

ISSN 2348 - 5663



VOLUME 8 ISSUE 1  
JANUARY - JUNE 2019

**Peer Reviewed Research Journal**



DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION  
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT  
KERALA, INDIA

COMMUNICATION &  
JOURNALISM RESEARCH

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 1  
JANUARY - JUNE 2019

**Peer Reviewed Research Journal**

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM & MASS  
COMMUNICATION  
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT  
KERALA, INDIA

Published in India by

Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut.

All rights reserved. ©2019. This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or imply or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. Publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

The opinions expressed by authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the University or of the organizations with which they are associated.

## **Editorial Team**

### **Advisory Board**

Prof. (Dr.) J V Vil'anilam, Former Vice Chancellor, University of Kerala

Prof. Usha Rani, Professor of Journalism, University of Mysore, Karnataka

Dr. Subash Kuttan, Former Head, Department of Journalism, University of Kerala

Dr. Sucheta Nair, Associate Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut

### **Chief Editor**

Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut

### **Editors**

Dr. Muhammadali N.

Sikha N

Ramis Salam. P.

Raju. C.V.

### **Editorial Assistants**

Sikha N

Meljo Thomas

Ritu Raveendran

Ramis Salam. P.

Subhida E K

Smitha P

Raju. C.V.

Sam S

### **Address for communication**

The Chief Editor, Communication and Journalism Research

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

University of Calicut - 673635

Kerala, India.

Email: masscomhod@uoc.ac.in



## **Information for Contributors**

Communication and Journalism Research is a biannual refereed journal that publishes significant original research works and reviews in communication and journalism. Communication and Journalism Research accepts original articles which have not been published and which are not under consideration by another publication. Articles should be between 5000 and 8000 words in length (includes everything from title to references), should be free from jargon and should be written in English, as clearly and concisely as possible. Each article must start with an abstract.

Communication and Journalism Research accepts submissions by e-mail. Authors can submit the articles by email to: [masscomhod@uoc.ac.in](mailto:masscomhod@uoc.ac.in). The file should be saved in the 'Word for Windows' format. PDFs are not accepted.

Manuscripts should follow APA (American Psychological Association) style. The author should retain a copy. Full name of author(s) should be given with their mailing address (es).

A 'bioblurb' of approximately 100-150 words should be supplied for inclusion in 'Notes on Contributors'. This should include current and recent academic and professional affiliations, together with a list of major publications (with dates and name of publisher) and forthcoming books.



## Contents

### Editorial Note

**Mapping Media Anthropology: Thinking through the Possibilities and Shifts** 1-13

Khadeeja Amenda

***Rahbar e Deccan* and Infrastructural Modernity in the Princely Hyderabad** 14-28

Muhammed Ashraf T

**Body, Desire and Identity: A Textual Analysis of the Film *Chitrangada-The Crowning Wish*** 29-41

Anupama K P

**Narratives and Aesthetics of Iranian Children's Films** 42-51

Dr. Abdul Muneer V

**Gender Sensitivity in Journalism Education: The Case of University Education in Kerala** 52-61

Anju John & Dr. Muhammadali Nellyullathil

**Mediating Science and the Public: Biotechnoscience, Media and Science Communication in India** 62-75

Jawhar Cholakkathodi





## Editor's Note

One of the dominant advantages of the discipline of communication and media studies is that it encompasses diversity as it deals with an array of communication tools, processes, strategies and techniques. The current issue of the journal reflects this diversity. This issue does not focus on a particular theme, rather it aims for generating an enriching discussion on the dynamics of diverse media practices ranging from early print culture to film, as well as on the traditions of intellectual and critical engagements as regards the discipline.

Khadeeja Amenda draws our attention to the various modalities and dimensions of engaging with the lived experiences of the media. Mapping the debates and discussions on media anthropology the author posits certain key questions: Is there any need to revisit our understanding of what constitutes media or media theory? Can media theory exist as an overarching concept especially in the context of new understanding and approaches pertaining to the embodied and performative dimensions of different communication tools and techniques including media? 'Mapping Media Anthropology: Thinking through the Possibilities and Shifts' underscores the need for theorizing media in relation with the experience of the media texts itself.

Muhammed Ashraf T takes the readers to the print cultures of erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad. Focusing on the selected editorials of the Urdu daily *Rahbar e Deccan* the author explains how the daily mediates between modernity and tradition, and between the state and the people. The analysis of the editorials highlights that in the princely state, modernity was not placed in opposition to the tradition, rather they were mutually constituted. Apart from focusing on relevant issues like the freedom of the press, and the role of the press in a society, the editorials were also meant to provide an understanding of how Urdu had become a language of knowledge and instruction in the princely state of Hyderabad, and the challenges associated with in the making of it.

Film studies has been emerged as one of the exciting fields of study. On the backdrop of the Bengali film 'Chitragada-The Crowning Wish,' Anupama K P engages with the question of how people navigate through their intimate spaces-body, desire, and identity, and an exploration into this question opens up a discussion on the possibilities of queer aesthetics in cinema. The article also sheds light on a relatively less theorized area- how a collective work of art like film can be recognized as the autobiographical work of an individual. She explains how the film brings up new avenues for cinematic autobiography, especially queer

autobiography. The paper also looks at the ways in which an artist creatively and imaginatively utilizes his/her medium to make an engagement with one's own self.

Iranian films have been known for depicting children in central roles. On the backdrop of a number of globally acclaimed Iranian films that employ children in key roles Dr. Abdul Muneer V reads the many meanings behind the employment of children in films from Iran. The study argues that on the one hand such children-centric films bring to reel the real-life issues and struggles experienced by the Iranian society at large and on the other hand the employment of children in films can be seen as a deliberate strategy adopted by the filmmakers to circumvent restrictive laws formulated by the government.

Anju John and Dr. Muhammadali Nellyullathil in their article address certain relevant questions: Is Mass Communication and Journalism education in Kerala gender sensitive? To what extent, the curriculum and syllabi of Journalism and mass communication help the learners deal with gender inequality and gender stereotyping in their academic and professional lives? Thematically analysing the syllabi of the Post Graduates departments in different universities in Kerala, the study finds that though most universities teach legal aspects of indecent and obscene representations of women and focus on nurturing debates on gender stereotyping, there is a conspicuous absence of women in the syllabi of media history. In similar vein, little significance is given to understanding feminist approaches to media as well as to the perspectives of alternate gender categories. In the light of the analysis the paper calls for a revival in terms of gender policy in the curriculum of Mass communication and Journalism in particular and in the higher education scenario in general.

Jawahar Cholakkathodi looks at the interconnections between bioscience, media and the public in the context of print media in India. By analyzing biotechnology related coverage in three national dailies such as The Hindu, Times of India, and Indian Express, the author argues that communication of policy science to the public is more challenging than the communication of the basic science. By mapping changing trends in the media coverage, the paper argues that such analysis helps us to unearth the production of knowledge in a mediated setting.

# Mapping Media Anthropology: Thinking through the Possibilities and Shifts

Communication & Journalism Research

8 (1) pp 1-13

©The Author (s) 2019

Reprints and Permissions:

masscomhod@uoc.ac.in

ISSN 2348 – 5663

**Khadeeja Amenda \***

Research Scholar, Centre for Media Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

## Abstract

This paper is on the trajectories, possibilities and shifts of media anthropology or anthropology of media. Media anthropology is a 'buzz word', in discussions on media or communication studies. A niche for media anthropology is sought within the genealogy and critique of media theory to provide a much-needed context and conceptual clarity for the same. Media anthropology's theoretical and historical location is sought in the performative and embodied aspects of media studies. Mapping of media anthropology debates from the 90's to the contemporary Indian context is done to understand what it like is to *do* media anthropology. Media anthropology, and its *whats* and *hows*, are placed between technologies and mediations to think through the constitutions of media and media theories. The paper asks, 'should media theory pave a theoretical and conceptual way for media anthropology'?

## Keywords

Anthropology of Media, Communication, Mediation, Media Anthropology, Media Studies.

## Introduction

The anthropological interest in media came about in the mid-nineties when the importance of media in everyday power relations, identities, imaginations and ideologies became explicit. The everyday practice of media and the participation of media audiences became the anchoring remark for the anthropological engagement with media. The anthropologists attempted to understand the everyday/lived/ongoing media practice enmeshed in daily life. This paper discusses media theory in the framework of anthropology as a discipline and practice. By discipline, it emphasises specifically the stream of anthropology that deals with media. The paper tackles the possibilities of what qualifies to be considered as 'media'. The practice thinks through the multiple methodologies of anthropological studies ranging from the ethnographic studies of newsrooms to the public engagement with media and the state.

Is an anthropological turn sufficient in media theory to understand the daily negotiations of media and people? By tracing the debates between media theory and anthropology of media, the paper would engage media theory in the anthropological terrain with examples from the Indian subcontinent.

---

\* Correspondence: khadeejaamenda@gmail.com

## Media Theory: Genealogy and Critique

The genealogy of media theory could be traced back to the models of communication constituted during the post-world war era. Rooted in puffery and propaganda, these models of communication attributed no agency to the media audience, perceived them as docile users of media devoid of any power to interpret the information being bulletted upon them.

Mass media is the collective term used for means of communication to the masses existing in various mediums and forms. From lithographic printing to the internet, are various forms of mass media depending on the context and purpose of its use. Mass media theory is primarily categorised as a social scientific theory, cultural theory, normative theory, operational theory and everyday theory of communication (During, 2011). Early media theory conceptualised either mathematically, scientifically or as propaganda/puffery had lacunae of understanding the human engagement with the media. The information was seen as a structured *flow* where the *channels of communication* played a vital role, and the *receiver* may or may not have the agency for *feedback*. Communication, an intrinsic phenomenon to human beings where schematised and theorised in the laboratories of companies that produced communication devices like telegrams, including still popular ones like Dell.

Media theory entangled with modernity tried to rationalise and appealed itself as scientific owing to the interests of the west. The loci of these theories were the 'effects' on the receiver along with the receiver's power to propagate information. Certain media scholars attributed the history of communication to Aristotle's concept of Rhetoric. Rhetoric consisting of the speaker, the speech and the listener is considered as the foundation of media theory. Inspired by Aristotle, Harold D Lasswell's schematic representation of communication is regarded as the earliest form of media theory (1948). The influence of this 'mechanistic' and 'effects' model is reflected for a decade in the history of media theory. The primary motive of media theory was influenced through persuasion. The Shannon and Weaver model of communication (1949), Wilbur Schramm's interactive model of communication (1954), Westley and MacLean's conceptual model of communication (1957), Berlo's SMCR model (1960), Dance's Helical Spring model (1967), Becker's Mosaic model of communication (1968), Barnlund's Transactional model (1970) are some of these. Rather than rejecting them as a schematic- mathematical model, a careful examination of these can end up with the traces of the social in it. Lasswell's understanding

of the behavioural aspect of communication extending to animal communication is such a possibility (Lasswell, 1948). These models based on linearity, positioning users from active senders to passive listeners, postulated a notion that the communication involves a mechanical and schematised process (Kumar, 1994).

