

## **Imagined and performed locality: the televisual field in a north Indian industrial town**

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*'Punjabis are confused... we don't identify with butter chicken and 'balle balle'; there is more to Punjabi culture than that.'* - 'KD', journalist, Ludhiana, Punjab

### Nuancing the 'local'

It is widely recognised by now that processes of globalisation, or the expansion of markets and financial flows, fundamentally rely on an adaptation to local cultural, political and economic processes. This has been particularly noted in the case of South Asian broadcasting, with its strong consumer preference for local programme content in the vernaculars. The celebrated early instances here are those of MTV, which was taken off the air and had to undergo a 'localising' makeover before being reintroduced to South Asian audiences in 1996, and, by contrast, the local Hindi-language broadcaster Zee TV, whose ratings confirmed the popularity of vernacular programming over STAR TV's imports. Advertisers, marketing organisations and broadcasters in the region quickly learned to shape their strategies accordingly. From the mid-1990s onwards there has been a new appreciation of vernacular consumers and 'local' cultural idioms on the part of a corporate service sector which until recently was predominantly drawn from an English-educated elite, and whose work had largely been aimed at people like themselves (Rajagopal 1999, Saraf 2002). At the same time, in the critical literature on globalisation and broadcasting in South Asia there is also some concern that 'the working of the satellite market, particularly in the northern subcontinent, has reinforced the national at the expense of the sub-national or regional' (Page and Crawley 2001, 302). The reference here is primarily to the dominance of Hindi over other regional languages, and the vulnerability of smaller, local communities and cultures to 'homogenisation' through the consolidation of large centralised delivery systems.

Both narratives, that of the corporate sector's enthusiastic championing of a commodified 'local' in the service of consumerism and that of the cultural critics' defence of local-level civil societies against subsumption by larger-order configurations such as the national and the global/western, valorise locality as a site of resistance to homogenisation or cultural imperialism. I want to suggest, however, that while they are apt to shade into each other, these two senses of the 'local' cannot be conflated: there are subtle, yet crucial distinctions to be made between the registers in which they operate and the modalities of resistance that they promise. The first sense, that of the commodification of locality in the service of the market, refers to the production of a well-articulated set of identities represented through easily and widely recognisable symbols drawn from language, religion, and an increasingly narrow realm designated as 'culture'. Even though such 'local' identities are in fact formulated *retrospectively* in a manner compatible with the terms of an increasingly globalised televisual field, for these categories to be effective in organising consuming practices within a rhetoric of resistant 'cultural' specificity they must be posited as pre-existing, primordial or given (on the 'production of locality' see Appadurai 1995, also Gupta and Ferguson 1997). However, in this framework the specificity of such 'local' identities is undermined by their interchangeability with other forms of difference within a broader repertoire of self-definitions (national, regional, sectarian, gendered, and so on), all of which are strategically mobilised by consumerist epistemologies and rhetorics (Rajagopal 1999).<sup>1</sup>

The second sense of the local, by contrast, is marked by a relative absence of articulateness or self-reflexivity: it is grounded in performative practices and interpersonal linkages that are not always relayed back via overarching symbols of community. Indeed, it is the relative absence of self-recognition or self-acknowledgement that makes this interpersonal habitus both hard to reify and irreducibly local, or inexchangeable with other forms of identity. But also, by the same token, this

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<sup>1</sup> As Rajagopal puts it, 'the sphere of consumption is an infinitely graded hierarchical realm, so that a given repertoire of consumption practices permits one form of inequality, coded in locally recognizable ways, to be traded for another, more nationally or globally legible form. It should be noted that while the translation of regional practices to a more public arena permits new modes of identity formation, the extensive internal differentiation in any individual repertoire renders consumption patterns uncertain as a durable basis for collective action. Any forms of

enacted rather than 'imagined' (Anderson 1991) community does not quite map onto explicitly political formations such as nation or civil society. Even though it might provide the ideological resources and practical infrastructure for actualising such explicitly political formations, it also provides the resources for subverting them through its ability to both acknowledge differences or inequalities and work with and across them.

