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**Schneider, Nadja-Christina; Titzmann, Fritzi-Marie (eds.):
Studying Youth, Media and Gender in Post-Liberalization
India: Focus on and beyond the 'Delhi Gang Rape'
(Kommunikationswissenschaft, Bd. 6).**

Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2015. – 218 S., ISBN 978-3-86596-535-6, 34,80 €

In terms of its thematic foci, this book could not have been better timed. Heated debates over the banning (in India) of the documentary film 'India's Daughter',⁴ based on the 'Delhi Gang Rape' of 2012 and due for release in March 2015, have once again brought the incident to the forefront in media discussions. These discussions on the ban elucidate the variegated public opinion on whether the film should or should not have been released. Voices within India may largely be split into (1) those opposing the release on grounds that the documentary maligns India's international image and gives a platform and too much air-time to a perpetrator⁵ and (2) those in favour of the release on grounds that it 'exposes' (rather than silencing) the roots of a larger social problem. A deeper probing into the discussions, however, illustrates that the picture is more complex and diversified just as the legitimation grounds utilized to support either of the two stands. It is precisely this complexity that the five chapters of Part I (*The 'Delhi Gang Rape' as a Critical Media Event: Representations, New Practices of Debate and Media Sociability*) delve into and graphically unfold.

In her remarkable analysis of what she terms as 'national' and 'global' media discourses on the incident itself and the problem of gender based inequalities, Maitrayee Chaudhuri lucidly demonstrates how growing convergences between the two may be located, though numerous differences still persist. She draws the reader's attention to a very important dimension of new media technologies – their almost magical capacity for enabling 'instant access.' The call for a greater emphasis on history and political economy for a better comprehension of the contexts and the commonalities/differences between these two levels (national and global) of information production is exceptionally well grounded in the empirical data derived from discussions in newspapers, television channels and internet forums. In chapter 2, Jesna Jayachandran draws our attention to a source that has hitherto received less academic attention, viz., reader comments

⁴ Directed by Leslee Udwin.

⁵ The documentary film shows the interview conducted with one of the rapists (Mukesh Singh).

in online print media. By analysing online reader comments from the *Times of India*, she highlights how 'gender bias, hate speech and online rape threats indicate the resilience of chauvinism in digital spaces' (p.70) most rightfully leading to the conclusion that while on the hand, technology enables greater access and consumption of news, on the other hand, it also bears the potent danger of re-enforcing pre-existing inequalities.

Chapter 3 (Fritzi-Marie Titzmann) looks at yet another unexplored platform, a web portal called *Youth Ki Awaaz* (Voice of the Youth), innovatively scrutinising the interface between digital discussions and active mobilisation and participation in street protests in the aftermath of the December episode. It therein refutes the commonly held perception that youth are generally disengaged in socio-political movements. Chapter 4 (Maren Wilger) is a related exploration of debates and discussions linked to the rape case on another online platform, though this time readers get introduced to a US based news aggregator called reddit.com. The chapter rightfully points to the stereotyping and essentialist tendencies to cast the construed homogeneous entity of 'India' as being synonymous with a 'backward rape culture' (p. 126). Generalisations which produce 'Delhi' as 'India' and 'Indian men' as 'rapists' abound here. An interesting aspect of this analysis is the position of the users of Indian origin based outside of India, who were consistently forced into becoming defensive once they identified as being Indian. Chapter 5 is an interview (conducted by Urmila Goel) of the renowned writer, historian and publisher Urvashi Butalia that sharply reflects on the asymmetry of information in non-Indian platforms when it comes to the subject of the longstanding history of the women's rights movement in India. This lack explains the further negative branding of India as a country with no past of movements for women's equality and as being an exotic imaginary country shrouded in religiosity that impedes the realisation of women's rights. Butalia sensitises the readers to the position of feminists and activists from India who, especially when speaking in international fora, persistently need to balance between not silencing and covering the terrible nature of crimes committed against women in India and the gaps in Indian law and, at the same time, appreciating efforts such as the recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee and not allowing external observers to stereotype India but rather to 'turn the mirror on themselves' (p. 135).