A new discourse on communication theory occurred when these 'effects' theory paved the way for those based on experience and relationships ensnarled in the process of communication. The semiotic models of communication influenced by semioticians and linguists, including Ferdinand de Saussure, C K Ogden, I A Richards, and Charles Sanders Pierce's seminal work, contributed a new arena in media theory where the meanings of the messages were given focus. These theories comprehended the social interaction through messages. Theodore McComb's A-B-X model of communication (1953), though functionalist in approach, appreciated the social aspect of/in communication. He introduced the role of communication in social relationships to 'maintain social equilibrium within the social system' (Kumar, 1994). The pioneering work of Marshal McLuhan brought in a paradigm shift in media theory where the medium was considered as the influential agent rather than the content. Though his categorisation of media as hot and cold is dwindling, the over-arching argument postulated by McLuhan, according to media scholars, gained popularity after the widespread of the World Wide Web (McLuhan, 1964). Harold Innis, along with McLuhan, emphasised mass media as a central element in the history of human civilisation. McLuhan considered technology as an extension of man, and Innis found the source of social change in technological innovation (Carey, 1967).

Marxist scholars perceived media as a materialistic product of capitalism. Media was seen as the vested interest and power of the ruling class that deviated the common public from the realities of life. The early Frankfurt school (Adorno and Horkheimer) considered mass media, which is a part of mass culture, as an 'instrument of capitalist hegemony that created false needs and desires' (Spitulnik, 1993). Mass media was seen as a cultural commodity, and the role of media in the creation of a bourgeoisie public sphere was delineated by later scholars like (Adorno, 1991), (Althusser, 1971) and (Chomsky & Herman, 1988). The emergence of British cultural studies embarked on a shift from the structural-functional approach that was in media theory. The cultural specific dimensions of media production and reception, including culturally-based aesthetic evaluation, were their significant contribution to media theory as such. Seminal works of Raymond Williams briefed the role of technology in understanding the social fabric,

whereas Stuart Hall's semiotic analysis understood the process of communication through decoding and encoding (Hall, 1980). Raymond Williams, who combined theory and ethnography, understood various *expressions* of subaltern imaginations, including subaltern resistance through popular culture. The encoding/ decoding aspect of media considered media audiences as the active participants in media engagement (Dickey, 1997). Parallely the media content analysis happening in the United States since 1920 contributed new arenas in understanding the discipline. Inspired by Innis and McLuhan, James W Carey, the communication theorist, brought in a classical turn in media theory that is yet to be acknowledged. He brought the concept of *communio* to the process of communication. A new conceptual understanding was brought by Carey even to the term communication that emphasized media theory beyond a sender-receiver relationship. This concept of *communio* was grounded in the experience of the performance of communication. By attributing 'life as a conversation', Carey phrased cultural studies against positivism and positive science where the foundation of media theory lies. He categorised communication process as the transmission view of communication and the ritual view of communication; transmission view is regarded as may happen in transportation of goods ( like in telegraphs) ritual view as the process of communication intricate to media theory beyond symbols and orders embodied in the culture, practice and rituals. The functionalist and formalist approach to media theory was critiqued by Carey. The emerging empirical tradition in the discipline of media theory was called by Carey as those 'creating and maintaining American society'. Carey's work reflected the existence of social hierarchy in technological determinism. The above-mentioned classification of the communication process as ritual and transmission view of communication emphasis the performative aspects of communication (Carey, 1964).

The ritualistic/performative aspects of communication put forth by James W Carey, can be interrelated with the symbolic theorists who engaged with the text as an ongoing interaction between the producer and the active users of the text. Goffman's (1971), understanding of dramaturgy that deals with the interactions of everyday life can be attributed to the media performance. Inspired from Goffman, Joshua Meyrowitz (1985), draws from McLuhan in deliberating his concept of no sense of place. He deciphers how print kept the media in an intact space, whereas new media is cutting across spatial and temporal biases. Gidden's (1991), formulated his theory of structuration where everyday actions can influence factors, including media. Contemporary postmodern theorists like Jean Baudrillard perceived the media question not as a mere representation of social life but as how the

social life itself has transformed into a media event, shifting to a situation of hyper-reality<sup>2</sup>.

Media theory took a shift by giving importance to audience engagement with media than the media text. The relevance of anthropology of media is at this vantage point of audience engagement with the media. Media theories conceived in the west based on quantitative data, homogenised the media engagement and experience. The major limitation of media studies/media theory was on the conception of media engagement. The intrinsic elements of media engagement, including the relationship between media and state, media and gender, media and religion, were negated by early media theory. Indigenous film making and comprehension of them ushered the beginning of a sub-discipline in anthropology called the anthropology of media. Known as media anthropology in academic courses, anthropology of media is still an emerging field in understanding the daily negotiations of media and its users.

### **Mapping media anthropology**

Modern fieldwork anthropology was born into this new environment-film for instance, was brought to India and was produced and disseminated not only in urban cinemas but also in the rural traveling shows long before the Malinowskian revolution in anthropology began- and yet, oddly, until very recently, anthropology has largely ignored this perceptual world (Fischer, 1991, p. 531).

American Anthropological Association defines anthropology as the study of humans, past and present. A discipline that understands the full sweep and complexity of cultures across all of human history, anthropology draws and builds upon knowledge from the social and biological sciences as well as the humanities and physical sciences (Association, 2016). Anthropology as a discipline covers various aspects of human interaction and culture, including mythology, art history and various social institutions. Why study media anthropologically and not sociologically? Sociology is a relatively new academic discipline, and in the west, unlike in India, it is seen as a discipline that deals with hardcore quantitative data. Traditionally anthropology studied 'exotic' cultures while sociology was disciplined to study one's own culture, owing largely to colonisation and colonial knowledge. Methodologically, Sociology is rather constituted by case studies, whereas anthropology is equivalent to ethnography, at least for a few.

---

<sup>2</sup> A condition where reality and fiction are combined so as it is difficult to distinguish between the two.



Both these disciplines study human behaviour with the social<sup>3</sup>. Through anthropology of media, I would like to discuss the lived/daily/ongoing media engagement with the media users.

The anthropology of media considered media as a shared aspect of contemporary social life (as institutions, workplaces, communicative practices, cultural products, social activities, aesthetic forms and historical developments) not different from the social organisation, law, economics, religion and art, as socially conceived and enacted thoughts thoughts (Ginsburg, Lughod & Larkin, 2002). Media theory shifted from the content to 'post-content' era with the advent of anthropology of media. The study on mass media and its relation to the cultural and the social is applicable to every field research site (Spitulnik, 1993). The strength of anthropology lies in its concern with people and lived practices and their negotiation with embedded ideologies, politics, and economics (Askew & Wilk, 2002). Ethnography is used to understand the production, consumption, circulation and theorising of media. The interconnectedness between media practices and cultural frames of reference is reflected in various ethnographic cases. Certain scholars claim that the ruptures and debates in the 90's and 80's in the discipline of anthropology and its methodology lead to the formation of anthropology of media (Ginsburg, Lughod & Larkin, 2002). A pursuit of ethnographic knowledge and cross-cultural understanding of media can be seen in the studies done by media anthropologists.

It took a decade to understand media through the lens of anthropology after Debra Spitulnik pointed 'there is as yet no "anthropology of mass media"' (1993, p. 293). The paradigm shift in the social, political, economic and cultural post 90's culminated in a constant engagement between media and anthropologists. Early media theorists were curious in understanding media representation, the context of production and circulation of media content, practices and discourses of reception. The empirical works on media from Raymond Williams to Arjun Appadurai (even if deficient in ethnography) locates media anthropology in a society that had a post-understanding on the use of technology. The concept of culture (Bourdieu, 1993), imagined community (Anderson, 1991), and public sphere (Habermas, 1992) is important in understanding these formations. Appadurai's work on understanding the importance of media (even if the media is transnational or national) in translating the 'local' should also be read along with (Ginsburg, Lughod & Larkin, 2002). The vantage point and

---

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion on history of anthropology see, (Singh & Guyer, 2016). On sociology and social anthropology in India see (Srinivas, 1952). Ethnography and anthropology see (Col & Graeber, 2011).

challenge of anthropology of media was in understanding the 'total social fact'. Sara Dickey points that anthropologists should not shift the complete attention from the centrality of the text (1997). When intertextuality (in the context of new media) plays a major role, one has to understand what constitutes the text itself. The focus of present-day anthropology is on the experience and knowledge during media engagement.

The decade long gap mentioned by Spitulnik does not imply the complete absence of anthropology of media. The early offset of anthropology of media can be seen through the 'culture-at-a-distance' approach formulated by the United States during World War II. The ethnographic work done by Hortense Powdermaker (1950) on Hollywood film-makers can be considered as the baby child of anthropology of media. The anthropology of media conceived by Powdermaker, Mead and Bateson had a different epistemological understanding since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The relations between Hollywood, the produced movies and impact on the audience were her central concern. Media anthropologists ushered a shift in media theory entangled in quantitative studies and used qualitative methods like an in-depth interview and participant observation. Later on, ethnographic studies on media emerged (Dickey, 1997). Rather than seeing media as an 'entity that corrupts the public' anthropology of media reconceptualised the mass media's relation to the "culture" and "society", briefed on the construction of an imagined community of nation-state by configuring a central position to media (Spitulnik, 1993). The neglect of anthropology of media leads to the conceptual gap in understanding the centrality of media in the twentieth century, especially where concepts like print capitalism is much critically understood (Dickey, 1997).

The 'mass-mediated identities' in 'imagined spaces' became a constant in media anthropology. Post 90's the methodology of anthropology of media can be attributed to studies on producers, consumers, space of media (exhibition sites like cinema halls, cinema locations, film festivals) and reflexive method where one's own encounter with media is taken into account. From anthropological studies of the newsroom to folk songs among native communities, anthropology of media engaged with the lived experiences of media and its worlds. When it came to films, the materiality of cinema as a medium and as a form is of curiosity. Anthropologists are yet to make a clear distinction between media and other forms of knowledge in the creation of these identities. A media audience can either consume their own culture or create a visual pleasure/desire by consuming the culture of the other. The major focus of media anthropology is proliferated on large media forms like television (Ang, 1989), (Hamilton, 2002), (Lughod, 2002),

(Mankekar, 2002) and radio (Tacchi, 2002). Studies are emerging on micro media forms like audio cassettes, compact disc lending shops and so on. The differential ideological positions of media producers give the anthropologists a new space to emerge with a wider understanding of media anthropology (Askew & Wilk, 2002).