This paper is a preliminary exploration of the rearticulations and inarticulations of locality or community in relation to the televisual field in the town of Ludhiana, in the Indian state of Punjab, based on research conducted between late 2000 and early 2003.<sup>2</sup> I provide a brief background on Ludhiana as a context for television before discussing how Punjabi regional culture has been formulated in the context of national and global media and broadcasting. I then turn my focus to urban and community identity in Ludhiana, and the relays between media imaginaries of Punjabi and Ludhianvi identity, the televisual field as a performative site, and everyday life in the city.

### Ludhiana as a context for television

Most scholarly studies of Indian television so far have either focused on the giant urban metropolises, or on the villages which still house over 60% of the country's population. Academic preoccupations have tended to echo the agendas of broadcasters, and our current focus on Ludhiana is no exception. If earlier research reflected both the state's developmentalist, nation-building agenda and the academic (particularly anthropological) valorisation of 'village India', more recent studies index a confluence between the 'urban turn' (Prakash 2002) in South Asia scholarship and commercial broadcasting interests in the potential of dense, affluent city markets. Even more recently, however, television networks, advertisers, market researchers and cable TV operators have been turning their attention towards the burgeoning consumer markets in the 'second tier',

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rhetoric used in consumer appeals will need constant retooling, therefore, to address this uncertainty and to thwart an ever-present competition.' (Rajagopal 1999, 137.)

<sup>2</sup> Research for this paper, carried out in December 2000 and December 2002-January 2003 in collaboration with Dr. Sanjay Srivastava (Deakin University, Melbourne), was made possible by funding from the Australian Research Council. This research forms part of a larger ARC-funded project on 'Television, Globalisation and Social Change

provincial cities and towns. As the head of marketing for Siticable (one of India's three major cable distribution networks) in Ludhiana told us, the metropolises are reaching saturation in terms of advertising coverage, particularly for the intensely competitive market in fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs). The push for cable TV markets is now extending to the smaller regional centres, particularly in Punjab with its relatively affluent agricultural hinterland, with the ultimate aim of competing with the state broadcaster, Doordarshan, for the rural audience.

Ludhiana, with a population of about 3 million (as opposed to around 13-14 million in Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata) can be seen as the premier 'second tier' town of Punjab. While it is not the state capital, it is an important, prosperous industrial centre, with a large cable-viewing population: Ludhiana Siticable's advertising tariff card for 2000 boasted over 500,000 viewers across the city, constituting the largest single cable network in North India. Starting with foundries (for agricultural implements) and woollen sock and hosiery manufacturing in the first decades of the twentieth century, Ludhiana also became a centre for producing bicycles and sewing machines after World War II. Ludhiana provides a particularly good instance of both national and global flows, due to its histories of both transnational out-migration and intra-national in-migration for the better part of the twentieth century. Most out-migration of Punjabis to overseas destinations like the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and East Africa has occurred from the agricultural Doaba region just north of Ludhiana, but Ludhiana has not lagged far behind: evidence of its transnational connections can be seen all over the city. Ludhiana is by no means a tourist destination, but hole-in-the-wall counters in the heart of the local bazaar offer foreign currency exchange; travel agencies and immigration consultancy companies abound; local shops stock products like coffee-makers not usually associated with middle class Indian homes. Conversely, a taxi stand in Sydney is known to

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in India', jointly conducted by Sanjay Srivastava, John Sinclair and myself. I would also like to acknowledge the kind assistance of Prof. HR Sekhon in organising our accomodation at the Punjab Agricultural University.

local Indians as the 'PAU' stand, because of the number of drivers there from Ludhiana's Punjab Agricultural University.<sup>3</sup>

The visibility of migrant workers in Ludhiana, mostly from Bihar and Eastern UP, is largely restricted to the industrial areas to the east of the city where they both live and work, even though they constitute up to 30% of the city's population (according to 'KD', a local journalist). Some local cable TV operators acknowledge their presence by providing Bihari-language programming (on ETC's Bihari channel). However the mainstream English- and Punjabi-language press tends to shore up the divide between the Punjabis and the '*bhaiyya*'s (Hindi for 'brothers'), as they are known, addressing itself exclusively (and explicitly) to a Punjabi audience and constituting migrants as risk-carrying others against whom Punjabi prosperity, hygiene and morality must be defended. In practice, though, this divide is not quite so clear-cut. Long-term migrants are undergoing assimilation into the Punjabi mainstream as their children attend local schools and adopt the local language; some migrants also reportedly convert to Sikhism because Sikhs tend to be better paid. Linguistic distinctions are complicated by the fact that while working-class migrant Hindi speakers are learning Punjabi, many urban middle class Punjabis are encouraging their children to speak more Hindi, as they see Punjabi as a relatively rural or provincial language.

