

## WATCHING NEW NATIONAL LEADERSHIP IMAGES AND HOPES OF 'ACHE DIN' IN ANAND NAGAR SLUM

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### Abstract

*This article based on ethnographic detail of how poor and struggling men and women in Anand Nagar 'Jhuggi basti' watch and engage with political discourses in television news. It argues that watching new national leadership images and political discourses on television gave them with the hope of 'Ache din'.*

**Keywords:** television; news; ache din; politics

### Introduction:

Jayasankar and Monteiro have claimed that Indian viewers inextricably tied up their identities as citizens with watching the news and the audience attitudes for news are their standpoint for the state (Jensen, Chapter-4, 1998, p. 62). Mehta argues that news production itself is a cultural process that cannot be separated from its social environment. While it may be difficult to find out any direct causal linkages between news and audience, there is no doubt he argues, that news initiates and creates a new sphere of political action. If the audience for news expands then the shape of politics will also undergo a change (2008, p. 32-33). In the recall of political news most men and women in Anand Nagar Basti, television had been at best a subsidiary force of political information. Anand Nagar is a large heterogeneous Basti (settlement) of about 3000 households (Census of India, 2001). According to its residents, the slum came up in 1986 on what was originally BHEL (Bharat heavy electrical limited) land. The migrant families from various different rural areas of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and other states (and also refugees from Pakistan) settled here over the years.

In the course of my ethnographic field work in Anand Nagar slums, from November 2013 to July 2016 and repeated visits to respondents' homes we found that watching the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) on television was often a highly active, participative and discursive experience for both men and women in the basti. They had long discussions both during and after watching of speeches that were frequently watched by them. Televised political discourses they insisted had neither influenced voting decisions, nor changed the ideas informing those decisions. While engagement with television, both men and women say, have had few connections with their voting behaviour and decisions over past decades, their narratives do however carry newer powerful memories of mediated, televised images of national, political leaders and political discourses. Even respondents who said they did not watch political discourses in general (most women for instance), still remembered seeing the (current) prime minister (Narendra Modi) on television. Watching his speeches on television (and observing him in other media spaces) they said motivated them and gave them also hopes of 'Ache din' (good days).

### Mediated politics, images and hopes of 'Ache din'

Hayes has pointed out that sometimes voters see and consider politicians' both inside and outside personal characteristics, as relevant to their perception for that politician. Perceptions of candidates' character and qualities whether they are believed to be strong leaders, moral and decent, honest, trans-curate and the favourability of photographic representations of candidate forecast election results (2009, p. 233). Though respondents in Anand Nagar basti are not regular television watchers, they are discursive on the subject of what they think of India politics these days as Prime

Minister Narendra Modi and their discourses on television give them hopes of ‘Ache din’ (good days) and a better life. Kavita a 21-year-old young womansay for instance, “I do not watch too many political discourses on television but I like watching Narendra Modi. The way he talks about bringing good days, I get hope (*mujhe ummid milti hai*) Now maybe our good days will come. Maybe political scenarios are changing (*shayad rajniti ki chavi badal rahi hai*)”.

Many elder men say that they have been participant of political sphere for several years but for the first time in the ‘Itihas’ (history) of India they say they have seen a ‘Neta’ (political leader) who is connecting Indian culture and tradition to the world and the whole world is watching television a “new picture of new India (*yahi hai naye bharat ki nayi tasvir*)”. They say they do not know how or when ‘Acche din’ (good days) will come but it is more about what they think of ‘Acche din’ really means or signifies to them. “*Hamara Pradhan Mantri* our Prime Minister Modi has succeeded in bringing India back to the world map,” says Bhagwandas Kundan, A 30-year-old man, working as a welder in a factory. Hart argues that television, with its facility in creating false intimacy between viewers and politicians, encourages voters to evaluate candidates on the basis of personality to judge them, as Gould puts it “on the same terms a man greets any new acquaintance” (Hart, 1999; Gould, 1972, p. 21, as cited in Hayes, 2009, p. 234). Indeed, Keeter finds in a study conducted from 1952 to 1980 that personal characteristics weighed more heavily in the vote choice of people who relied on television for political information than for those who got most of their news from newspapers. He concludes that “television has facilitated and encouraged vote choices based on the personal qualities of the candidate (1987, p. 344, as cited in Hayes, 2009, p. 234). Bhagwandas Kundan ask what is the good day and for the good day, he say the government will not do anything for free, after all, we have to buy everything ourselves. They say if they want to develop themselves they have to pay for the commodities that they use. They say they know that sometimes prices may seem inappropriate, but that is why the government is trying to ensure that they can achieve the quality of life. They say that after GST (goods and services tax) the prices of commodities will go down and they will be benefited if that will happen then ‘*mere liye to yahi ache din hai*’ (this is the good day for me).