Corporate ethnography, new media anthropology, digital anthropology and cyber anthropology are some of the buzzwords in media anthropology. The establishment of graduate courses in the west on digital anthropology and anthropologist's intervention on the digital (internet including social networking sites, apps etc.) gave a new methodological arena of digital ethnography. Debates persist on various aspects of digital ethnography, including assurance of research ethics (Miller, 2011), (Miller & Slater, 2000). Visual anthropology and ethnographic films constitute another major part of the present day's anthropological work. Critical engagement of anthropologists and media can be seen by the introduction of two books; *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader* (Askew & Wilk, 2002) and an edited volume titled *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (Ginsburg, Lughod & Larkin, 2002). These anthologies on the anthropology of media brought a new understanding in conceptualising media theory where the constant interrogation of media and the people became primary. The anthropological works on indigenous media enabled the discipline to engage with race, ethnicity, symbolic processes, and political arenas.

Media anthropology thus comprises ethnographically informed, historically grounded and context-sensitive analysis of the ways in which people use and make sense of media technologies. From gender and media to the aural media forms, anthropology considers the experience of media texts rather than its mere interpretation.

### **Selected works from the Indian context:**

From film fan clubs (Dickey, 1993) to film making (Pandian, 2016), there has been a critical engagement between the anthropology of media and the Indian subcontinent. Anthropological studies on media in India have largely been on visual anthropology works ranging from calendar arts to the pictures of Gods. There are also works on cinema based on production ethnography, audience viewership, relations between gender and media to idea of nationalism. The prima facie importance of anthropology of media in India was on the visual manifestation of the social.

The role of media in the formation of nationalism (in its ultra-form or sense of belonging) is one of the recurring themes in works pertaining to media

anthropology in India. Purnima Mankekar, in her seminal work *Hindu Epics, Epic Contests: Television and Religious Identity in India*, ethnographically studies the neighborhoods in Delhi to posit questions pertaining to Indian culture, community and identity. She analyses how questions on morality, politics, ideal manhood and womanhood is proposed through the serial *Ramayana*, which was telecasted through state television. The influence of the visual iconography of *Ramayana* popularised through calendar art is primary in conceiving the epic in terms of moving visuality. She draws how the politics of popular *Ramayana* prevailing in Northern India negated with the ideas of *Ramayana* prevailing in Southern India. Along with contributing to Hindu nationalism, a demonised othering of identities (including of Sikhs and Muslims who may not watch the serial) were done as certain of *Ramayana* got interpellated with the desires of consumerism and cosmopolitanism (Mankekar, 2002).

*National texts and Gendered Lives: An Ethnography of Television Viewers in a North Indian City* is a continuation of Mankekar's work on the Hindu epics of *Ramayana*. The focus of the study is on the act of viewing television and audience engagement, where gender becomes the constituent element of television viewing in Indian households (Mankekar, 2002). If not for right-wing nationalism, a sense of belongingness induced by the idea of nationalism is discussed by Tejaswini Ganti in *And Yet my Heart is still Indian: The Bombay Film Industry and the (H) Indianization of Hollywood*. Without claiming ethnography, the author employs an in-depth interview method. She carefully analysis the decisions, negotiations and evaluations that undergoes during the *Indianization* of Hollywood movies. The construction of the Indian audience by Bollywood filmmakers is the primary concern of her study. She considers *Indianization* as a relationship between filmmakers and their construction of Indian audiences. The Indian filmmakers act as the cultural mediators, evaluators of appropriate/inappropriate contents, characters and themes for the Indian audience. Ganti employs first-hand film viewing experience with the filmmakers as the method for understanding these quotients. The act of viewing a film is related to the act of identification. The relationship between the Indian audience, their creation of social sensibility and moral attitude is analysed through the box office trends, a yet another way to engage with films (Ganti, 2002). The ideas of nationalism and identity were the foundations of works of the studies on visual anthropology in India. Christopher Pinney's works from *Photos of Gods* (2004) to *Camera Indica* (1997), re-imagined the sense of sight in India. *The Indian work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction: Or, what happens when peasants "get hold" of images* analysed chromolithographs from North India and critiqued

the concept of Walter Benjamin's aura based on ethnography furthering into questions on caste (2002).

The production ethnography on Tamil cinema *Reel World* is a fresh take on the methodology of anthropological engagements. Instead of engaging with the final product of media, be it cinema or photographs, this study literally went behind the screens. The multi cited ethnographic done by Pandian deciphers filmmaking from the contours of human constitutions like hope, dream, space, art, love and desire. The feelings and textures of cinema is based on the experience of cinema and not on the process of the same. The interlocutor of Pandian, a farmer who often sings at his paddy field, asks, 'have you ever felt your life as a cinema'? it is through such sensations that the text goes through (2016).

### Conclusion

The overarching thoughts rising from these debates on media theory and media anthropology initiates a thread on what can be conceived as media. Should there be a media object in flesh and blood to consider something as media? The materialities, subjectivities and affective lives of media definitely give multiple manifestations to what can be qualified as 'media'. If media can be 'anything' or 'everything', can media theory be called media theory in itself? Should it be reconceptualised as 'communication theory' considering the performative aspects in media theory embodied in the social, cultural, practice and rituals? (Carey, 1992).

There was a failure in understanding the production of meaning and ideology in media theory along with the questions pertaining to agency and interpretation of media engagements. Will anthropology of media be a sufficient entity to fill this epistemological gap? Anthropology of media studies the cultural and social fabric between the engagement of technology and its user. Along with the technology, that is, the media, it is the mode of interaction and comprehension of this mode of interaction of media and its user that constitutes anthropology of media. Thus does anthropology of media attribute to the anthropology of mediation? The existing debates on anthropology of mediation culminate into lacunae by claiming the concept as the twin sister of anthropology of media with an identity crisis. Epistemological enquiry on the anthropology of media/mediation must take place than of a debate on the identity of the sub-discipline belonging to anthropology<sup>4</sup>. If at all the epistemic gap in media theory can be addressed

---

<sup>3</sup> For detailed discussion on anthropology of mediation and digital anthropology see: (Boyer, 2012)

by media anthropology, what if it becomes a mere reiteration of empires of the media market?

## References

- Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Egyptian Melodrama-Technology of the Modern Subject? In F. D. al, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (pp. 115-133). California: University of California Press.
- Adorno, T. (1991). Culture Industry Reconsidered. In T. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (pp. 85-92). London: Routledge.
- Althusser, L. (1971). *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus*. London: New Left Books.
- Anderson, B. R. O. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. and extended ed.). London: Verso.
- Ang, I. (1989). *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramtic Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Askew, K., & Wilk, R. R. (2002). *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Association, A. A. (2016, November 14). *American Anthropological Association*. Retrieved November 14, 2016, from American Anthropological Association: Advancing Knowledge, Solving Human Problems: <http://www.americananthro.org/>
- Bhri Gupta Singh, & Guyer, J. I. (2016). A Joyful History of Anthropology. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 197-211.
- Bourdieu, P., & Johnson, R. (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Boyer, D. (2012). From Media Anthropology to Anthropology of Mediation. *The Sage Handbook of Social Anthropology*, 379-389.
- Carey, J. W. (1967). Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan. *The Antioch Review*, 5-39.
- Carey, J. W. (1992). *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. London: Routledge.
- Chomsky, N., & Herman, E. S. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Col, G. D., & Graeber, D. (2011). The Return of Ethnographic Theory. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, v-xxxv.
- Dickey, S. (1993). *Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
-

- Dickey, S. (1997). Anthropology and its contributions to studies of mass media. *International Social Science Journal*, 413-427.
- During, S. (2001). *The Cultural Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Fischer, M. (1991). Anthropology as Cultural Critique: Inserts for the 1990s cultural studies of science, visual-virtual realities, and post trauma politics. *Cultural Anthropology*, 525-37.
- Ganti, T. (2002). And Yet my Heart is still Indian: The Bombay Film Industry and the (H)Indianization of Hollywood. In F. G. al, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (pp. 281-301). California: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Ginsburg, F. D., Lughod, L. A., & Larkin, B. (2002). *Media worlds: Anthropology on new terrain*. California: University of California Press.
- Goffman, E. (1971). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday life*. New York: Penguin.
- Habermas, J. (1992). *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. London: Polity Press.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/Decoding. In S. H. al, *Culture, Media, Language* (pp. 128-38). London: Hutchinson.
- Hamilton, A. (2002). The National Picture: Thai Media and Cultural Identity. In F. G. al, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (pp. 152-170). California: University of California Press.
- Ien, A. (1989). *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Kumar, K. J. (1994). Introduction to mass communication theory. In K. J. Kumar, *Mass Communication in India* (pp. 1-60). New Delhi: Jaico Publishing House.
- Lasswell, H. D. (1948). The structure and function of communication in Society. In W. Schramm, *The processes and effects of mass communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Mankekar, P. (2002). Epic Contests: Television and Religious Identity in India. In F. G. al, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (pp. 134-151). California: University of California Press.
- Mankekar, P. (2002). National Texts and Gendered Lives: An Ethnography of Television Viewers in a North Indian City. In K. Askew, & R. R. Wilk, *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader* (pp. 299-322). Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

- Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour*. New York: OUP.
- Miller, D. (2011). *Tales from Facebook*. London: Polity.
- Miller, D., & Slater, D. (2000). *The Internet an Ethnographic Approach*. New York: Berg.
- Pandian, A. (2016). *Reel World*. London: Penguin Books.
- Pinney, C. (1997). *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pinney, C. (2002). The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or what happens when Peasants "Get Hold" of Images. In F. G. al, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on new Terrains* (pp. 355-369). California: University of California Press.
- Pinney, C. (2004). *Photos of Gods*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Powdermaker, H. (1950). *Hollywood, the dream factory*. California: University of California.
- Spitulnik, D. (1993). Anthropology and Mass Media. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 293-315.
- Srinivas, M. (1952). Sociology and Social Anthropology in India. *Sociological Bulletin*, 179-215.
- Tacchi, J. (2002). Radio Texture: Between Self and Others. In K. A. al, *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader* (pp. 241-257). Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.
- Wilk, R. R. (2002). Television, Time, and the National Imaginary in Belize. In F. G. al, *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (pp. 171-188). California: University of California Press.