In general, Ludhiana's commercial culture has tended to promote social mobility, particularly through entrepreneurship, as with the local-level cable operators and internet café owners who have recently linked up with national-level networks. Currently cable television in Ludhiana is provided by two of the three major national networks: Siticable, a subsidiary of Zee TV, which brought together local cable operators under the aegis of the East Ludhiana Cable Network Pvt. Ltd. in 1995, and WIN (Hathway) Cable, which entered the Ludhiana market in 2001 (India's other large cable network is the Hinduja's Indus Group InCable Net, which was involved in lethal local turf wars with SitiCable in the late '90s). Hathway was started by the Raheja group (Mumbai real estate

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<sup>3</sup> *Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, Non Resident Indians & Persons of Indian Origin Division, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi: 2000, 279.*

developers with an increasing interest in broadcast and internet services), with Murdoch's Star TV acquiring a 26% share in in 2000. However, despite these links with national and transnational players with their formal styles of corporate functioning (upholding the requirements of transparency, reporting and accountability to shareholders and so on), neighbourhood-level cable operators rely on much more flexible, informal and opaque arrangements: indeed, it is these arrangements that make it possible for the larger networks to adapt themselves to local circumstances. For instance, it is well known that even though the major trans/national broadcasters set fixed rates for broadcasting to specific territories and require a declaration of the number of subscriptions from city-level MSOs (multi-service operators: the intermediaries between the national-level cable networks or broadcasters and neighbourhood-level operators), subscribers in different neighbourhoods are charged varying rates more or less depending on how much they can absorb, and neighbourhood-level cable suppliers (also known as LMOs or 'last mile' operators) routinely under-report the number of subscriptions to the MSOs. All this is informally accepted as long as the final figures are within reasonable limits. In other words, the MSOs effectively act as translators between a formal, western-style, post-liberalisation corporate culture and a more informal, 'vernacular' business culture at the local level.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of content, too, while Siti and WIN provide programming from the large national and trans-national production companies, in Ludhiana each also provides a limited amount of its own city-level programming, enabled by local advertising, over and above the usual film broadcasts from videos and DVDs (often pirated) provided on a dedicated channel by all MSOs and neighbourhood operators across the country. Siti and WIN both have their own small production facilities, from which they broadcast city news and entertainment segments mostly consisting of musical numbers strung together by a compere (either performances by local artists, religious or pop music videos, or the ubiquitous song and dance sequences from films), but involving local

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<sup>4</sup> On the role of local entrepreneurs as translators see Ching 2001. There are parallels here with the way in which global trade during the colonial period also depended on such translations across business cultures and moral economies (Jain, forthcoming).

audiences through *vox populi* interviews or write-in requests.<sup>5</sup> These also provide a format for city-level promotions and competitions sponsored by local advertisers; Siticable also uses its local channel for classified advertisements. So Ludhiana cable viewers have access to a wide array of programme choices, ranging from these local city-level channels, through national and regional programming on public and private broadcasters (Doordarshan has a regional centre in Jullundur which broadcasts in Punjabi, while Star and Zee run the Punjabi channels Tara Punjabi and Alpha Punjabi respectively), to foreign imports on channels such as Star World, CNN, BBC or Discovery.