Bhagwandas Kundan says,

“I am not a Modi fan in fact I always voted for Congress in the elections but I do not believe in fanaticism (*katarpanti mai bhi vishwas nahi rakhta*) so, I am not afraid of supporting our Prime Minister for doing good work (*ache kaam ke liye unki tariff karne se nahi darta*).”

If this was done by the old government, Bhagwandas Kundan adds, then everything would be right in the country “*ache din hum sabko milkar lane hai* (good days we all have to get together). They say as a citizen of India their work does not end by making the government only and they have some duty towards this country. Respondents recall televised tropes of ‘Swach Bharat’ watched by them on television and say ‘he’ (Prime Minister) well said that “*main gandagi nahi karunga*, if we all decided not to mess no power in the world can say our country is dirty”. Modi’s appealed to us cannot we make this oath ‘*kya hum ye sankalp nahi kar sakte*’ and they say now they have to decide whether they want good days or not ‘*hamen ache din chahiye ya nahi*’. If people of small and big positions begin their work properly, ‘*ache din apne aap aa jayenge*’ then the good days will come themselves.

Ravish says,

“People do not pay taxes, do not wear helmets, break rules, and throw garbage on the road; you will say why I am saying all these things here but for me, these things are related to ache din good days

of the country. Modi is doing his work and as a citizen now we have to do our work we all have to contribute to get 'Ache din' good days (*sabko milkar kaam karna hoga*)."

They say the current government is doing a very good work with the formula of rich versus poor and the step of demonetization taken by the government was appreciated by many young people in basti '*ab hum jaise log bhi digitalise ho rahe hain*' (now people like us are also digitalizing). Will illiterate people are digitalizing they says yes, they have seen uneducated people withdrawing money from ATM machines during the 'note bandi' and say '*log sikh rahen hai*' (people are learning) and the process of this learning will bring 'ache din' good days? They say when a leader of the country speaks to the public, then he only makes promises, and say in public it is something else and something else personally but our prime minister is doing everything publicly.

Whenever a leader takes such a big step, they say there is an ideology behind every decision and that is the '*rajniti faayda*' (political advantage) but the only ideology behind 'note bandi' was '*janata ka faayda*' (the public's interest). Gaurav say "for the first time I have seen a leader taking positive steps against bribery, corruption, scam and black money it was very good that 'Modi' took the step of 'note bandi' (demonetization) '*ye bohot bada kadam hai*' it was a huge step towards 'ache din' (good days)". This has revealed a lot of illegal black money in the country by which the country's economy will benefit in the coming days and if such a work continues, then '*ache din jarur ayenge*' (good days will surely come). Many young men remember of PM Modi's speech at 6th DigiDhan Mela in New Delhi telecasted on Channel DD News and Zee News on '*kitna gaya kitna aaya*' addressing; "that was also a time when the talk was about '*kitna gaya*' how much went this is also a time when the talk is about '*kitna aaya*' how much came" and say we like to see how our Prime Minister is thinking of our money and also investing the money of both the country and the people in the right way.

They say his government has been working for the last three years but no case of corruption has yet come to the public and say the way he is taking steps to overcome the black money, he is very much appreciated. Ultimately, the judgment is a reflection of the criteria that were most cognitively accessible, not a census of the information the voter acquired during a campaign. By focusing on the image in a way that radio or print media cannot, television, the argument goes, has made candidate personality a more salient consideration for voters (Keeter, 1987; Lang and Lang, 2002, as cited in Hayes, 2009, p. 234). In showing how television can encourage trait-based evaluations of candidate debate performance, Druckman writes that unlike consumers of other media "television viewers have access to visual imagery and nonverbal cues that often play an important role in shaping personality evaluations of others" (2003, p. 561 as cited in Hayes, 2009, p. 234). It seems that they more trust on presentation seemingly what they hear and watch on television is more reliable for them.

