

The emergence of OTT Media as a Selective Tradition with a Feeling of Structure

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Abstract

New entrants like over-the-top media platforms are proliferating today, and there is nothing except that it is the future of entertainment. When I look at a large assortment available on various OTT platforms, I am struck by the extent to which it has been invested in establishing a selective tradition with a feeling of structure- the dominant, the residual, and the emergent culture. The terms by Raymond Williams suggest that culture and its artefacts are directly proportional to class-based domination. This dominant culture selects various forms, cultural products, and practices from the past that suit it passing them off as "the tradition." In contrast, some others are neglected and are ultimately diluted. So, the result of ideology and Hegemony is a dominant culture where the ruling class's ideas are a way of looking at life. The residual culture represents traditions that are still present in traces and are a support to the dominant culture. The emergent is the arrival of state-of-the-art beliefs and values within cultural practice. Through the lens, this paper will explore how "*Fabulous Lives of Bollywood wives*" on Netflix, "*Paltan*" on ZEE5, and "*3 Idiots*" on Amazon Prime are cultural spin-offs passing a structure of Feeling.

Keywords: Selective tradition, Dominant culture, Residual culture, Emergent culture, Ideology, Hegemony, the Significant Past, the Tradition, OTT platforms, Media

The emergence of OTT media

Emanating from the discovery of ancient artistry of communicating words, phrases, sounds, and actions, entertainment altogether reached the nascent stage in the later middle ages when thousands of people gathered at temporary wooden structures or theatres to spectator forms of various dramas, plays, allegory, dialogues, monologues, and mimes. As technology paved in, the same content was obtainable in audio and video with the introduction of VHS, DVDs, and Blu-ray. The DTH technology was another significant milestone in media and entertainment, which helped the literature enthusiasts get their hands on various offshore shows and movies every Sunday. Recently, there has been a paradigm shift where watching movies or television has become accessible through Video on Demand services. Streaming of such audio-video content can be accessed through OTT nowadays.

Over-The-Top viewers can connect to an uncensored and biased plethora of stories on any internet-connected device like laptops, smart phones, television, or tablets.

These OTT platforms being global players make the content readily available to anyone and everyone worldwide. It is estimated that there are more than three crore subscribers in India, and this number is just growing by leaps and bounds. In these trying times of COVID-19, when people are compelled to stay indoors, the OTT market has spurred, which has left a profound impact on people's lives. Various telecasted shows based on different themes influence the life of an ordinary man, and hence, Over-The-Top media is considered a carrier of culture and its forms.

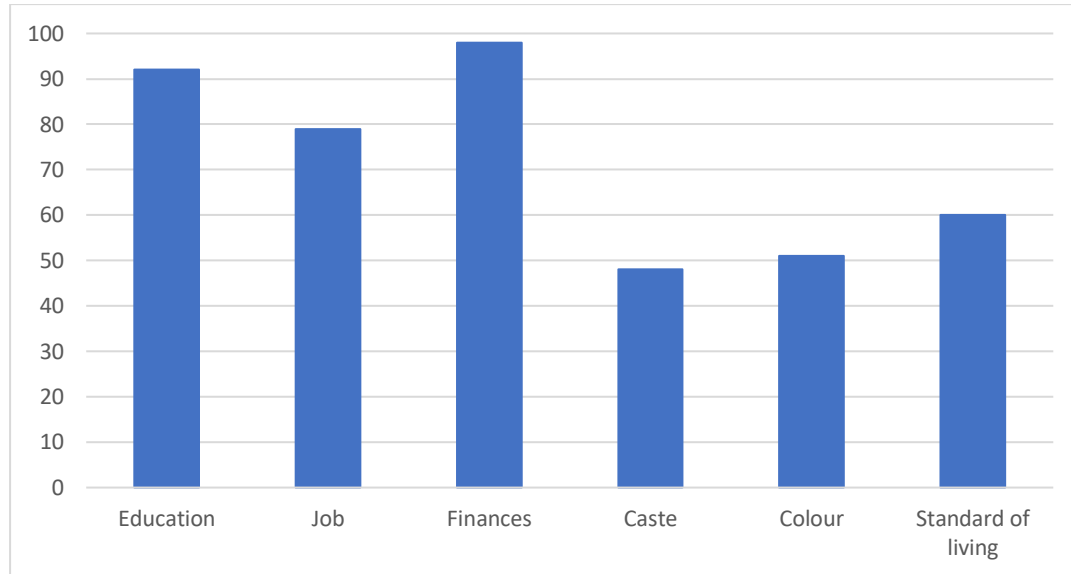
Passing off OTT content as Selective Tradition