### Producing national/regional locality: Indianness and Punjabiness in the trans/national culture industries

The state broadcaster Doordarshan's monopoly up until the early 1990s meant that a great deal of broadcasting energy was geared towards the nation-building project, whether through news, 'developmental' soaps, or, later, through the more ideologically volatile mythological serials. If this situation changed dramatically with the influx of foreign satellite broadcasting, the big growth area in the late 1990s was vernacular programming, not just in Hindi but also in the regional languages, particularly those of the south. It has been remarked that the northern regional languages such as Marathi, Gujarati and Punjabi have not developed as strong a presence in vernacular programming as their counterparts in the south because northern viewers tend to understand (or are less resistant to) Hindi and therefore 'leak' across to the Hindi channels (see, for instance, Page and Crawley 2001, 184-222). This was certainly the case for the Punjabi-speaking viewers we interviewed, who preferred the Hindi soaps on Star Plus to most Punjabi-language programming, with the exception of live broadcasts of *Gurbani* (Sikh prayers) from prominent *gurudwaras* (Sikh temples), which many people tuned into as early as 5 am.

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<sup>5</sup> Film song based programming is the easiest and most lucrative way to fill programming slots, as song and dance capsules from new and forthcoming releases are provided free by film promoters. From the perspective of viewers, these make for televisual 'wallpaper', whether in shops – where there is often a television running, primarily for the benefit of the person behind the counter – or homes, where, as one retired empty-nester put it, the television substituted for the *raunaq* (lively atmosphere) of a house full of people.

However in the case of Punjabi audiences I want to suggest that there may be another factor at work apart from the greater appeal of Hindi broadcasting on Star and Zee. In a sense Punjabis have not had to look to vernacular media to assert a separate identity, because Punjabis in the culture industries have played such a prominent role in visually shaping national identity, giving national identity itself a Punjabi inflection. This inflection was already present in the Bombay film industry, given the preponderance of influential Punjabi directors, producers, actors and writers throughout its history, and in particular the embodiment by Punjabi actors of a hegemonic national masculine aesthetic.<sup>6</sup> However, the synecdochic mapping of Punjabi bodies and sites onto a national imaginary gained intensity from the early 1990s onwards through the relay between the South Asian diaspora and a growingly cosmopolitan Indian middle class. There have been two key sites for this relay. One has been 'Indi-pop', particularly *bhangra*, which was revitalised in Britain and exported back to audiences in India, where its tremendous popularity was aided by an already thriving semi-formal cassette industry. The centrality of *bhangra* to this phenomenon has meant that Indian pop music is dominated by Punjabi singers, with Punjabi songs and phrases gaining mainstream currency in both Indi-pop and Bollywood film music.<sup>7</sup> The other circuit between diasporic and local audiences is again constituted around the Bombay cinema, whose address shifted noticeably in the mid-1990s towards a transnational, middle-class South Asian audience. Here again, the large Punjabi diaspora, as well as the association of Punjab with agricultural prosperity, has meant that nostalgia for the homeland and its traditions is often mapped onto a specifically Punjabi rural imaginary, as in the case of Aditya Chopra's 1995 film *Dilwale Dulhania le Jaayenge*. Later transnational retakes on the family wedding genre, such as Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) and Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002) are also situated within specifically Punjabi family contexts, again reinforcing the metonymy between Punjabiness and Indianness in the post-liberalisation national imaginary. Through these diasporically-mediated narratives the Punjabi family has become a

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<sup>6</sup> Prominent Punjabis in the Hindi film industry include, to name a few, the men and women of the Kapoor clan, Dev Anand and his brother Chetan Anand, BR Chopra, Yash Chopra and his son Aditya, Sahir Ludhianvi, Rajesh Khanna, Dharmendra and his progeny.

<sup>7</sup> Among the more prominent current stars are Gurdass Mann, Harbhajan Mann, Malkit Singh, Daler Mehndi, Apache Indian, Jassi and Bally Sagoo.

privileged site for exploring both the tensions of transnational living and of the fast-paced social changes occurring within India after liberalisation.

These two circuits of Punjabi-Indianness inscribed by the music and film industries come together in television, in part through Punjabi-dominated music programming and in part through mainstream Hindi channel soaps, several of which, such as *Saans*, *Kusum*, *Kaahin Kissii Roz* and *Des Mein Niklla Hoga Chand* (all on Star Plus) revolve around Punjabi business families. *Des Mein Niklla Hoga Chand*, among Star TV's highest-rating weekly soaps, is set in London; one of its major attractions is that it features songs by Sukhwinder Singh, currently one of the most expensive singers in the Bombay film industry. In these trans/national media contexts, then, issues of urban Punjabi identity are largely subsumed within issues of national and transnational identity.

