



KOSMOS Workshop

MEDIA, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS IN INDIA

20 September 2014, 9 am - 4 pm

Venue: IAAW, Invalidenstr. 118, 10115 Berlin

LIST OF ABSTRACTS

Mediatization of politics and the role of Muslims in the Telangana conflict

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The creation of India's 29th state on June 2, 2014 realized a 56-year-old demand for the division of Andhra Pradesh due to internal economic inequalities. The decision of the center to create a new federal unit was preceded by massive agitations that had been going on since 2009. For the Telangana movement and its final success media played a key role. As the traditional outlets were largely dominated by high-caste groups from Coastal Andhra and presented the movement rather unfavorably, Telangana supporters had to find other ways to make their voices heard. Thus the conflict over the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh also led to a change in the region's media landscape. New TV channels and newspapers with an explicit pro-Telangana stand were launched. Social media were increasingly used and new websites emulating professional journalism created. Through active participation in the movement, Muslims could increase their visibility and could for the most part successfully incorporate themselves into Telangana collective identity.



‘Gender and the Vision of the ‘Modern’: Television and its Public

NANDITA BANERJEE DHAWAN, Assistant Professor, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata

The ‘new Indian woman’ was projected as the new face of global India in the 1990s, both in the development discourse of the Indian state and in the media. The 1990s was a period when liberalisation of media regulation and dismantling of state control paved the way for the entry of global media conglomerates. The paper focuses on ways in which the ‘pan-Indian-ness’ of the ‘new Indian woman’ on state-owned public television, Doordarshan, in the 1980s changed to a strong ‘Hindu’ identity with the advent of satellite television, giving rise to the image of the ‘new Indian (Hindu) woman’ by 2000. I map this trajectory of television representations by studying the genre of Hindi family soaps on national television in the context of the rise of the Hindu Right and feminism in the 80s. The ‘new Indian woman’, in such representations, is definitely not a passive recipient of gender ideologies; she makes her own choice, negotiates, rejects and even redefines certain patriarchal norms of marriage, but not at the cost of the institution of marriage itself. The message is loud and clear — ‘empowerment’ of women is possible only within the ideologies propagated by the ‘Hindutva’¹ Gender Rhetoric’.² I locate the rise of the television star Smriti Irani, from an ‘ideal daughter-in-law’ in a popular television family soap to a Minister in the new Hindu Right government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The protagonist of the family soap exemplifies the gender turn of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). As long as she carries her ‘tra-

¹ I use this term not in the sense of Hinduism, but to indicate the contemporary Hindu Right organisations and movements that use this banner.

² The Hindutva forces project the patriarchal family, with the heterosexual married couple at the centre, as the ‘natural’ and ‘eternal’ unit of the society, and *the* ‘legitimate’ structure of family in practice. They view the family as the primary and most important unit for imparting good ‘values’, the family will be at risk if women start to question gender ideology and norms, leading to its disintegration. They refer to women’s essence as wife and mother as their strengths. They have described motherhood as the cherished ideal of every Hindu woman and marriage, obviously, the necessary correlate of motherhood, which needs to be rigidly normalised for a woman. I refer to these characteristics as the ‘Hindutva Gender Rhetoric’.



ditional' image by wearing her marital symbols and measures her success in terms of how well she can groom her children, the patriarchal order of the BJP seems perfectly capable of accommodating her 'modern' desires of 'empowering women', 'reservations for women' and 'punishment for rapists'. Thus, while she is 'modern' enough to publicly campaign for the development agenda and demand women's rights for safety and their reservation, she is 'traditional' enough not to question Hindutva's integral relation with development and the basic structure of the patriarchal institution of family. In response to the Indian women's movement, the *Sangh Parivar*³ has spawned its own women's organisations which claim to be representative of the actual desires of Indian women and the sole alternative to the women's movement that is invariably termed as 'western'. Smriti Irani seems no less than a 'feminist'- one who wears her religious identity on her sleeves. My paper thus tries to study the challenges this situation poses for Indian feminists and women's movement.