# ***Rahbar e Deccan* and Infrastructural Modernity in the Princely Hyderabad**

Communication & Journalism Research

8 (1) pp 14-28

©The Author (s) 2019

Reprints and Permissions:

masscomhod@uoc. ac. in

ISSN 2348 – 5663

**Muhammed Ashraf T \***

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Communication,  
Hyderabad Central University, Telangana, India

## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the editorials of *Rahbar e Deccan* daily which was published from erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad. This paper argues that the daily acted as a mediator between the state and the people. *Rahbar* functioned as a resolution mechanism by accommodating modern methods while keeping traditional ethos as vantage point like many of the early printing ventures in the state.

## **Keywords**

Infrastructure, Modernity, Print, Tradition

## **Introduction**

*Rahbar e Deccan* daily newspaper was started in June 1920 from *Daru saltanath* (capital) of the Hyderabad State and continued its publication until the integration of the state into India in 1948. First it was having four pages of small size printed on small size lithographic press. It published Urdu gazal on the first page. Initially most of the news were local in character and later the newspaper contained 6-8 pages with more international news. It translated many news from English newspapers and news agencies. The daily was professional in selecting, arranging and publishing news. *Rahbar* was meticulously careful to be free from errors and mistakes. Editing was done at every stage of the production of the newspaper.

This was the first publication to use an electrical press in the state and it carried the photos of prominent personalities and important functions. It also helped to make the design attractive. *Rahbar* has the credit of first newspaper of Hyderabad to appoint correspondents in Delhi, London and Beirut and they sent news reports through wire. The reports about the Second World War were published under the title of “war” and it attracted the readers. After the end of the war in 1944 it published a special issue with photos of the war. The newspaper published international advertisements along with local ones. The proof reading was done by a unique technique of reading and hearing.

---

\* **Correspondence:** alqalam001@gmail.com

The possibility of lithography was beautifully utilized by *Rahbar*. It had excellent calligraphers with tremendous journalistic skills. Through this practice they endeavored to keep the culture and aesthetics of calligraphy alive. There is a popular story about the expertise of a calligrapher to have a nose for news to publish a very important news story in the paper. During the salt satyagraha (salt march) event people were curious to know about the possible arrest of M K Gandhi by the British government. Delhi correspondent sent the news of Gandhi's arrest through wire and the telegram reached the *Rahbar* office very late in the night when most of the editorial staff left the place. The calligrapher who was going for the final print of the newspaper saw this telegram and he had a little knowledge of English. He understood the significance of this news then he removed some news from the first page and included the story about Gandhi's arrest on the first page. On the next day this news was not covered by any Urdu newspaper other than *Rahbar*. This news became the topic of discussion in and around the city. After an inquiry it was found that the news was prepared by the calligrapher Abdul Ahad and he was awarded rupees 100 for using his skill and enhancing the reputation of the newspaper.

*Rahbar e Deccan* had a good reception among government circles and it was subscribed by many government officials. It is suggested that the Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan used to go through this newspaper every day to know the general condition of the people. Sometimes Nizam's poetry and *gazals* by reputed poets were published in the first page of this daily. Nizam's patronization made it an allegiant to the Hyderabad princely rule. Contrary to the arguments made by researchers and writers the relationship between the *Rahbar* and the Nizam was critical and the publication was not just an organ which uncritically praised the state and its rulers. It attempted to creatively and constructively critique the government and transform the incipient public.

Maulvi Ahmed Muhiuddin was the editor of *Rahbar e Deccan*. He studied at the Nizam College Hyderabad and had his graduation from Aligarh Muslim University. Since he was not interested in government job he turned to journalism. His old friend Maulana Abdullah Khan was his joint partner. His elder brother Muhammad Yusufuddin was the superintendent of the newspaper. Many writers and translators were associated with *Rahbar*. The end of Second World War and death of Ahmed Muhiuddin and Yusufuddin affected the internal functioning and structure of the paper. The management was transferred to Syed Hamid Muinuddin and later Muhammad Manzoor Hassan became the editor. Muhammad Waheeduddin second son of Ahmed Muhiuddin was appointed as the managing editor of the newspaper.

Many translators were appointed in the newspaper. Most of them were graduates of the Osmania University. Articles were contributed by renowned figures like Allama Imadi, Manazir Ahsan Geelani and Dr. Hamidullah. Abul Khair Siddiqui's column "Science ki Dunya" (The World of Science) was passionately read by the people. *Rahbar* played big role in making Urdu language popular and Urdu journalism significant.

Journalists and other staff were deeply respected by the management of the *Rahbar*. They were given maximum freedom and there were no unnecessary restrictions upon them. Their concern for the employees reached the extent that even an employee dies his burial expenses were carried out by the newspaper. The widow of the deceased received pension from the management. Loan was sanctioned for the employees to be repaid in easy instalments.

The vision of *Rahbar* was reformative and it criticized and opposed any movement against religion and ethics. The designing of an independent and sovereign Hyderabad was the foundational objective of the newspaper. The police action of 1948 and the integration of Hyderabad to Indian union caused the closing of *Rahbar*. It imagined a productive space for the people of Hyderabad state. By registering complaints, raising objections and suggesting corrective measures to the state it acted as a 'critical insider'.

### **Visionary mediation**

*Rahbar e Deccan* endeavored to propose new ideas and practices in the field of education, development, industry and infrastructure. Many of its editorials were responses to the complaints raised and problems faced by the people of the state. It suggested its own resolutions and sought the government to address the issues raised by the public. Hence *Rahbar* performed as a mediator between the state and the public. To comprehend this phenomenon *Rahbar's* editorials have to be closely examined and interconnected.

The objectives of media had been clearly described in *Rahbar's* one of the editorials (October 28, 1922) titled "Difference between News and Views". The editorial was written in the context of a protest happening in the Osmania University. *Mushir e Deccan*, an Urdu daily argued that there is no need for many professors in the department of religion at Osmania since there are only three or four students. *Rahbar e Deccan* accused that *Mushir e Deccan* is intentionally propagating lie as in reality the department was consisting 13-14 students. *Rahbar* argued that something against *government* to create misunderstanding among public will make black spot in the field of journalism. Here criticism is not considered as a crime but it was suggested

that repetition of mistake is not good for media. *Rahbar* pointed out that the press is meant for internal and external, governmental and non-governmental life and it should not be partial. In this instance an idea of a mutual relationship between press and government was forcefully put forward by the daily.

*Rahbar* took firm stand against propaganda and negative campaigning by media. In the context of Ali Imam's resignation people in North and South India started speculating many things. Newspapers also propagated negative opinions. The Hindu daily wrote that Kishen Pershad will replace Ali Imam. *Ahram e Istiqlal* daily of Kanpur and *Dul Qarnain* also wrote the same thing. *Rahbar* (October 16, 1922) suggests that even though the newspapers can influence people to form opinions they cannot endorse these assumptions without evidence. Ali Imam is a highly respected man and the Nizam will choose the right person to deal the issues of the state, the daily suggests.

Role of the press in a society is viewed here as critical. Negativity and harm to development has been strongly discouraged by *Rahbar e Deccan*. It suggests (Ibid) that "press should guide the country to differentiate between profit and loss. Press should be the voice of the country, advisor of wealth and maintainer of prosperity." Even though the *Rahbar* was supporting the government it stood for productive freedom of the press in the state and it suggested that the betterment of a country can be measured by the freedom of press exercised over there. Every event is considered as free and external and opinion as internal/personal and selective.

### ***Producing knowledge and infrastructuring education***

Knowledge production and infrastructural development in the field of education were the major driving forces for the *Rahbar e Deccan* newspaper. They promoted modern education with a moral basis attached to it. They pushed for reform, popularization and systematization of education at the Osmania University through intellectual experiments and structural changes.

The roots of the educational vision of Hyderabad state could be found in the endeavors of Sayyid Ross Mas'ood. On the one hand his concept of education was transnational/trans-Islamic and on the other he was influenced by alter nationalist tendencies. The term trans-Islamic is used as it was defined by Nile Green. The term 'distinguishes a set of parallel and contemporaneous aspirations and activities of Muslims in various regions of the world that in contrast to "Pan-Islamist" ideologies, were neither unified as a single movement nor aimed at common or collective goals. They were usually aimed at the achievement of discrete and geographically localized

agendas.” “Alter-national is employed as a label for aspirations and activities promoting either communitarian interests (particularly the Muslims of India) or the interests of small, short-lived or otherwise forgotten states that are usually subsumed in discussions of nationalism (particularly the Indian Princely States).” The term “Alter-national” in this way draws attention to the alternative and largely forgotten nationalisms that spread between the two World Wars in the name of such never-realized independent nations as Tatarstan and such vanquished nations as Hyderabad, as well as other princely or would-be states in South, Southeast, and Central Asia.”

Ross Mas’ood’s imagination of a future Hyderabad was corresponding to the ideas of the then ruler Mir Osman Ali Khan about education, intellectual progress and socio-material development. Making Hyderabad a civilizational and intellectual hub was envisioned by many intellectuals during various points of time.

In an editorial (October 12, 1922) titled “The Deficiencies of Current Education” *Rahbar* argues that it is the duty of the state to impart education to people and the purpose of education should be service of the community (*qaum*). Here the formation of the community and imparting of education can be understood as reciprocal process. The community was not conceived as a given entity rather it was constituted through various processes. Community was formed through education and education was established through community formation.

It envisioned a localized form of education not the imitation of English. Modern/British model of education has been criticized in the same editorial as something which could not comprehend the local tradition and educational practices. Foreign lifestyle was also questioned as it is unable to teach local life experience. As a resistance to foreign education a localized imagination of education has gained currency in Hyderabad in the first half of the twentieth century. The promotion of Urdu language as the language of learning was in order to resist the colonial language and culture unlike north India where Hindi-Urdu controversy was prevalent (Kavita Datla, 2013).

*Rahbar* asserted local language as the main character of the Osmania University. It suggested that the education should not be only about rituals but also about politics, nationalism and courage. *Rahbar* imagined nationalism not as a synonym of animosity between countries but as something which cultivates healthy competition between countries for development and a nation is supposed to learn from other nations. Jamia Millia Islamia was mentioned as the example for how education should be used to serve the nation. In *Rahbar*’s view religious studies must be a

compulsory subject at the Osmania University along with English literature, Arabic and Persian. The technical education provided at Jamia Millia was suggested as a model for the Osmania University. *Rahbar* used to write editorials on the necessity of technical education for the development of the state.