Meanwhile the specificity of Punjabi culture, at least in these trans/national media imaginaries, resides in the romance of the rural: in stereotypical filmic images of fields of yellow sesame flowers; in popular prints and paintings depicting village idylls with men lying on woven *charpai* beds smoking *hookahs* while their women grind grain and spin yarn; or, in music and dance, in the folk forms of *bhangra* (for men) and *gidda* (for women), performed to hearty cries of '*balle balle*'.

Neither the trans/nationalised nor the rural versions of Punjabiness speak directly to the specificities of everyday life in a town like Ludhiana. However, aspects of these media imaginaries are actualised in performance within the demarcated realms of 'ritual' and 'culture' by urban Punjabis everywhere – and, to the extent that these Punjabi forms have become metonyms of Indianness, by urban north Indians in general. Again, a privileged site for such actualisations is the wedding ritual, a conveniently mobile and acceptably spectacular means of asserting 'cultural' identity within a wider generic format of modern 'everyday life' (on the model instituted under Euroamerican monopoly capitalism), particularly in the context of liberal multiculturalism. Similarly, the performance of a specifically Punjabi identity is cathected onto the observance of Punjabi festivals such as *lohri* or *teeyan*, which, particularly in their more reified versions, take on a recreated 'rural' flavour. The commodification of a reconstructed rural Punjabiness in a demarcated ritual/cultural

space compatible with mass-mediated consumerist modernity was graphically illustrated by the *lohri* celebrations conducted by the London-based NRI (non-resident Indian) family which owns Ludhiana's premier 5-star hotel. Returning to Ludhiana for *lohri* to celebrate the birth of their first daughter (although *lohri* is traditionally associated with celebrating the birth of a son), they used the banquet hall of their hotel as the venue for lavish feasting, drinking, DJ-conducted dancing, the customary *lohri* bonfire, and 'rustic Punjabi' entertainment by the well-known singer Pammi and his troupe from Patiala, who specialise in Punjabi folk songs (*lok sangeet*, as the master of ceremonies put it). After all, as the MC reminded us, being settled overseas the family had returned to enjoy an 'authentically' rural ambience (no matter that this was located in the heart of an industrial town). Pammi wore a shiny synthetic green and gold 'peasant' outfit and a dazzling smile as fixed as his moustache and turban while his patrons came up on stage to perform their version of the auspicious *vaar-pher* gesture, waving fans of crisp banknotes around his head before throwing them up in the air in a shower of cash. Meanwhile the couple of hundred guests continued to eat, drink and chat: for them Pammi might as well have been – as he often is – on television.

My point here is not that consumption *per se* is necessarily wedded to a homogenising culture of modernity: this is evidently belied by the specific ritual contexts and practices of consumption such as the one I have just described, as well as by the prevalence of other local forms of financial credit and consumption such as the women's 'kitty party', a very common aspect of social life across the class spectrum, particularly in Ludhiana (it is also the basis of the successful Zee TV soap *Kitty Party*, written by Shobha De).<sup>8</sup> However the particular forms of consumerism endorsed by mass-mediated advertising and broadcasting also enforce certain homogenising assumptions about the conduct of everyday life, imposing a matrix which both commoditises and restricts the spaces, times and performative modes available for the enactment of 'cultural' identity. Here 'culture' in its self-

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<sup>8</sup> The kitty party serves as an informal credit institution, where a group of women each contribute to a common pool or 'kitty' and then draw lots to decide the order in which they get to take it home. In Ludhiana the kitty party has taken on a highly elaborated form: catering or dining out is essential to most middle-class kitty parties, though they might also be based on other activities or themes, such as the *bhajan* kitty (where a singer is invited to perform religious hymns) or the couple kitty (where couples go away for weekend parties, replete with DJ). While most