Once thought as a luxury out, OTT viewers are now on a spike these days. Directors and producers have employed it as a medium to carry on the selected legacy to explain various events, possibly historical, and justify them as actions in the present. Via Netflix, Amazon Prime, Zee5, and other channels, mediated messages are sent forward virtually. The OTT applications reveal the existence of marginalized forces through selective tradition, which is associated with Raymond Williams a feeling of structure. In 2018, Netflix was accused of swindling the black users with manipulative personalized advertising. Generally, this streaming platform suggests shows based on personal viewing habits. Some subscribers found the recommendation discriminating. Even though they watched the 'Occident' most of the time, suggestions constantly revolved around the 'Orient.' Netflix indirectly tries to compel the viewers to watch certain shows based on ethnicity; because other black users watch the same content based on their preference, the platform was questioned for passing the preference prejudicially.

“...it is underestimated that cultural tradition is not only a selection but also an interpretation. We visualize most of the work previously done through empiricism, without making any provisions to see it in something like its original terms” (Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 1961)

A slew of programs is readily available for the binge watchers who are passed off as "the tradition," "the significant past." A few of these practices are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms that support or do not contradict other elements within the influential dominant culture. The Indian Matchmaking, a show connected by matching Indians and Indian-Americans in the same traditional ways as it used to be in the past, is no exception to passing a selective tradition. The 8-episode series not only promoted casteism, and sexism but also colorism and classism. Justifying her role, Sima Taparia said this is what happens in India (Meher Manda, 2020). An increasing number of marriages in India today are based on love where the partners first choose each other and then later may or may not meet the other half's parents. Rest are categorized as arranged marriages where the consent of parents comes first. Also, in

the latter, today, families look for well-settled individuals; whether it is about the young man or the woman, so most people do not believe in caste, creed, or color (Allendorf, 2013).



The graph above is based on a random sampling of Indians, and Indian Americans, which clearly states that the most important aspect for them regarding matchmaking is education, followed by finances, job, and standard of living. Then a few individuals chose caste and color. So through the Indian matchmaking on Netflix.

‘...it is underestimated that cultural tradition is not only a selection but also an interpretation. We visualize most of the work previously done through empiricism, without even making any provisions to see it in something like its original terms’ (Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 1961)

Whether consciously or unconsciously, selective traditions are influenced by society to a great extent. Particular lines were drawn and redrawn to portray the whole matchmaking process after continuous selection and deselection to draw some new lines and pass it off as the 'dominant culture' (Cazden, 2010).

Conveyance of Dominant, Residual, and Emergent culture by OTT media

Another exciting work of Williams deals with the complexity and dynamic nature of the culture through various categories: dominant, residual, and emergent are distinguished. However, before emanating on to it, understanding the term a structure of Feeling is necessary. The phrase was coined in *The Long Revolution* by Williams (1961) and stressed that cultures have a feeling due to structure. An analogy was put forward between 'solution' and 'precipitation' where 'solution' depicts 'the lived experience.' Two cultures will have the same Feeling due to the same structure, but while moving on to precipitation, the things change. The Feeling of the lived experience is different from the hegemonic forces.

...‘a feeling much more than just a thought- a pattern of impulse, restraints, and tones’ (Williams, Politics and Letters, 1979)

The Over-The-Top media portrays culture today with the Feeling of structure; it leaves no stone unturned in conveying these three aspects of culture that Raymond William’s piece of work ‘Dominant, Residual and Emergent’ does not demystify.