Networking, Media Activism and Media Practices by Dalits - Case Studies from Rajasthan, Delhi and Transnational Contexts

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Already in 1945, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the most popular leaders in the history of Dalit movements, made serious allegations against the Indian 'mainstream' media for being exclusive and biased (see Ambedkar [1945] 1991: p. 200). More than 50 years later, the Indian 'non-Dalit' journalist B.N. Uniyal (1996) stated in his famous article "In search of a Dalit

³ This implies the family of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, a contemporary embodiment of Hindu militant nationalism, which includes the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* and the Bharatiya Janata Party along with its other constituents.



journalist” that he was not able to find even one Dalit journalist in India. Since then, a small number of journalists, activists and scholars attempted to verify his hypothesis. Recent studies reveal that even if there are nowadays at least a few Dalit journalists working in India’s ‘mainstream’ news industry, the job opportunities as well as the news coverage of Dalit issues within this sector are still very limited. Most of these studies and articles discuss ‘casteism’ within the Indian media system and try to elaborate the reasons for the ‘absence’ of Dalits in media business and news coverage. Comments on alternative Dalit media are mostly by-products of the analysis or focus only on one form of media (see Jeffrey 2001; Kandasamy 2008; Prasad n.D.; Rajpurohit 2014; Teltumbde 2010; Thirumal & Tartakov 2011).

In contrast, this paper examines forms of networking, media activism and media practices by Dalits. It demonstrates that several Dalit groups, activists and organizations were able to build up trans-regional and even trans-national communication and information networks, which are based on different forms of media. Especially the availability of new information and communication technologies in recent years benefited those developments. Nevertheless, the process needs to be understood as a long-term process, interrelated with the struggle and growth of Dalit movements in the last century. The emerging heterogeneous networks and mediascapes function as spaces for Dalit voices beyond hegemonic mainstream discourses and in certain cases they are even able to connect those voices to mainstream discourses. In spite of these strengths, it has to be taken into account that the sphere of influence is often limited and new exclusions can emerge due to power structures within those networks and mediascapes.

The analysis includes two different points of view. Based on a qualitative case study with Dalit activists and journalists from Delhi and Rajasthan, conducted in November 2013, the paper illustrates how different actors perceive the role of different forms of media for addressing their issues and how they describe changes in power structures and possibilities political agency. Furthermore, the perception of the self within those networks, especially as



a producer of news, is analyzed. From a meta-perspective the paper gives insights in the flows and power structures within such networks as well as in the interaction between different types of media.

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“The Voice of the Youth”

Social media discussion following the Delhi gang rape case

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The paper concentrates on online discussions following the Delhi gang rape case of December 2012. Since an analysis of India’s vast social media landscape would go beyond the scope of a single paper, I focus on a selection of blog entries posted in reference to the Delhi gang rape case on the online platform *Youth Ki Awaaz*. While social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are preferred as mobilization tools, the online platform mainly serves to voice opinions and generate discussion. But given the increasing tendency towards cross-media strategies, *Youth Ki Awaaz* features many links to social networking sites by operating Facebook and Twitter groups and accounts and by compiling updates and opinions from these platforms.

This paper looks into the dominant themes of discussion revolving on *Youth Ki Awaaz* around the rape case and how they relate to the nationwide street protests triggered by the incident. I understand the expression of opinion and subsequent discussion as an important aspect of any form of social activism and protest. Building on that, my hypothesis is that debates in social media form an integral part of the dynamic discourse within which the protest movement is situated. Furthermore, as the empirical data show, many of the young people who contributed their views on *Youth Ki Awaaz* engaged not only in digital discussion and online mobilization but participated in real-life street protests in the aftermath of the Delhi case. These experiences inform their engagement with social media and vice versa.



Another Poverty Film

Another Poverty Film is a black comedy which explores the mindsets behind the gross inequality that exists in post liberalized India. Through humour, the film portrays the assertiveness of the new Indian middle class which borders on callousness and the deep anger of 'non-citizens' who are on the wrong side of the Indian growth story . The film travels through a cross section of urban India; encountering a mix of middle class opinions, news telecasts, state policies and angry outbursts from the 'left over' people. This journey is complicated further by the self-indulgent pontifications of a middle class filmmaker who has a penchant for making up academic sounding words.

Biography

Fathima Nizaruddin is doing a practice-based PhD at the Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media (CREAM), University of Westminster, UK. She is researching about alternative documentary practices in India. She is an Assistant Professor (on leave) at AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, India. Her films have been screened at various international festivals like Puno de Vista (Spain), Filmmor Women's Film Festival (Turkey), Barcelona International Women's Film Festival (Spain), International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala (India), New Jersey Independent South Asian Cinefest (USA) and VIBGYOR International Film Festival (India).