Educational progress of the state was one of the major concerns of the newspaper. It urged the authorities to accommodate maximum people to educational institutions. In a sense journalism was conceived as a problem solving mechanism. When a student who got third rank in metric exam was denied admission at the Osmania University due to the unavailability of seat *Rahbar* wrote an editorial (October 19, 1922) suggesting practical solutions.

The student was not interested to study mathematics and physics and he also could not get admission in the Nizam College as well. Maulvi Abdu Rauf, advisor of the government wrote a letter to the authorities regarding this matter. A copy of the letter was sent to *Rahbar* too. It was observed that as the Jamia Millia Islamia allows third rank students for intermediate course and the Aligarh Muslim University has approved the courses of Jamia Osmania, students of Hyderabad need not to worry about higher studies and their future. The students of Hyderabad were encouraged to move to different places for education. *Rahbar* wrote an editorial on November 6, 1922 about financial expenses for education in Germany as a response to the letters from readers. It shows the vision of the newspaper on educational growth.

The admission also had something to do with the capacity of the professor. The number of students studying at the Osmania was very high hence a professor will not be able to manage the class. At the end of the editorial *Rahbar* opines that the passion for knowledge is less in the state. Hence the thirst for knowledge should be cultivated. If the admission issue is solved it will benefit not one student but many students.

Education in Hyderabad was accessible only to the elite classes for a long time especially in nineteenth century. Setting up of schools and colleges in the end of nineteenth and in the beginning of twentieth century made small scale transformation in the arena of education. Education of *Jagirdars'* (who collected taxes and revenue and maintained standing army) children was a major concern for the Nizam. The Nizam decided to use two percent of the *Jagirdars'* asset for the education of their children. *Rahbar* in an editorial (July 18, 1923) suggests that *Jagirdars* will be able to understand the value and benefit of education once their children are educated. They were also encouraged to go to Europe for higher studies. The newspaper also raised

many questions like how a *jagirdar* can pay tax if he has low income and many children and if he is not able to continue his children's education what is the policy of the government.

The Hyderabad state gave importance to all branches of knowledge specifically to medicine and engineering. It seems that the aim of establishing various educational institutions was to equip the state to be self-sufficient and competent with other princely states and British India. The formation of modern subjects also must have been the driving force behind these endeavors. Students could enjoy freedom to criticize the quality of education and they could raise complaints. Engineering education was not high in standard and teachers didn't have thorough knowledge in the respective field. The daily highlighted (October 22, 1922) the complaints of students about the quality of engineering course and proposed to make sure that quality and best education is offered in the field of engineering.

Not only intellectual and mental growth was given importance but also physical development was considered as essential part of education. It was urged (November 2, 1922) that the participation of students in sports programs must be ensured and programs for physical development should be conducted in schools. Education was considered as a mean to achieve the comprehensive development of an individual.

The *Rahbar* perceived (December 7, 1922) government as a shelter for the people. It compared the government with rain which waters both dry and wet fields and sun which lights large houses and small huts. It argues that a state is not for a few but for all and everyone must get benefit from it. This editorial was written to inform the people about the extension of last date of free payment for judicial examination. At the end of the editorial the newspaper suggests that the students from the villages will not be able to know about the extension of the date. Educational establishments, press and other institutions were centered in the city of Hyderabad. Hence the *Rahbar* pushes the authorities to consider the students from rural areas.

In a different editorial (December 28, 1922) it was suggested to establish new law department at the Osmania University. In the case of judicial exam some students complained that the fee is high to apply for the course. *Rahbar* opined (November 30, 1922) that high fees should not be charged from the students. The newspaper focused on the demands of the students and talked in favor of them. This shows the critical and corrective position of the daily and how it acted to support the poor and rural subjects.

The newspaper also attempted to combat rumors against the government. There was a rumor about the judicial exam that if someone fails in one subject in the first year he/she will have to attend classes for two years again. According to the government authorities this year's exam is the last examination of certificate course in law. From next year onwards the subject will get departmental status and for those who failed in the exam there will be one more chance to clear the subjects.

There was a controversy during the period about notifying the time table of second year medical exam without publishing the results of first year examination. *Rahbar* accuses (October 22, 1922) that the careless attitude of the examination committee caused hardships for students. Because of this issue students refused to write the second year exam. The newspaper wanted to bring the notice of the authorities to solve the students' problems while highlighting the international popularity of medical education in general.

Informal education and training were considered by the state as tools of development and self-sufficiency. The state authorities were urged by the daily to produce its own goods for regular use. The Hyderabad state used to suffer from droughts every year during this period hence the industrial and agricultural development was inevitable for survival. The majority of people depended on agriculture. *Rahbar* proposed to the state that farmers should be given industrial training and domestic production must be encouraged. Institute of Commerce and Industries at the Osmania University organized an exhibition of domestic products during this period and the exhibition was appreciated by the daily (December 3, 1922).

*Rahbar* had shown keen interest in the educational experiments and experiences in Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University. It praised the industrial education in Aligarh and praised the presiding of a woman in a convocation as the first time event in world history. The daily pointed out (January 2 1923) that the Begum of Bhopal had supported woman education in Aligarh. It seems that the daily envisaged to create a Muslim educational solidarity and cooperation. Since the editor of *Rahbar* was graduated from Aligarh he must have had first-hand experience of their educational system.

It also published different speeches delivered in convocations at Jamia and Aligarh. The series of editorials published during the month of February, 1923 in the context of convocation in Jamia and Aligarh talk about the impact of Islamic culture in India, it's role in breaking caste system, creation of unity of religions, service rendered by Islam in the field of teaching and education, and necessity of freedom as a rare species that is hardly found in



the history of civilization. They also discussed about nationalism and why institutions should be free from the government intervention and progress of nation.

In another editorial it brings the model of Prophet Muhammad's approach to science and knowledge since people from different parts of the world came to Medina for learning. It also quotes prophets sayings about knowledge like 'one who seeks knowledge is in the path of God', 'one who talks about knowledge is praising the God' and knowledge illuminates the path to the paradise and knowledge is the only friend in the desert of darkness'.

The contributions of Islam in the field of knowledge and learning were praised in the convocation meetings. How medieval Muslims produced knowledge was a very important question. The names recalled in the meeting were Ibn Sina, philosopher and scholar of science and medicine, Ibn Rushd and Abu Musa and their theories are connected to Aristotelian thoughts.

The daily also talked about language politics in general and promoted Urdu language in particular.

### **The politics of language and *Rahbar e Deccan***

Unlike north India the language discourse in Hyderabad was multidimensional. The north Indian language discourse was largely centered on Hindi-Urdu controversy. In Hyderabad Urdu as the official language had to engage with vernacular languages like Telugu, Kannada and Maratha. Persian was the official language until 1880s and it was replaced by Urdu language during the period of Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, the sixth Nizam. Unlike the Qutb Shahi period and the Asaf Jahi rule in nineteenth century the language discourse has witnessed various changes in the early decades of twentieth century. Even though the Urdu was imagined in Hyderabad as a language to rival English there were some critical engagements of Urdu with other local vernacular languages as well.

The making of Urdu as a language of knowledge and education has a long history in the state starting from the individual initiative of Fakhruddin Khan Shamsul Umara in the first half of the nineteenth century and through establishing educational institutions in the second half of the same century and founding of Osmania University in the early decades of twentieth century. In order to officiate Urdu and to make it the language of instruction Hyderabad has to face many challenges and troubles from different linguistic groups. The emergence and creeping of nationalist movements from British India to Hyderabad also heated the tensions around the question of language.

There were trenchant criticisms against Nizam's approach to Telugu people and language. It was alleged that the Nizam was scared of the progress of Telugu people. It was also told that Telugu, Marathi and Kannada press were not permitted in the state. The same source who made these accusations suggested that there were many Telugu publications in Hyderabad including *Neelagiri* weekly, *Telugu Patrika*, *Golconda Patrika* and *Sujata* Monthly and 15 Telugu journals were started between 1900 and 1930. Regarding the question of official language, language of instruction and educational policies heated debate was going on in the state between Urdu and Telugu press (B. Srinivasulu, 1982).

In an editorial (June 2, 1926) *Golconda Patrika* praised the education and libraries in the princely state of Baroda and urged the Nizam government to establish mobile libraries in Telangana region. It again asked the government to give permission to found libraries and vernacular schools in the state. It was accused that the government did not give permission. *Rahbar e Deccan* suggested that Telugu libraries were the houses of conspiracy and the temples of hypocrisy. *Sahifa* an Urdu daily also expressed the same opinion. Later the *Golconda Patrika* raised severe critique against the Urdu press by stating that some newspapers support the aspirations of the people while other newspapers present distorted image of the aspirations of the people. It accused *Rahbar e Deccan* and *Sahifa* as perpetrators of religious fanaticism.

Telugu press including newspapers and magazines raised many criticisms and accusations against Osmania University as well. Establishment of Osmania University was portrayed as ruin to Indian culture and Urdu as foreign language. They alleged that there is Muslim domination in the Osmania University and Urdu is not the language of the people and it should be given second place. When *Rahbar* wrote that Urdu is the medium of instruction in the Osmania University and no need of Telugu and Sanskrit, *Sujata* responded that *Rahbar's* logic does not deserve reverence. *Golconda Patrika* also criticized Translation Bureau and demanded for Andhra University with Telugu language as the medium of instruction.

“*Hyderabad Vidya Mahasabha*” was established in 1915 to promote education in the state. It used to organize educational conferences and it was dominated by the people who are associated with the government. Hence *Golconda Patrika* called it as Muslim Sabha. In 1928, a parallel mahasabha was formed and it was named as “*Prajapaksha Vidya Mahasabha*”. *Rahbar e Deccan* made stringent criticisms against the conferences organized by the sabha saying that this sabha is only for Hindus and a wide gulf is getting evolved in thinking between rulers and ruled. *Rahbar* went further and called “*Prajapaksha Vidya Mahasabha*” as Hindu Mahasabha. *Rahbar* suggested

that such organizations are not needed in the state since the Nizam government is not foreign and such organizations are only required in British India.

Raging debates and disputations continued to happen between Urdu press and Telugu press. *Golconda Patrika* and *Sujata* opined that Urdu press is not promoting education and they do not tolerate something good done by other magazines hence they do not deserve any respect. Urdu press especially *Rahbar e Deccan* was accused as the creator of divisions between communities. But the editorials published in *Rahbar* suggest that it was attempting to resist the penetration of British Indian tendencies in Hyderabad. By accusing Osmania University as ruin to Indian culture and Urdu as a foreign language, Telugu press was perpetuating Hindu nationalist tendencies in the state, *Rahbar* argued (July 2, 1923).