reflexive, identitarian form is restricted to rituals, food, dress, song and dance, and to leisure time and/or domestic or private space. This time in turn is divided up into age- and gender-based viewing/consuming categories corresponding to the logic of brand identity, and to a set of assumptions about who is doing what and when. So in addressing the weakening of 'local' cultures through television, the question is not just one of the cultural content of programming, but of the very notion of culture enforced by the commercial broadcasting system as a whole. If both national and regional cultures are valorised and reinforced on Indian television, these forms of locality are not so much 'preserved' as reinvented in a manner that can fit within the changing matrices of everyday life ushered in by liberalisation. In this context Indianness or Punjabiness occupies certain demarcated domains now designated as 'traditional', while other domains, designated 'modern', make space for more 'western' arenas of consumption. An instance of the former in the urbanscape of Ludhiana are the many spectacular 'marriage palaces' ranged – significantly – on the outskirts of the city, hired for weddings and other festive events, while the interstitiality of the latter is exemplified by the tiny neighbourhood 'Ally Beauty Parlour', almost certainly named after Star TV's *Ally McBeal*.

### Performing urban locality

How does city-level broadcasting mesh with this scenario of 'local' identity-formation? Local broadcasting by cable television operators primarily consists of news, films, music-based entertainment segments and the occasional *vox pop*, as well as classified advertising, but drama production is risky and expensive, so there is no city-level equivalent to the trans/national Hindi or Punjabi soaps. At the same time, however – and this came as something of a surprise to us (given the prevalence of narratives in which the local or regional is threatened with subsumption by the global or national) – it soon became apparent that the past three to five years had seen an efflorescence of self-reflexivity at the level of urban public culture, largely orchestrated by cable TV and the print media. Among other things, this heightened self-awareness was indexed by the

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kitties are of the order of thousands of rupees (a few hundred US\$), they can go up as high as Rs 10 lakhs or 1

presence of a recently started city-based glossy lifestyle magazine, the *Ludhiana Dispatch*, one of just a handful of such city magazines in India, as well as by the responses we encountered to our research: everyone we met asked us what we thought of Ludhiana and Ludhianvis as a prelude to proffering their own self-descriptions. Most of all, however, it was indexed by the intense media presence at every possible local event: ministerial visits, concerts, sports meets, conferences, beauty contests, school prizegiving ceremonies, food festivals, a war veterans' seminar, fundraising prayers for a local temple, women's coffee mornings, and so on. Not only were these events marked by the often obtrusive activities of press and TV cameramen, but sometimes media personnel (both men and women) accounted for at least 20% of those attending the event. In other words, whether or not people actually watch their local cable TV news (very few of those whom we interviewed said that they did) or read their local papers, they know that the events in which they participate are covered by the media.

I want to suggest, then, that in part the impact of the new commercial media environment on the performance of urban identity in Ludhiana needs to be understood not so much in terms of fictional representations of imagined community, but in terms of an intensified circuit between media reportage and the orchestration of local events. This intensification is driven by the media's recognition of the potential of the city-level advertising market, and the concomitant organisation of audiences – and hence advertisers – around events of local interest, both through promotions at the venue (sponsorship banners and so on) and through advertising in the local media that report these events.<sup>9</sup> In 1999, when the Hindi daily *Amar Ujala* and the English quarterly the *Ludhiana Despatch* entered this market, it was estimated that advertising in Punjab was worth Rs. 250 crore or 2.5 billion (US\$ 50 million), growing at 20% every year.<sup>10</sup> It is hardly surprising that Ludhiana, as one of the most affluent centres within this lucrative Punjab market, should be a prime target for media penetration. But Ludhiana also seems uniquely amenable to the mediatised ramping-up of

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million (US\$20, 000).

<sup>9</sup> These include the two local cable TV channels, WIN and Siti, English-language newspapers such as the *Tribune*, *Indian Express* and *Hindustan Times* which have their own local editions, the Hindi-language *Amar Ujala* (which established a Chandigarh office in 1999) and the Punjabi-language *Ajit* and *Punjab Kesri*.