Rahul, 28 years, secondary passed vegetable seller says,

"I like all the speeches of Modi Ji as they are motivating but how much came and how much went it was best, the way he said that he is working to catch '*chuiya*' rat, (*ye chuiyaa pakadne ka hi kaam hai*) not only me but every citizen watching television that they will have a hope of ray for ache din."

On other side, how poor and illiterate people will manage cashless transfers; how people will do daily purchasing; how housewives buy grocery if they cannot read or write. But maybe '*agar hum acha soche*' (if they think positive) then they can move ahead '*aage badh sakte hai*'. Many women in basti say when they were watching television news during demonetization and see a balance in

class and status; Nisha says she spotted wealthy and poor people standing together in queue for cash withdrawal and depositing first time without VIP quota bias and say media shows wrong images during note bandi, there were long queues; people was getting hard but money was getting '*paisa mil raha tha*'.

They say yes, something good has been done commodities prices are reduced due to low inflation but one thing they say that was good was that both rich and poor were standing in the line and changing the money, Modi made everyone equal. They say they saw how the vegetable seller was roaming with a touch phone, payment was paid through Paytm all this was something new for the poor people like them. "Everything was fine here, even in difficulties everyone was happy (*sab kush the*)" and say they are learning something new everyday in the contemporary governance of Modi who thought that poor people like us would also use paytm. '*Kya ye achhe din nahi hai*' (aren't these good days)? If a previous government had thought like this before, good days would have already come.

Many women say now they can access to free gas connections and gas subsidy that make their kitchen life easy and say '*khana banana aasan ho gaya hai*'. They say when they watch their 'Pradhan Mantri' (prime minister) insist poor women like 'them' to use LPG gas and say earlier it was difficult to manage because connections were costly '*gas connection bohot mahenga tha*' but now due to Prime Minister initiative for poor women they can access to fuel free and smoke free kitchen that leads their life toward '*ache din*'. Many women who are BPL card holders say they have LPG connections in basti and say '*hum bohot khush hai*' they are very happy that the Prime Minister is doing a very good job; Respondent Sunita 34-year-old housewife and BPL card holder remember of Modi speech on television and praised him the way he thought about his (poor) mother who spent their life in cooking food on '*chula*' dart. "It was the first time I had watched a '*neta*' a leader who addressed Indian mother in his speech and care about her health by saying "*jab garib maa lakdi ka chula jalake khana banati hai to 400 cigarettes ka dhuan uske sharir mai jata hai*" (when the poor mother cooks food on charcoal, she inhales the smoke of 400 cigarettes". They say when they watch all this it gave them with the feeling that '*ab hamare ache din aa gayen hai*' (our good days have come).

Opposition (Congress) party worker, Mohan Shrivastava, a 48 years old law graduate says this step was taken financially to reduce the strength of other political parties and not for the welfare of our country; demonetization was nothing but a political game and say the result of this was seen in the elections of Uttar Pradesh. He further says politics is nothing but managing a social elite configuration and those who have such capabilities, draw the masses in favour of that party. He believes Modi's television speeches help him to attain such 'social elite configuration'. The BJP has created a critical mass mobilisation and an emotionally charged environment through his slogan of '*ache din*' (better days) by using television communication. Hart argues that, such a "character model" of political journalism sends a clear message to voters: "watch television issues confuse, character endures" (Hart, 1999, p. 36, as cited in Hayes 2009, p. 234). Historical changes in campaign communication, some work suggests, have also encouraged a focus on candidate attributes. Baum claimed that now politician uses television commercials to increase their appearances on entertainment programs, to communicate themselves into with people (Baum 2005, cited in Hayes 2009, p. 234). Over recent years, while diverse political knowledges are still not accessible or of interest to most publics in the basti, people engage with symbolic attributes... personality... semiotic messages

## Conclusion

The positive new national leadership images that are occasionally seen in televised news are accepted by men and women in Anand Nagar basti as they do see them relating to their social life and everyday culture as a hope of bringing change. Most men and many women in the basti nevertheless do watch political speeches or discourses on different channels and recall watching images of 'new national leadership' and express revived hopes of *ache din*.

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