*Rahbar* was against giving secondary education in mother tongues. But it had attempted to push the government to establish primary schools in different parts of the state. The reason for not approving secondary education in mother tongue can be the agenda of the state of recruiting educated officials in government positions hence making Urdu as the official language. The establishment of Osmania was to co-relate the ancient arts and sciences with the modern arts and sciences and to promote spiritual values. To fulfil this it made compulsory theology education for Muslims and compulsory ethics education for non-Muslims in 1928-1929.

*Musheer e Deccan* daily advised that the government servants must know regional languages. *Rahbar* responded to this advice by saying that practically it is not possible to learn twelve to fifteen languages of the state though for the people who speak Marathi and Telugu, and for Urdu people to learn one of the languages was compulsory. The progressive and reputed Urdu daily *Raiyyath* never opposed Urdu as the official language of the state. It emphasized to make it easy, simple and intelligible to all. *Majlis e Itihadul Muslimeen* also demanded to keep Urdu as the official language. What is noticeable is that the village administration was performed in regional languages.

Urdu was presented in official and unofficial documents as a language which was spoken in different areas of Hyderabad. A government resolution issued on October 18, 1917 proposes Urdu not only as the official language, but “it is the only vernacular which is more or less understood throughout the dominions especially in those urban areas from which His Exalted Highness’s subjects who generally take to secondary education, are mainly drawn”.

Osmania University was praised by *Rahbar* as a boon for the people of Hyderabad. Education in mother tongue was strongly espoused by the daily following models from Europe. It says that in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the English used to feel proud of their knowledge in Latin and later they realized that the intellectual growth is possible not only in Latin but also in English language. Nations which love their mother tongue only can like their culture, *Rahbar* argued.

*Rahbar* also objected releasing press notes in English language. It opined that since Urdu is the official language all communications and documentary works should be done in this language. Only two Urdu newspapers (one of them was *Rahbar*) were reporting activities of the government departments to the people. If the information is published in English language, large section of the people will not be able to understand the content. The daily asks when the language of the Osmania University is Urdu why its success story is published in English language.

Telugu press also accused *Rahbar* as mouthpiece of the Nizam government. Number of editorials published in *Rahbar e Deccan* and secondary sources also prove that it could freely criticize the government. Overall development of the society was a major concern of the daily.

The *Rahbar* daily urged (November 23, 1922) government authority to ensure connectivity and communication between Hyderabad and the outer world. For instance, it demanded the government to open post office in Afzal Gunj as it was an emerging big business hub. It gave minute details about the place to prove why such an office is necessary at that location. The shops of that place wanted to send and receive letters from different parts of the country especially from British India. Post office must be convenient for the residents of the area as the post office in Begum Bazar is not sufficient to serve the public. There was no post office between Pathargatti and residency. To reduce the expense, it was proposed to shift the office from Begum Bazar to Afzal Gunj.

As the newspaper dealt with local issues, educational matters and infrastructural concerns, it also discussed international political affairs and religious topics. Turkey and Ottoman Caliphate was the major content of *Rahbar*. It placed Turkey as a powerful center of the world. It spoke about and urged for the unity of Muslims. The right of Caliphate was attributed to Turks because of their invaluable contributions in the war for Islam. *Rahbar* celebrated all the victories gained by the Turkish government. It considered the happiness of the Nizam in such news as representing entire population of Muslims especially of India. Because of the victory of Turkey over European

powers Nizam declared 29 August, 1923 as holiday in Hyderabad. The government announced that all the mosques will be illuminated at the state's expense. *Rahbar* proposed that not only the government but people across Hyderabad have to lighten themselves. For this purpose, groups have to be formed and money has to be collected to illuminate mosques in every locality. The daily also opined (August 3, 1923) that after every prayer (*namaz*), special prayer for the Caliph of Muslims and the Nizam has to be conducted.

The daily wrote editorials against the encroachment of Turkey by European powers. It criticized propaganda against Turkey by saying that media reports are trying to make the Muslims ally of France and Italy. Appeal by the International Red Cross Committee to help the victims of Greek attack was also made by the newspaper (January 17, 1923). World Muslims were asked to help them and the committee had great success in China, Siam, and Burma etc. It was hoped that the Central Khilafat Committee will hand over the funds to the committee.

The *Rahbar* daily considered Turkey as the center of Muslim power and credited it with the custodianship of two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina. Enemies want to erase Turkey from the world map as it had fought against all European countries. Mustafa Kamal Pasha has proved that the country has all the properties that free and energetic countries possess. As the European countries have been called independent, Turkey also has the right to be called free and alive nation. The victory of Turkey is projected as triumph of truth. Turkey had to suffer a lot to reach this stage and its economy and villages have been destroyed by enemies. These facts were narrated by the daily in order to appeal the world Muslims to assist Turkey financially to improve its situation.

The daily wrote editorials to counter vicious propaganda against Turkey. In an editorial titled "White Lies" with the help of statistics and data it counters British Prime Minister David Lloyd George's accusation against Turkey that it has killed 15 lakh Armenians. *Rahbar* asks that as the population of enemy country is 12 lakhs how could Turkey kill 15 lakh people. It urges (November 28, 1922) the readers not to believe in such propaganda since the propaganda machine against Turkey is active. *Rahbar* focused on Khilafat and freedom struggles in different parts of the world.

### ***Religious piety***

To promote religious virtues and encourage people to improve spiritual and ethical qualities was one of the major agendas of the daily. The aim was to

create ethical subjects in the state for social development. It wrote special editorials in the month of *Rabiul avval* (month of Prophet Muhammad's birth) and on Eid Milad un-Nabi (celebration of Prophet's birthday). In an editorial written on Milad un-Nabi it talked about how the world was changed after the period of Jesus to profanity and idolatry. The birth of Prophet Muhammad made the desert of Arabia verdant and fertile like the birth of Jesus made Jerusalem a paradise. The special day must be celebrated in Hyderabad and his messages should be shared and perpetuated. People used to send money to *Rahbar's* office for celebrating Milad un-Nabi and the daily praised the donors and prayed for them. The money was distributed among poor people, victims of natural calamities and charity organizations. Muslims of Hyderabad were encouraged to spend money on welfare activities as taught by the prophet.

*Rahbar e Deccan* praised the services rendered by various officials in different departments of the state. For instance, Nawab Muhyuddin Yar Jung's administration in Karim Nagar and Warangal was highly appreciated in the context of his retirement from the service. He played a very important role in improving the area. He built many roads and sanitation was given utmost importance. In light of this, *Rahbar* made a proposal to the government that after retirement he can be appointed in Hyderabad so that sanitation in the city could be improved. Residents of the city can have better facilities and good healthcare.

Religious and community organizations were given big support and encouragement by *Rahbar*. *Tableeg e Sifathul Islam* was one such organization which was formed in 1921 and its headquarters was in Hyderabad. The aims of the organization has been narrated by the daily (August 9, 1923) one by one as 1) preaching and propagation of Islamic ethics, 2) preparing Muslims for government employment, 3) establishing orphanages and institutions for destitute, 4) helping socially backward communities to be educated, 5) reformation of the individual self, 6) warning drunkard and addicts of bad habits and weaning them away from the wrong path.

In a different editorial (January 18, 1923) a great concern was expressed in the daily about preventing 4 lakh Muslims from apostasy. *Jamiyat e Dawat wa Tableeg e Islam*, Lahore has sent some preachers for this purpose and all Muslims of India are requested to thank them for their service. The daily opines that since the active propagation of Islam has been forgotten for long time the Muslims are facing the threat of apostasy. The reason for Muslim conversion to Hinduism and Christianity is lack of knowledge of Islam. It also opines that this is not the matter of freedom of choice rather this is the

result of ignorance of Islam which their ancestors embraced considering as the right and best path.

### **Conclusion**

Comprehensive development and independent existence of Hyderabad princely state was the major focus of the daily. Self-sufficiency and local development were given utmost importance. The local production of soaps and oil was praised by the daily (November 19, 1922). Fragrance and quality of the product was highly appreciated. It was said that the people who love products from the west may not be able to differentiate between local and British soaps at the first sight. The soap was scientifically tested and the chemists had verified that there is no harmful substance in the soap. Hence the daily attempted to promote modern ideas in every field while holding traditional ethos as the basis. It focused on the mutual constitution of tradition and modernity through its editorials and other contents. The contents of the daily in 1930s and 1940s shed good light on political debates and religious controversies until the integration of the state into India in 1948. After the integration, due to political reasons the name of the daily was changed to *Rahnuma e Deccan*.

### **References**

- Abdul Rahman, M. (1986). *A Critical Analysis of the Nizam's Government's Policies regarding Social and Political Problems in the State*. Unpublished MPhil Thesis. Osmania University.
- Ali Khan, M. (1995). *The History of Urdu Press: A Case Study of Hyderabad*. Classical Publishing Company.
- Ansari, T. (1980). *Hyderabad me Urdu Sahafath 1857-1859*. Ijaz Printing Press.
- Cameron, R H. (1922). *The Prince of Wales at Hyderabad*. Bulletin Press
- Green, N. (2013). Forgotten Futures: Indian Muslims in the Trans-Islamic Turn to Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 72(3), 611-631.
- Husain, G. (1993). *Role of the Urdu Press during the Freedom Movement in the Erstwhile Hyderabad State*. Unpublished MPhil Thesis. Osmania University.
- Saraswati Datla, K. (2013). *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India*. Orient Blackswan.
- Srinivasulu, B. (1982). *Role of the Telugu Press in the Movement of Cultural Revival in Telangana, 1901-1930*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Osmania University.

# Body, Desire and Identity: A Textual Analysis of the Film Chitrangada-The Crowning Wish

Communication & Journalism Research  
8 (1) pp 29-41  
©The Author (s) 2019  
Reprints and Permissions:  
masscomhod@uoc. ac. in  
ISSN 2348 – 5663

**Anupama K P \***

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Communication  
Hyderabad Central University, Telangana, India

## Abstract

What determines one's gender? How are subjects formed? These questions are predicated on ontology or one's knowledge of self. With regard to Rituparno Ghosh's 2012 film *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* the paper reappraises these questions in order to analyse their significance for queer aesthetics: how do people navigate the most intimate spaces-their body, desire and identity? How does an artist explore his/her medium, (here film) to examine and reflect upon his/her self? The paper also aims to examine how film as a genre opens up new possibilities for cinematic autobiography, especially queer autobiography, an area that is relatively unexplored and under theorized.