Dominant Culture

At a specific time, in a certain place, a particular class will be in a dominant position, culturally, economically, and politically. The way they look at life is considered the ruling one is dominating society and others' lives. It is irrefutably true; what celebrities do in their reel or real lives has been in the public's glare forever. Their lifestyle is a center of attraction. Through them, the public or commoner takes up personal grooming; imagines leading an aristocratic life where all the comforts and desires are satiated. The actors can create an indelible mark through the movie's script or the script of their personal lives on teenagers and even grown-up individuals; the commoner treats film stars as idols. So it would not be wrong to conclude that due to the power these stars hold, they can manipulate the ideology of an ordinary man, making their perceptions the ruling ones in the society.

...‘dominant culture is the established language and ideals that are determined as a benchmark in the society’ (Gebre, 2018)

In this state of affairs, a recently telecasted program, The Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives, is an epic exemplification of the dominant culture of film stars portrayed through the platform of OTT media. The Uber plush lives that these women are a live example for others in the society. This eight-part reality show features Maheep Kapoor, Bhavana Pandey, Seema Khan, and Neelam Kothari Soni. Their actions and reactions give the viewer more than just access to their personal space. Nothing more than pretty clothes, luxurious cars, and get-togethers, this Karan Johar's show is an example of classicism by the Dominants. Ample evidence is present where dominants and the actors portray a feeling of superiority among the masses. For instance, Maheep Kapoor cannot talk to her maid Rekha correctly in Hindi, which leaves Seema Khan laughing. This depiction of Maheep being superior and flaunting her English skills while Rekha, a maid who is not well educated and belongs to the working class, portrays the power over the marginalized. Dominance is maintained through a compromise between the two opposites.

In another incident where Seema Khan comes up and asks why so many bags are ready for her trip of merely five days, Maheep Kapoor says

‘I had to dress up..... I had a look. I had morning, lunch, dinner
La ball practice, Waltz looks
I had so many looks.’

This dialogue sounds like a classist speaking in four sentences. A commoner cannot afford such a way of life, but Maheep tries to exhibit it as something undeniable, ubiquitous. She tries to justify her actions as a 'touchstone.' Another incident where Seema asks her son whether he saw the finale of Keeping Up with the Kardashians, another reality show based on a Hollywood family, is just like Karan Johar's show which portrays upper classes and untypical values and inappropriate language. Neelam taking fillers and stating, 'everybody is doing it these days, makes it sound like a regular job. Instead of promoting body positivity, they indirectly whisper about Botox and plastic surgery to society. These statements by the actors in real life or real life make a commoner sensitive towards their flaws, and hence, these actors are imitated by many in society. Those who do not are considered old-fashioned or outdated. It is aptly said

Dominance is not imposed; it is a shuffle where the other feels disconnected from their ideology and cultural terrain (Apple, 2000).

Residual Culture

Residual culture involves elements from the past that continuously or occasionally revive themselves; thus, they are supportive of the dominant culture or the opposite. Residual culture is not anachronistic, or as William had put it,

... 'different from the Arctic though quite difficult to distinguish it. Residue remains active in the cultural process....' (Williams, William Marxism, and Literature, 1977)

It would not be wrong to think of residual culture as part and parcel or simply a version of the dominant culture as it is still alive and relevant to contemporary culture. As

... 'specific experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed..... in terms of the dominant culture or nevertheless lived and practiced based on the residue.'

The OTT media is one of the strongest carriers of residual culture. Various shows and movies presented on the Internet streaming media providers depict how various elements of the past are still lived and re-lived in certain forms at certain times. Paltan on Zee 5, popular OTT platforms, is a War film based on the 1967 Nathu La and Cho La clashes along the Sikkim border. Even though the movie was directed way back in 2018, it is considered an example of residual culture for the situation between India and China escalated again in 2020. Director JP Dutta's film is a part of the trilogy where the other two are Border and LOC. Paltan depicts the clash between Indian and Chinese troops to stop the latter's attempt to encroach the Indian borders. Focusing specifically on the Nathu La and Sikkim, which were considered the extension of Southern Tibet, the movie is a saga of residual literature.