live events because of the perceived absence of cultural and leisure activities other than shopping and eating out (the latter perception shored up by the widely internalised stereotype established in large part by Pankaj Mishra's small-town travelogue *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana*). Over the past few years there appears to have been a flurry of event-organising activity, whether on the part of community clubs and hotels (beauty and personality contests, musical evenings, festivals ranging from Karva Chauth to Halloween), religious institutions (prayers, processions, lectures), new cultural organisations such as the Ludhiana Sanskrit Samagam or the local branch of Spic-Macay (both dedicated to bringing 'high culture' to the city), local industries (such as the Vardhman Mills knitting competition), other commercial promoters (from trade fairs organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry to the Bacardi Blast, a party promoting Bacardi rum catering to 5,000 invited couples, featuring Ludhiana's star DJ Bhanu Ahuja) or private individuals (weddings, parties, festivals – again often featuring live music or a DJ). Correspondingly, print and television reporters, for their part, seem to display an insatiable appetite for local news, if not a knack for manufacturing it (to the extent that our presence as researchers was itself deemed newsworthy by the local edition of the *Indian Express*).

Even as the kinds of events I have listed above are obviously live and participatory, their relay through the media – whether witnessed or implied – gives them the additional dimension of being perceived as part of a larger imagined forum, beyond the community or institution most immediately involved. The events themselves might be organised around transnational/regional imaginaries (as with the 'Miss World Punjaban' contest), or around varyingly constituted community forums, from city-level institutions such as the Ludhiana Sanskrit Samagam to neighbourhood, sectarian or caste-based associations such as the Ramgarhia Ladies Club. However the contours of local media address – their imagined viewership or readership – establish a relay between these community formations and the frames of the city and the region. Within these latter media frames, language and class are the more salient categories of distinction, in keeping with the

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<sup>10</sup> 'Eyeing the Punjabi Pie', Shuchi Bansal, *Business World*, 23 Aug. 1999.

advertising profiles, production values and branding of the particular media involved. As with the reformulation of national and regional identity within the terms of the trans/national media, what we are seeing here with the local and regional media is a commercially-driven articulation between different levels of community and modes of distinction, marked for the most part by mutual accommodation rather than by tension. Again, this accommodation is made possible on the one hand by the spatial and temporal coralling of what is recognised as a community's 'cultural' life into leisure time and spectacular events, and on the other hand by the very articulation and playing back of local or community identities, which enables them to be harnessed to the logic of the brand without threatening 'tradition'. Thus, for instance, unlike the controversial Miss World pageant in Bangalore in 1996 which sparked protests from feminists and Hindu nationalists alike, the Ludhiana-based 'Miss World Punjabian' or 'Miss Karva Chauth' events meld the interests of the cosmetics and fashion industries with conservative formulations of Punjabi or Hindu womanhood.<sup>11</sup> If, in an earlier model, post/colonial nationalism was cathected onto the sign of woman and her association with the home as an interiorised space of cultural and religious tradition (as opposed to the modern/westernised domain of the masculine 'outside'; see Chatterjee 1993), this gendered 'home' has now become an imagined, deterritorialised space ('World Punjab'), actualised through mass-mediated *public* performance even as it invokes and valorises domesticity.

That said, however, I want to suggest that there are also other spaces of community or locality that unfold in a minor key: undeclared, uncelebrated and unsymbolised in textual self-representations, mass-mediated or otherwise. These performances of community are not necessarily confined to the gendered domain of woman/home, nor are they necessarily antithetical to mass media or new technologies: indeed, on the contrary, they both enable the penetration of new technologies and set the terms on which this takes place. Consider, for instance, the reliance of cable and other media networks in Ludhiana on interpersonal interactions: on direct, personal relationships between cable

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<sup>11</sup> Karva Chauth is a festival in which married women fast for the well-being of their husbands; now Hallmark-style cards are available for women to wish their husbands on this occasion, which has taken on the contours of a 'Husbands' Day'.

operators or MSOs and customers, local government officials, politicians and local businesses, or between magazine publishers and their advertisers. These relationships are consistent with the 'informal' or 'semi-formal' styles of corporate functioning that have characterised many aspects of the Indian economy during the postindependence period, indexing the absence of a well-enforced formal regulatory environment within which to conduct business. While such financial and resource networks have largely been based on caste solidarities and kinship ties, these identitarian formations have not precluded cross-caste and 'inter-vernacular' (Jain, forthcoming) interactions within regional, pan-national and indeed transnational frames – interactions that are not explicitly acknowledged as the basis for community, even as they are integral to the performative fabric of everyday life. This has historically been particularly true for situations where the introduction of new technologies has meant relatively fluid participation and mobility on the part of different social strata (see for instance Guha-Thakurta 1991 on the early print industries in Calcutta).