## Keywords

Autobiography, Body, Film, Identity, Queer, Sexuality

## Introduction

There is a corpus of literature and scholarships in the academia that challenge the centrality and the working principle of normative sexuality. Normative sexuality prescribes the functions and movements of the body and desire, and those who internalize the prescriptions are accustomed to these conditioned and restricted functions and movements. It views the body, identity, and desire from a deterministic standpoint which in turn ignores the possibilities one has in terms of one's identity, body and desire. The queer theory evolved through the works of scholars like Judith Butler (1988, 1990, 1993), David Halperin (1990, 1995), Teresa (1992), Anna Mary Jagose (1996) to name a few provide understandings on how normative sexuality operates and how it is being legitimized by the collective common sense of the society. In her discussion of gender performativity Butler says, "gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond" (1993, p. 231-32). This points to a determined position with respect to gender negating chances for fluidity. Queer as a term dismantles this determined position and celebrates fluidity. According to

---

\* Correspondence: anupamakp3@gmail.com



Halperin, “queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (1995, p. 62). The advocates of queer theory also analysed how the dominant understanding of sexuality troubles the lives of those who disrupt the regularising principles of sexuality. The disruption of the operative principle of heteronormativity involves different possibilities in terms of our body, desire and identity. This paper argues that these different possibilities call for a different aesthetics and it can be called as queer aesthetics. This paper aims to understand how the film *Chitrangada: The crowning wish* produces an understanding with respect to queer aesthetics. In the light of the film, the paper explores the different modes through which people navigate the most intimate spaces-their body, desire and identity. Also, the paper looks at how an artist uses his/her medium, (here film) to examine and understand his/ her self.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first part ‘queer aesthetics’ explores the first question (to take cognizance of one’s identity, body, and desire) drawing upon the major postulates of queer theory. The second section aims to explore how film as a genre brings up new possibilities for cinematic autobiography, especially queer autobiography, an area that is relatively unexplored and under-theorized. In this section, the paper looks at subjectivity, temporality and narrative through the close reading of the cinematic codes in *Chitrangada- The Crowning Wish*. The end part of this section looks at how the narrative of the film has become an inescapable form of understanding one’s self.

### Queer Aesthetics

Rituparno Ghosh’s Bengali language film *Chitrangada-The Crowning Wish* (2012) takes the prominent litterateur Rabindranath Tagore’s dance drama *Chitrangada* as a pretext to portray the conflicts as well as the struggles of a choreographer in terms of ‘his’ [(?) *the pronoun ‘he’ (or his) does not justify the gender identity of the choreographer Rudra. This ambiguity is expressed by the question mark, which the author will not use again for reasons of avoiding repetition*] gender identity. *Chitrangada* is a mythical character in Mahabharata. She is portrayed as one of the wives of Arjuna. While Arjuna was roaming around Manipura he met and fell in love with *Chitrangada*, the only daughter of *Chitravahana*, the king of Manipura. Arjuna longed to marry her. As per the tradition of Manipura, *Chitrangada*’s children were successors to the king. *Chitrangada*’s father *Chitravahana* agreed to Arjuna’s wish; but on one condition that *Chitrangada*’s children would rule Manipura. When adapted for dance drama, Rabindranath Tagore revisited the story. In Tagore’s *Chitrangada*, the king of Manipura needed a son as his next successor. When *Chitrangada*, the girl child was born, the king decided to

raise her as a man. She dressed like a man. In her youthful years, she met Arjuna who was hunting in the forest of Manipura. Chitrangada was lured by the valour of Arjuna and she wished to be with him forever. This is where Rituparno's film starts. The central character in the film Rudra is a choreographer of a dance drama titled 'Chitrangada.' As the film begins Rudra is seen excitedly involved with the dance drama team.

In the initial scenes of the film *Chitrangada*, Rudra Chatterjee (portrayed by Rituparno Ghosh), a choreographer by profession, is shown wearing earrings and, 'kajal' in his eyes. His eyebrows are neatly threaded. Rudra is reluctant to wear *sari*, a so-called feminine dress. He also registers his protest in adhering to the dress code pre-determined for a man. When he meets the doctor to discuss the possibilities of 'gender -reassignment -surgery' Rudra openly declares; "I am not going to wear *sari*" after surgery. He says that he would opt something in-between. We see that the body, mannerism and appearance of Rudra transgress the boundary imposed by normative sexuality. The depiction of Rudra is seen as a critique of the normal and the dominant sexuality- a critique which is generally addressed using the term 'queer.'

Rudra's actions and artistic expressions are never confined to the social and cultural expectation of either masculinity or femininity. In a scene Rudra tells Partho (essayed by Jishnu Sengupta) who is a new percussionist in the former's dance group: "Most of us are unhappy with what nature gives us. Or guys wouldn't want a macho six pack to become a man; girls wouldn't wax or primp to become woman." His statement invokes the question of what is natural and normal and it also refutes the established notion of masculine and feminine, and resists the idealization of gender norms. Through scenes like this the film seems to problematize the instrumentalized nature of heterosexuality that classifies people into two neatly demarcated binaries-man or woman.

The film maps the desire of Rudra for Partho and the scenes which feature their intimacy are characterised by the overt exhibition of homo erotic bond. In one of the sequences, we see Partho coming to Rudra to present him a new anklet in place of the older one that he picked up and flushed out in an earlier scene. Partho tries to tie the anklet on Rudra's legs. This moment becomes the beginning of their relationship. Partho declares that he won't call Rudra 'sir', instead he likes to call him 'Rudi' and he whispers the word in an erotic tone. While helping Rudra to wear the anklet, Partho touches Rudra's legs and caresses them. The moment he touches Rudra's legs, Rudra seems to be aroused and it is as if he has been waiting for it for a long time. The camera focuses on Rudra's face. His eyes are seen filled with tears. Rudra's heart

beats and his entire body shivers as if in a shock. Partho takes Rudra's cheeks in his arms, caressing and massaging it. The sound of the anklet seems to intensify their intimacy. Suddenly, the scene is transformed to a dance performance in which their body movements are shown celebrating their budding romance and physical affection. Though Rudra is hell bent against Partho's heroin addiction, he is in love with him intensely. This scene is a riveting illustration of transgressive desires.

In another scene, where Rudra makes himself up for the dance show, Partho who has been caught high on with heroin and subsequently banned by Rudra from performing comes to the makeup room. Partho apologises and asks Rudra to search him for heroin. Rudra, while searching his pockets, finds out the bracelet that Partho stole when both were strangers. Partho strugglingly gets back the bracelet and begs Rudra to take it as a token of his love for Rudra. It moves Rudra deeply and the subsequent shots picture the intimacy, affection and love between them. Rudra asks how much he struggled to get it back. Partho's reply is "do you know how pain becomes pleasure?" Rudra asks him to teach it. They seem to forget everything around them and engage in the act of pleasure. Their desire floods with volcanic fervour. As the lines in the backdrop sing, "the melody flows through their body."

The erotically charged body and its desire occupy a key position in the plot. The body has become a location of pleasure as well as a site of critique of and resistance to the category of 'man.' His body and desire take a 'flight' from anything that attest to a particular gender. It becomes sites of signification that goes beyond the marks of dominant heterosexuality. Rejecting one of the overriding assumptions that there is one apt way to do one's body and desire Rudra accentuates the idea that individuals can do their body according to their wish.

We have seen that the film begins with the projection of the subversive potential of Rudra in terms of his body and desire. However, though it also plays with the illusory nature of gender performativity, it misses its path when the issue of procreation/reproduction comes in. The relationship between Rudra and Partho develops to reach a point where they decide to live together. Rudra discovers Partho's fondness for children when his friend Mala visits them with her children. The fact that Rudra would never be capable to bear children and make Partho happy inflicts pain on his mind. Rudra needs a feminine appearance of the body to work out their plans and this crisis is explained by the way the concept of heterosexuality operates in our society and it articulates that the institution of heterosexuality needs to ask the question of reproduction and procreation to regulate 'non-natural' sexuality and desires. This conflict exposes the tortuous and convoluted

network of power that restrains some forms of sexuality. And from here onwards the film showcases the conflicts a person experiences with his/her gender identity.

Rudra's desire to live with Partho leads to his decision to undergo gender -reassignment -surgery. Partho seems to be totally against this decision. The debate between them becomes one of the specific queer moments in the film. Partho says that he loves the way Rudra is. Rudra, due to the fear of losing Partho decides to stand by his own decision. While lying in the bed after surgery (breast implants), Rudra narrates his past to his counsellor Shubho (Anjan Dutt who at the end of the film is revealed as a product of Rudra's illusion). Rudra retells the story of Tagore's *Chitrangada* to Shubho. Now Rudra is seen as if in the first transformative stage of *Chitrangada* who pleads Madan, the god of love to make her a beautiful woman to win the heart of Arjuna. But after the breast implants, when Rudra uncovers his bruised body to Partho, the latter seems to be uncomfortable with the former's new appearance. Rudra could not win the heart of Partho who says, "if I long to have a kid, I will have my child, my own blood." Partho adds, "the man I loved is not this half thing, not this synthetic one." After this conversation, Rudra happens to see the intimacy between Partho and Kasturi (Raima Sen) who is a member of Rudra's dance group. He seems to be engulfed in grief. The following lines capture his pain:

"You cover the dying flames with ashes

What game are you in?

O lord of desire!

How long must I be in pain?"

In a succeeding scene when Shubho, the counsellor, visits him, Rudra was seen confused about the final surgery-vaginal transplant. He is reluctant to blame Partho for his sufferings even though in one of the former scenes he lashed out at Partho blaming him for the agony he endures. Rudra makes up his mind to adopt a child alone and seeks out its possibilities. The conversation between Shubho and Rudra exemplifies his state of mind and confusion.

Rudra: I don't know *Chitrangada* well, but do I know Partho well enough? Do I know my parents well, the youngsters in my group?

Shubho; Look at the positive. You got to know yourself.

Rudra: I doubt.

We can see that Rudra is slowly coming to realize that he was perfectly happy the way he once was (as a person who is swinging in between). He is not really pleased with the new appearance he got with breast implants and hormonal treatments. In this state he is reluctant to see his former lover who comes back to India now. Shubho asks whether he has any problem accepting himself. Rudra replies: "At this stage, probably. But I may overcome." Shubho tenaciously asks: "What about the child you want to adopt? If you cannot accept yourself, how can the child accept you? You may get over it, but what about the child?" Rudra starts weeping. The repetitive use of mirrors in these scenes is emblematic of the reflection of his confused mind. While gazing at his own reflection in a water tub he gets perplexed and is seen singing lines from Tagore's text which is accompanied by cupid performance. The metaphoric use of cupid performance, mirrors and the lines from Tagore's text expose the dilemma he is going through.