China was denied these parts by one of the field leaders in the Indian Army, Major General Sagar Singh. Due to this, in September 1967, gun fires and artillery struck soldiers from Chinese troops, and the situation went out of hand for the Indians. Soon the Indian platoon retired with two officers and a few soldiers martyred that day. The Indian Army

prevented the Chinese troops from advancing and ++forced them to move 3 km backward (BBC, 2021). Exactly, after 44 years, the relationship between India and China worsened. The world powers were facing off against each other along the Himalayan region. Accusations were charged from both sides, which resulted in the growing pressure. This growing political tension was a remnant from 1967 until 2020 when the situation intensified again. So it would not be unjust to claim that an old score between India and China is an example of Williams' residual culture.

Emergent culture

Emergent culture is about new cultural ideas, dominant or opposing, that are practiced constantly by a group of people or individuals. At a particular state of time, it takes shape by surviving through the echelons of society. At times, the dominant culture fails to acknowledge the marginalized spheres of experience, which often bloom out as emergent forms. As Williams had put it:

‘Emergent cultural forms reconfigure the current cultural practices and present them as actions’ (Williams, William Marxism, and Literature, 1977)

The never-ending struggle for Hegemony acts as a catalyst for emerging cultural practices; moreover, serving as hegemonic augmentation and revamping the marginal.

The movie ‘Three Idiots’ is a caricature of the emergent culture. The expectations of parents and society, the un-deterring attitude of authorities, peer pressure, and rote memorization are bonded together in the movie under the theme of educational scenario. How parents want to control their children's lives and how the authorities in educational institutes monitor and shape the ideology of the student are examples of the struggle for power over their tender lives. Individuals pressure students in society to work as engineers because the profession provides high monetary returns. The undue exertion is seen off and on within the society when some other individual achieves unprecedented success. Three Idiots features dialogues where these expectations are enforced. For instance, Farhan's Father imposes expectations on him to be an engineer even though he wants to pursue a career in photography. When Farhan did not reach the interview venue but instead came home and explained that he was not interested in engineering, the Father's reaction exemplifies parents' dominance and ignoring of their child's self-interest.

Farhan's Father- ‘Hasenge log! Final year main akar chod dia? Kapoor sahib bole ki tum khushkismat ho ki tumhara beta ICE main padhta hai, vo kya sochenge?’

(Hirani & Chopra, 2009)

Translation- ‘People will laugh! Left the college in the final year? Mr. Kapoor told me that I am lucky my child is studying in ICE; what will he think now?’

Farhan keeps his request forward that he wants to become a photographer no matter the new culture where children take charge and courageously face strict parents who always exert dominance by setting a standard for them.

Farhan-‘kya Hoga agar primary photographer ban Gaya? Toh kam paise kamaunga, ghar chota hoga gadi choti hogi, par abba main khush rahunga. I will be pleased.... Maine apki har baat suni hai aaj mujhe bas ek baar apne dil ki baat sunne dijiye' (Hirani & Chopra, 2009)

Translation- 'What will happen if I become a photographer? I will earn less and live in a small house with a small car, but dad, I will live peacefully. I will be delighted... I have always listened to you but today, for once, let me listen to myself.'

The Father then tells Farhan's mother to return the new laptop he recently bought to surprise him and instead get a professional camera. This is just one example of an emerging culture where children raise voices for themselves, their betterment, and their interest.

Another example is the unreasonable expectations of Raju Rastogi's family that increase stress in his life. He wears rings on all his fingers so that his stars become favorable, and he graduates as an engineer. The Incident where Raju tries to suicide because of all the familial, societal, and peer pressure is how frustrations created by an authority like the Viru Sahastrabuddhe or Virus can lead to liver failure. When Virus asks him to type the rustication letter, Raju cries in pain,

...‘Papa mar jayenge.....vo zinda sirf isliye hain ki mujhe engineer banta hua dekh sake... Ek mauka aur dijiye sir, please sir’ (Hirani & Chopra, 2009)

Translation- ‘My dad will die... his only aim in life is to see me become an engineer. Just give me one more chance, please, sir.'