Even beyond these relatively instrumentalised connections, there is another way in which the cable TV network provides a site for the performance of community at a micro-level, again in a manner which shifts the terms of existing, explicitly acknowledged and ritually performed identitarian affiliations and solidarities. Take, for instance, the story of 'Jaggi', who started out as a television repair man and then became a neighbourhood cable operator with the encouragement and support of his friends in the neighbourhood. For this group of men, regular social interaction in the evenings and a shared enthusiasm for new technologies (and, they admitted, for the models on Fashion TV) became the basis for an experiment in putting up a satellite dish using local hardware. The three friends, convinced of Jaggi's technical and entrepreneurial abilities, pooled in the capital for this venture as well as pitching in with the physical work of putting up the dish: they animatedly described how it took all night, with people from the neighbourhood gathering to watch this (unmediated yet mediatizing) spectacle as they ran around gathering materials, mixing and pouring cement and so on. The friends' faith in Jaggi – one of them proudly called him 'the father of cable in Ludhiana' was not misplaced: Jaggi's neighbourhood cable business has grown, as has his

reputation in the neighbourhood as a technical whiz, and he is now the technical director for the Ludhiana-wide WIN office. Most evenings when he comes back from the WIN office his friends drop by to hang out with him in his local cable shop, next to his home. This space of male bonding is another instance of the way in which new, globalised technologies are not necessarily alienating and destructive of 'local' community, but can foster it in various unacknowledged ways.

It could be argued that the kinds of performed community I am gesturing towards here are not 'properly' political to the extent that they do not draw on or foster a self-reflexive subjectivity or articulations of solidarity. At the same time, however, these opaque, unacknowledged links form the basis of a performance of locality which cannot easily be accommodated within the terms of consumerist/multicultural identitarianism, unlike the kinds of deterritorialised, imagined locality I described in the first half of this paper. And unlike some of the microresistances whose valorisation is so often lampooned in critiques of cultural studies, these solidarities and networks do not simply retreat to the realm of the personal or private in ignoring the imposed forms of modernity accompanying the new technologies taking hold in a wider intersubjective domain. On the contrary, they actually push back, instituting alternative styles of corporate interaction which can in some instances form the basis for strategic organisation, as with the fierce resistance currently being proffered by LMOs to proposals for the implementation of CAS (individually addressable Conditional Access Systems).<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>12</sup> On September 25, 2001 the Minister of Information of Broadcasting, Sushma Swaraj, constituted a parliamentary task force to make recommendations as to the introduction of CAS in India. This was in large part a response to representations by the Cable Networks Association, a cable operators' organisation, protesting against hikes in the rates of pay channel subscriptions. On December 10, 2002, parliament passed the Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Amendment Bill 2002, which made an addressable system implemented through set-top boxes mandatory for all pay channels starting in the metropolitan cities from July 14, 2003. The bill sets out a two-tier system, with a basic service consisting of free-to-air (FTA) channels whose minimum number and maximum floor price is fixed by the government, and a premium service consisting of pay channels, with rates to be decided by the broadcasters. Cable operators will be obliged to disclose channel subscription rates, the number of subscribers, the rates being charged and the number of subscribers for FTA and pay channels. LMOs are currently up in arms against the proposed floor price for FTA channels of Rs.71.33, which they say will put them out of business; they are demanding a minimum floor price of Rs. 180.

What I have put forward so far is a very preliminary formulation of the distinction I want to make between two different registers of locality, but hopefully it should already be evident that perceiving this distinction in the first place is only made possible by a methodology that treats the 'local' as an ethnographic as much as a textual object. Our current research on television, globalisation and social change in India is based on the methodological premise that the televisual field is both a textual site, which entails a concern with reading and reception, and a site of production and circulation, which entails attention to formal and informal institutional structures and intersubjective processes. Both these modalities inflect the performance of everyday life, culture and leisure, and the distinctions that are made between them. It is by thinking the two together that we might apprehend not only how imagined communities are actualised, both on and off the screen, but also how actual communities might elude visibility and yet exert a certain political force.

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