Part II (*Linking Youth, Gender and Media Studies: Media Practices, New Im/Mobilities and Evolving Sexual Identities*) shifts the focus away from the December incident in Delhi. Chapter 6 (Thomas K. Gugler) gives a detailed account of the LGBTQ activism in India, particularly describing the criminalisation, the decriminalisation and the eventual re-criminalisation of homosexualities in India. It traces the judicial context within which homosexuality has been

targeted as a criminal offense under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that was later declared as unconstitutional by a Delhi High Court judgement in 2009, only to be overturned by the Supreme Court in 2013. More importantly, the chapter places the subject of sexual liberalisation within a broader environment of capitalist change in India, whereby many participants of pride parades also become potential consumers of advertising and pornography industries. It convincingly concludes that regardless of these processes of commodification, a 'pluralisation and diversification of sex worlds seems unstoppable' (p. 160).

In Chapter 7, Nadja-Christina Schneider analyses documentary films on 'young Muslim women in the city' made by female filmmakers, grounding the much needed claim that such documentaries should not be viewed as 'alternative representations' of a religious other. This especially within an environment where sweeping generalisations and the perpetuation of stereotypes is common practice in the ambit of Indian media. Instead, the chapter offers the refreshing lens of 'entangled im/mobilities' to disclose the nuances of the contexts of a generation of women born in the 1980s and 1990s, who have been witness to tremendous socioeconomic transitions, of which cities are the most graphic expression.

Chapter 8 (Kabita Chakraborty) is an ethnographic study of two *bustees* (urban slums) in the city of Kolkata where the author traces the impact of mobile phones on local youth culture. The chapter aptly shows how the mobile phone becomes the icon of socioeconomic aspirations, a connecting medium for enabling 'forbidden' love and changes from being an unaffordable luxurious technological apparatus of status to being a banal everyday 'entertainer'. The chapter is rich in its material, collected over a decade, and calls for more attention to be paid to technology in general when studying youth culture.

In general, the edited volume is promising and offers engaging discussions on the increasing presence of new media (online platforms) in post-liberalisation India and its impact on issues related to gender and youth, though not shying away from older forms like newspapers, television channels and documentary films. However, the link between the two parts of the book could be developed further. This cannot be captured aptly only by relying on the usage of the word 'beyond'. There seems to be a slight imbalance between an exclusive thematic focus on the 'Delhi gang rape case' in five chapters and a more diversified focus on the 'beyond', with three chapters covering documentary films on the question of 'young Muslim women in the city', the diversification of sex worlds and the usage of mobile phones in shaping youth cultures. Though the larger umbrella themes are actively interconnected, chapters in Part II, at least after a first reading impression, appear to be more disconnected to Part I. Though all eight

contributions in this volume are driven by the motivation to render visible the interconnectedness of (new) media, gender, youth and its political implications' (p.15), it would add to the richness of the volume if this interconnectedness was theoretically more explored also in the introduction.

With regards to the first five chapters dealing with the Delhi rape case, a question that arises is whether in their dealings with the different media platforms, the authors encountered cases whereby users (female or male) have (whether in anonymity or not) announced their own past experiences of harassment and abuse as a means to connect/relate to the Delhi incident. Some of the contributions do point out to the uproar the Delhi case caused because of a general feeling that 'it could happen to anyone'. It is perhaps important to note that new media especially becomes an interesting medium here. Such platforms do produce mobilisation but also offer people the possibility to remain anonymous in spite of openly claiming similar pasts. This relative anonymity prevents the stigmatisation feared when one 'goes public' about the experience. This strengthens the cause of new media tools, which can mobilise communities based on an identification viewers/readers draw to what is being discussed and is an aspect, which could be further developed.

Another issue in Part I, which deserves greater space, is the category of the 'victim'. While all contributions are sensitive in terms of classifying the categories of 'national', 'gender', 'global', etc., there is no dealing with the term 'victim.' This ascription to the persons who have been discriminated against or abused has a legacy of deprived agency, highlighting a 'deficit' which is accorded to those aggressed. There have indeed been feminist voices that have attempted to critique this deficit discourse. The category, however, has not been viewed through the analytical lens by the contributions (and emerges as an emic one) though a great reflexivity is apparent on other such discursive groupings.

The above stated, these remarks should not deter readers from engaging with this volume as it indeed provides a collection of well researched, theoretically grounded essays which offer new refreshing insights for research in the field of Indian Media Studies. The book is promising in that through its diverse topics, it aptly presents the diversified nature of the post liberalisation Indian media.

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