prevails, clouding issues about whether women are taking pleasure in the features of melodramatic 'excess' and feminine discourses, such as in the representations of wealth, fashion, and glamour, or themes that are more challenging or disquieting. While most women certainly also find appeal in the 'excesses', this ambiguity gives women the leverage to engage also with the ideologies that men would prefer to repress.

The final point to be made in concluding is that the politics of viewing that this thesis has demonstrated, makes a strong case for the view that even the most seemingly

'trivial' popular narratives may constitute an important space for members of society to legitimate, question, reflect on, disrupt and define the micro-political familial and gendered discourses that organise social power and relations. This conclusion, further, suggests that study of popular narratives must be considered both within the frame of 'politics' and 'pleasure'. The focus on the latter tends to reinforce gendered dichotomies where feminine pleasure is located in the sensory and affective realm, rather than in respect to the reasoned ethical, moral and social issues, the debates about which form a significant part of the appeal audiences find in such narratives. This study thus demonstrates that popular narratives have an important part to play, not just in the social construction of society, but also in its political formation.

APPENDIX I

Analysis of Survey Data

Table 1 : Distribution of Sample By Religion

Religion	Percentage
Hindu	91
Muslim	7
Jain	1
Parsi	1
Total	100

Table 2: Distribution of Sample by Family Structure

Family Structure	Percentage
Joint Family	43
Nuclear Family	52
Single Parent	3
Others	2
Total	100

Table 3: Primary Language Spoken at Home

Language Spoken	Percentage
Gujarati	90
Chippa/ Rajasthani	6
Urdu	1
Marathi	1
English	1
Hindi	1
Total	100

Table 4: Secondary Language Spoken at Home

Language Spoken	Percentage
Gujarati	4
English	17
Hindi	16
Kutchi	2
N (Total number of families speaking second languages at home) = 31	

Multiple Responses

Table 5: Socio-economic Distribution of Survey and In-depth Interview Sample

SEC	Survey Sample	In-depth Interview Sample
A1	15	20
A2	19	30
B1	26	20
B2	6	0
C	23	15
D	9	15
E1	2	0
E2	0	0
Total	100	100
	N = 100	N = 20

Table 6: Number of Television Sets owned in Survey Households

Number of TV Sets Owned	Percentage
One	79
Two	16
Three	5
Total	100

Table 6.1: Descriptive Statistics of Television Sets Owned

Descriptive Statistic	Television Sets Owned
Mean	1.26
Median	1
Maximum	3
Minimum	1
N = 100	

Table 7: Type of Television Set Owned*

Type of Television	Percentage
Colour	97
Black and White	3
Total	100

*Includes what families consider as the main television set

Table 7.1: Channel Capacity of the Television Sets

Descriptive Statistic	Television Sets Owned
Mean	78.85
Median	86
Maximum	256
Minimum	4
N = 100	

Table 8: Cable Service Providers

Cable Provider	Percentage
Siticable	56
In-cable	36
Others	4
Don't Know	4
Total	100

Table 8.1: Number of Years the Households have Owned Cable

Descriptive Statistic	Number of Years
Mean	10.16
Median	10
Maximum	21
Minimum	1
N = 100	

Table 9: Monthly Cable Fees (in Rupees)

Descriptive Statistic	Fees
Mean	234.43
Median	250
Maximum	390
Minimum	0*
N = 100	

* Some families having personal connections with the provider or accessing illegally pay no fees

Table 9.1: Distribution of Sample by Range of Monthly Cable Fees
(in Rupees)

Range of Cable Fees Households Pay	Percentage
No Fees Paid	6
1 -100	7
101 - 200	16
201 - 300	50
301 - 400	21
Total	100

Table 10: Time Slots When Television Usually Remains Switched On In Homes

Time Slots	WEEKDAYS		
	Yes	No	Can't specify
Morning (6 to 10 am)	26	74	0
Forenoon (10 to 12 noon)	24	75	1
Afternoon (12 to 4 pm)	30	69	1
Late afternoon (4 to 6 pm)	17	82	1
Early evening (6 to 8 pm)	44	56	0
Prime Time (8 to 11 pm)	100	0	0
Night (11 to midnight)	31	69	0
Late Night (After midnight)	6	94	0

