

The southern connection

With channels scouting for new, varied content, remakes of popular southern serials are joining the ranks of Hindi entertainment programmes

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WITH competition intense on television, channels are scouting for varied content to grab eyeballs. In the recent past, we have seen many international formats being remade for Indian audiences and now popular serials down south—Tamil, Kannada, Telugu—are also being given a makeover for Hindi general entertainment channels (GECs). So, the top serial *Kolangal* in south got a fresh lease of life on Star Plus as *Dor—Maayhe Se Bandhi*. *Meeti Oil* is getting a makeover for Sony, and top draw Zee serial *Pavitra Rishta* also has its roots in a Tamil serial, *Thirumathi Selvam*.

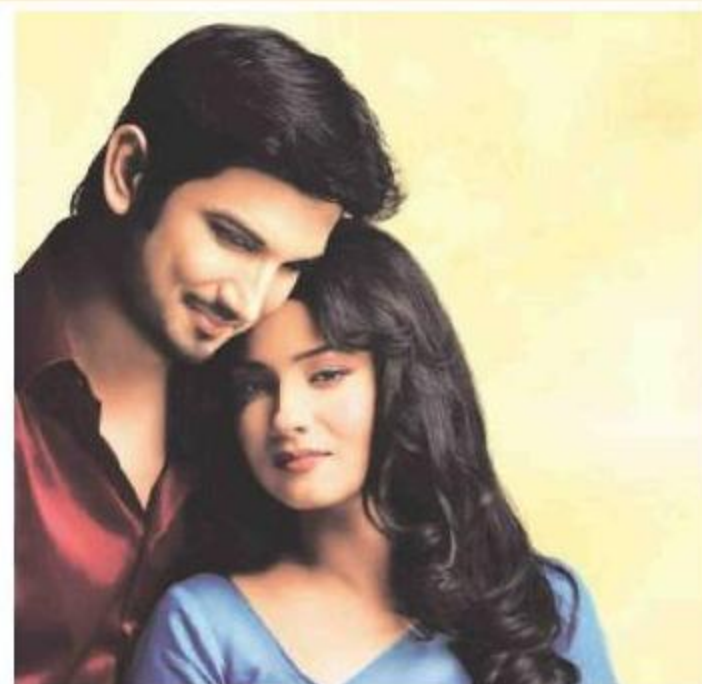
According to Suzana Ghai, creative director, Star Plus, the channel is looking at content from south and the show *Dor* is the first step in that direction. "The power of the character Avni and a theme that even today raises a lot of debate in many parts of society" drew Star's creative team to *Kolangal*. "Can a girl work post-marriage and then make the choice of taking financial and emotional responsibilities of her parental home? This is a topic that a lot of girls will relate to today," says Ghai.

UTV Television CEO Santosh Nair says if a serial has fared well in south, "we don't see any reason for it not to be successful elsewhere. We have been working for a long time in south and following these popular shows. We know what will work with the Hindi GECs."

The non-fiction international formats have worked very well in India. Think *American Idol*, which has already done four seasons in India as *Indian Idol*, *Ugly Betty* (*Jassi Jaise Koi Nahin*), *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* (*Kaun Banega Crorepati*), *The Fear Factor* (*Khatron Ke Khiladi*), and so forth. "Here, we are only importing stories from our own regions," adds Nair.

So, are we past the *saas, bahu* sagas? "Kitchen politics can never be over. We just need differentiated treatment. Loud, outrageously plotted content isn't working," Nair points out.

"There is no doubt that good content on television is no more only about *saas bahu* sagas and new kind of stories are being appreciated by audiences. But success of a *saas bahu* story like



(Clockwise from left): *Dil Se Diya Vachan* is inspired by Tamil serial *Idayam*; *Dor* has its roots in Tamil serial *Kolangal*; *Pavitra Rishta*'s story idea is taken from another popular Tamil serial *Thirumathi Selvam*; stills from *Metti Oil*; *Thirumathi Selvam*; and *Idayam*



Saathiya in recent times has proved that a good story on any relationship told with freshness will always work," adds Ghai.

Zee's Sukesh Motwani says that for *Pavitra Rishta*, which seems to be grounded in Marathi sensibilities, alternations were made. "But the idea of the story from popular Tamil serial *Thirumathi Selvam* was very interesting. It's realistic and has a socio-economic context. It matches middle class issues in today's time with love, emotion, and drama surrounding the family." The two main characters are restrained and dignified and we see many relationships—mother/son, son-in-law, sibling-through their eyes even as they struggle with identity issues, says Motwani. For Zee, *Pavitra Rishta* has worked very well and Motwani says all channels are trying to get shows from the region to the Hindi GECs.

Zee also had another Tamil serial on show, *Dil se Diya Vachan* from *Idayam*.

The creative heads of televi-

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sion point out that there are a lot of changes sweeping across content in GECs. For instance, says Ghai, "Till a couple of years back, the heroine was expected to be perfect. Today, characters need to be more relatable, stories need to be more believable. Great response to shows like *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* and *Sasural Genda Phool* shows that people are open to new type of story telling today and high drama is not the only formula for success." Motwani points out that though larger-than-life dramatic shows also find an audience, largely the realistic, believable plots see more takers. "We have a 7pm serial called *Choti Si Zindagi*, which tells stories of an orphanage and it has done well, too," adds Motwani.

For UTV Television, the second serial it's working on for Sony will be a remake of the popular south serial—*Metti OH*—which will be on air sometime in June. According to Nair, the Tamil version ran for around 800 episodes, with the final episode generating viewer ratings of 40. The Kannada version is still running with around 1,700 episodes, and the Telugu one ran for 1,500 episodes. "As we retell the story for another audience, we will make certain changes to fit Hindi sensibilities," says Nair.

"The most premium thing on television today is creativity," says Danish Khan, marketing head, Sony and "everyone is looking for original, pioneering content." And good content will cost money. Now, with high-definition, television is getting a serious look-in, content costs are going up further because they have to be shot in HD as well. For instance, Star Plus's *Dor* was shot in HD. "Costs are going up," admits Nair, "and it's a huge challenge because you need at least 100 episodes to break even."