Un-deterred by the student's grief, the Director does not melt even a bit, due to which Raju goes into the stream of consciousness, realizing the load of problems he has in his personal life, and decides to jump from the window of the Director's office. After recovering from the accident, Raju changed utterly. When he appeared again for the interview after the incident, he was courageous to own up to why his marks were consistently poor

...‘Bachpan se bright student that. Maap baap ko laga gareebi mitayega, main darne laga. Fear is not good for grades, sir.’ (Hirani & Chopra, 2009)

Translation-‘I was a bright student since my childhood. Parents thought I would rid them of poverty, and these expectations scared me. Fear is not suitable for grades, sir.'

The constant reminder fed into students' minds is not something that happens today but has been happening since time immemorial. However, Raju is another character through which the emergent culture is denoted. He became straightforward in his approach while answering the interviewers, and when the panel exerted again certain kind of dominance, Raju spoke for him,

...‘Dono taange tudva kar pairo par khada hona sikha hai. Badi mushkil se aya hai ye attitude, nahi hoga sir. AAP Apni Naukri rakh lijiye, main apna attitude rakh lunga' (Hirani & Chopra, 2009)

Translation-‘After breaking both my legs, I have learned how to become self-reliant. This attitude that I now have is difficult to change. It is all right, you can keep your job, and I will keep my attitude.’

One interviewer praises Raju for his behavior and attitude, stating that many students for jobs agree to all the terms and conditions; however, you are different. Thus, Raju reconfigures the current expectations of cultural practices associated with ready for the market students.

The story of Chote, aka Ranchod Das Chanchad, is no exception to emerging culture. Aamir Khan plays the character of Chote in the movie. He was highly inclined towards education in the movie. Even though he was a gardener's son and had no formal education initially, he was knowledgeable and outsmarted the educated ones. He solved tenth class questions in sixth grade without any help. Seeing his penchant for education, the actual Ranchod Das Chanchad's Father, the employer of choice, decided that he would finance Chote's education. This will give Chote the education he desires and himself the degree that will take off the tag of illiterate that society has given him. Chote was named after his owner's son, Ranchod Das Chanchad, in the school and college. This is an example of an emerging culture where the marginalized are voicing their preferences indirectly, which are accepted by those in dominance and imply it. This breaks the limit that the dominating ones have created to confine and circumference the others, rationally and reasonably.

The dialogues of Amir Khan in the movie provide a new perspective on the whole education system.

‘Arre Raju hum padhenge, jee laga kar padhenge. Lekin sirf exam pass karne ke liye nahi.... Kamyab hone ke liye nahi kaabil hone ke liye padho; success ke piche mat bhago, excellence ke piche bhago’ (Hirani & Chopra, 2009)

Translation-‘Oh! Raju, we will study with complete dedication. However, not just to pass the exam...not just to be successful but to become capable individuals; do not run behind success but after excellence.’

The new culture of running behind excellence rather than success will lessen the burden on students of the pressures exerted on them by various media.

Conclusion

The Over-The-Top platforms are canons of selective tradition, the Dominant, Residual, and Emergent cultures from the past to the present. The dominant online media is presented through 'The Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives,' which throws light on the Hegemony that the actors exert on an ordinary person's life. The Residual culture primarily relates to what happened earlier as a part of the culture; 'Paltan' is a fine example of such incidents that are residue but remain active in the cultural processes. The Emergent culture depicted in 'Three Idiots' provides empirical evidence of the emergence, renewal, and growth of specific values and cultural norms in the society. Also, an overt facet that cannot be given a miss is that the cultural processes of Residual and Emergent can come into complete sense only with the Dominant culture, which is illustrated via the OTT media today.

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