Table 11: Time Slots When Television Usually Remains Switched On In Homes

Time Slots	WEEKENDS		
	Yes	No	Can't specify
Morning (6 to 10 am)	25	67	8
Forenoon (10 to 12 noon)	29	54	17
Afternoon (12 to 4 pm)	48	32	20
Late afternoon (4 to 6 pm)	26	54	20
Early evening (6 to 8 pm)	34	48	18
Prime Time (8 to 11 pm)	62	20	18
Night (11 to midnight)	29	56	15
Late Night (After midnight)	7	87	6

Table 12: Average hours of the TV remains on in homes on WEEKDAYS

Descriptive Statistic	Fees
Mean	5.38
Median	5.00
Maximum	18*
Minimum	1
N = 100	

Six families stated that they have TV on for 10 hours and more on WEEKDAYS

Table 13: Average hours of the TV remains on in homes on WEEKENDS

Descriptive Statistic	Fees
Mean	6.1
Median	5.0
Maximum	18*
Minimum	0
N = 100	

22 families stated that the TV is on for 10 or more hours on WEEKENDS

Table 14: Common Modes of Viewing in Households

Frequency \ Modes of viewing	Family sits together to watch TV	Individuals sit and watch separately	TV remains on and mostly watched in passing
Often	60	65	22
Sometimes	15	18	22
Rarely	25	17	56
Total	100	100	100

Table 15: Three most commonly cited programmes that all family members watch together on WEEKDAYS

Programme	Frequency	Percentage
Kasautii Zindagii Kay	50	58.1
Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi	49	57.0
Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki	42	48.8
N (Families watching Together on Weekdays) = 86		

Table 16: Three most commonly cited programmes that all family members watch together on WEEKENDS

Programme	Frequency	Percentage
Movie	50	73.5
News	7	10.3
Cannot specify a programme	9	8.8
N (Families watching Together on Weekdays) = 68		

Table 17: Gender of Family Member Watching Largest Amount of Television in Household

Gender	Percentage
Male	45.6
Female	54.4
Total	100
N = 90	

Ten families could not identify any one person

Table 18: Age Range of Family Member Watching Largest Amount of Television in Household

Age Range	Percentage
1 to 10 years	3.3
11 to 20 years	23.3
21 to 30 years	17.8
31 to 40 years	8.9
41 to 50 years	14.4
Over 50 years	32.2
Total	100
N = 90	

Ten families could not identify any one person

Table 19: Whether Households Watch *Kyunki* or Not

Response	Percentage
Yes	75
No	25
Total	100

Table 20: Total Number of Members from All the Families Surveyed Watching *Kyunki*

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	238	49.7
No	241	50.3
Total	479	100

Table 20.1: Gender Distribution of Viewers of *Kyunki*

Gender of those members watching *Kyunki*	Frequency	Percentage
Male	82	34.5
Female	156	65.5
Total	238	100

Table 20.2: Age Distribution of Viewers of *Kyunki*

Age Range of those members watching *Kyunki*	Frequency	Percentage
1 to 10 years	14	5.9
11 to 20 years	30	12.6
21 to 30 years	57	23.9
31 to 40 years	37	15.5
41 to 50 years	31	13.0
50 plus years	69	29.0
Total	238	100.0

Table 21: Favourite Character in *Kyunki*

Favourite character in *Kyunki*	Percentage
Tulsi	84.0
Mihir	26.7
Ba	21.3
Karan	22.7
Ganga	4.3
N (families who said they watch *Kyunki*) = 75	

Multiple Responses

Table 22: Most Enjoyable Features of *Kyunki*

Features	Percentage
Portrayal of life in a joint family	64.0
Good performances	36.0
Relations between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law	29.3
Portrayal of Gujarati culture	24.0
Attractive actors	22.7
N (families who said they watch *Kyunki*) = 75	

Multiple Responses

Table 23: Whether any Member in the Family Dislikes *Kyunki*

Whether someone in the family dislikes *Kyunki*	Percentage
Yes	28.0
No	72.0
Total	100.0
N (families who said they watch *Kyunki*) = 75	

Table 24: Whether any Member in the Family Dislikes *Kyunki*

Reasons commonly cited for disliking the serial	Percentage
Unrealistic	38.1
Dragging the narrative too much	33.3
Can destroy joint families	14.3
Others	14.3
N (families having a member disliking it) = 21	

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