The day before the final surgery Shubho and Rudra take an imaginary walk towards the seaside. The scene is set just before the sunrise alluding to the rise of Rudra to a new life.

Shubho: If cupid came to bestow on you a wish, what would you ask for?

Rudra: My wish is to be remembered as an energetic, eccentric, creative dancer.

Shubho: Or the beautifully transformed (*surupa*) Chitrangada?

Rudra: Even that is not permanent, not immortal.

At this moment Rudra receives an anonymous message- the third in succession from the same person. The messenger asks: 'Why is a building called a building even after it is complete?' The answer he gets is 'no transformation is ever complete.' This becomes the decisive moment of the film. Rudra asks the doctor to call off the surgery and to remove the breast implants. When the implants are being removed, we could see the cupid performance which links us with Tagore's *Chitrangada*. Chitrangada, after realizing the shallowness of her physical transformation, requests Madan to take away her beautifully transformed body and restore her to the state she was in. Rudra also decides to return to the way he once was. It is symbolically shown with the god of love performing on him. The song says:

"Give me new life, my beloved

This blessed morning

Banish all ills in this new celebration

Clear debris of night in the new dawn..."

Rudra's realization takes us back to the beginning of the film where he interprets the mythical story of Chitrangada as a story of wish- that you are free to select your gender. Rudra's decision to decline the necessity of a feminine appearance to fulfil his desires and to accept his state of in-betweenness troubles the determinate notion of gender identity and, celebrates the fluidity of sexuality. This realization demystifies the fallacy of a stable and finite gender. Rudra's final decision after receiving the message eloquently pronounces the idea that one's identity is always in the process of 'becoming' and it cannot be categorized and labelled. We can see that the film takes great caution not to name Rudra a man, female or gay and it explores the contesting of the categorization of gender and sexuality. The film seems to throw the binary homosexuality/ heterosexuality into a crisis. Demonstrating the assumed congruence between biological body and its acts/wishes is a myth the film dismantles the predominant idea around sexuality, desire and gender.

### **Autobiographical Tendencies in the Film (Enquiry into the Self)**

The film interlocks personal sentiments into a form of myth and fantasy. The director of the film Rituparno Ghosh has said in an interview that the 'film is a retrospective trip to his life' (ibnlive.in.com, 2012). Rituparno depends on fiction and fantasy in the process of self-reflection. His self has become the best subject for Rituparno to work on. Even though the film cannot claim to have the features of classic autobiography, elements of the genre can be traced. The following part will summarize discourses on classic autobiography versus cinematic autobiography and the possibilities for fiction in autobiography.

Cinematic autobiography has not emerged as a distinct film genre in its own right. Scholars like Elizabeth Bruss (1980), Philippe Lejeune (1989), and de Man (1979) have engaged in a discussion on the possibility of cinematic autobiography. The main questions addressed are how a collective work of art can be recognized as the autobiographical work of an individual and whether fiction and imagination play any role in autobiography. Elizabeth Bruss (1980, p. 301) demonstrates that in film the three parameters of canonical autobiography are upset; namely the truth value, act value and identity value. She calls for a redefinition of not only autobiography but also

the construction of selfhood, considering the possibilities of various modes of expression such as film and video.

Paul John Eakin (1985) asks whether we should insist that autobiographical discourse be pure, untainted by the fictional other which it already inhabits? His answer is no. His argument is based on the proposition that fiction and fiction making process are central constituents of any life as it is lived and of any art devoted to the presentation of that life. Arguments like these emphasize the role played by imagination and fiction in truth telling process which leads to self-invention. William Hope (2005, p.27-52) classified cinematic autobiography into two- explicit and implicit. In the explicit autobiography, directors play themselves using their own names, situating the film in their own city, whereas implicit autobiography does not announce itself as the filmmaker's autobiography, but autobiographical elements can be traced in it. The proof of its autobiographical nature is embedded in the extra cinematic elements. Hope (2005) says that there is no clear boundary between the two as they often overlap with each other. The film *Chitrangada: The crowning wish* displays autobiographical propensities and fits into the category of implicit even though some of the features of explicit autobiographical elements can be seen. The actor and the filmmaker are one and the same. The director Rituparno Ghosh himself played as the main character Rudra Chatterjee. The film is located in Rituparno's hometown Kolkata and is largely based on a part of his own life. This paper attempts to show how the filmmaker expresses himself through the medium of film and inserts his own subjectivity into it. Rituparno uses the title of Tagore's dance drama *Chitrangada* and he adds the supplementary 'the crowning wish' to it, as an appropriate for his own wish.

Rituparno Ghosh is a person who comes out of the closet and overtly discloses his sexuality often. Rituparno uses kajal, wears ear rings and jewels. His off-screen appearance is identical to Rudra's on-screen presence. Neither of his appearances- off-screen or on-screen carries the signs of masculinity or femininity. In the film Rudra's character says to the doctor that he is not going to wear *sari* post-surgery. When the nurse addresses him as 'sir', Rudra tells her about the purpose for which he endures the surgical procedure and when she corrects herself by calling Rudra 'ma'am', Rudra insists her to call him simply 'Rudra.'

Ghosh's close friends often have said about the ostracism he faced in terms of the gender identity as well as the sexual orientation he possesses and how he ignored it. In the film Rudra's words to Shubho at the end part of the film reflects the pain he suffered due to his effeminate character. But in some stages of his life Rituparno experienced a kind of conflict in terms of his

gender. 'Filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh was adamant on changing his sex', says Prosenjit Chatterjee, one of his close friends, even though Rituparno Ghosh was reluctant to be clear on this matter (newseastwest.com, 2013). After the death of Ghosh, newspapers reported quoting his doctor that Rituparno had undergone surgeries like abdominal plasty and breast augmentation before the shooting of *Arekti Premer Golpo* (a 2010 Bengali film directed by Kaushik Ganguly in which Rituparno Ghosh plays the role of a gay filmmaker.) The film *Chitrangada* maps the conflicts and struggles of a person who at some stage of his life decides to consider the option of gender-reassignment-surgery. When the film starts Rudra's breast implantation and hormonal treatments are already finished.

The film utilizes the possibilities of fiction and cinematic drama to portray the lived experience of Rituparno. It is illustrative of how one can engage with one's self through the medium of cinema. As Susanna Eagan (1984, p.20) pointed out, such explorations through cinema can be considered as a "manipulation of lived experience by giving it a beginning, middle and an end." The director belongs to a group of marginalized section. He makes a film based on his conflict and it opens up a new avenue for queer autobiography in film. The film takes conflict, as what Paul Ricoeur conceptualized, as the 'function of man's most primordial constitution: this is a conflict within man between his self and his others, his character and his personality, his thinking and his feeling, etc.' (Karl Simms, 2003, p.33). Through the fictional text *Chitrangada*, the filmmaker experiences and brings into effect the possibility of self- invention.

At this point, it seems to be productive to understand more about how the film narrative has become an inescapable form of understanding of the self. Rudra's character is presented as a transforming self which undergoes changes and shifts and is seen as a lonely traveller taking a journey for self-retrospection. Drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* the paper tries to argue that narrating one's story constitutes an integral part of understanding one's self and identity. For Ricoeur (1984, p.3) "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience." This idea of narrative stresses how significant our memory and imagination are in the narratives that we produce about our lives and experiences. The following part will show the ways through which the film/filmmaker makes an engagement with his self.

The narrative strategy of the film often relies on the conversation between Rudra and Shubho, a figment of his hallucinatory imagination- a character the director created to narrate his story. As Shubho is the product of his



hallucination, the film can be seen in the form of a monologue narrated by the actor to tell the story. It can be seen as Rituparno (who is effeminate) speaking to his masculine self. This narration leads him to realize the nature of human existence, his identity and his real wish. Rudra narrates his memory to Shubho. The opening scene of the film shows Rudra lying on a hospital bed post-surgery, waiting for the final vaginal transplantation. The hospital bed has become a site to reflect upon him. In *Chitrangada*, the narrative takes back and forth movements between past and present, real and imaginary. In the film when Shubho who visits Rudra at the hospital asks him about Partho, Rudra recalls Partho's entry into the dance group as a new member. The hospital scene is cut to the dance rehearsal camp where Partho comes when Rudra trains his dancer Kasturi. The moment Rudra sees Partho his memory goes back to another incident when Partho stole his bracelet once. To bring the idea home to us, the filmmaker often employs the technique of a 'flashback within a flashback'. Many times, Rudra and Shubho take imaginary journeys to the places where Partho and Rudra spent their time in the past. When Rudra remembers how he enjoyed time with Partho near seaside, we can see Shubho and Rudra walking along the seaside watching the meeting of Rudra and Partho. Rudra occupies many places at the same time.

We see that the film depicts Rudra's present as framed by his memory of the past and horizon of expectation. Memory and expectations are the processes taking place in the present. That is the nature of the three-fold present explained by Augustine and later developed by Ricoeur. Ricoeur (1991, p.31) writes:

Augustine, in this famous treatise on time, sees time as born out of the incessant dissociation between the three aspects of the present-expectation, which he calls the present of the future, memory which he calls the present of the past, and attention which is the present of the present (1991, p.31).

In the film, though not depicted explicitly, Rudra's expectations of the future are vivid from his words to Shubho. At the beginning of the film, he is hopeful of the surgery and dreams a life with Partho. When the unexpected turn of events shatters his dream, he hopes to adopt the child alone. Even when suffering with pain after surgery, we can see Rudra practicing dance movements in the hospital room. He works out to maintain his body that is essential for him to continue his dance.

We can see that narrating or remembering the past plays an important role in his existence in the present. Narrating his story to Shubho helps Rudra to

realize that only he is responsible for his actions and there is no point in blaming Partho for his sufferings. The conversation between Shubho and Rudra plays a crucial role in the development of the events. It helps him to take a kind of self- introspection that leads him to realize the impermanence of things and also to the exploration of the nature of human self. The mythical element is also utilized greatly to give meaning to the story. The filmmaker symbolically uses the story of Tagore's *Chitrangada* to reflect upon the changes, transformation and realization happened to Rudro. The metaphorical staging of cupid performance in the background whenever he undergoes surgery highlights the transformation, he has like the mythical Chitrangada. The filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh explores the possibilities of the medium of film to look back and to understand his self.

At the end of the film Rudra chooses to remain the same by abandoning his desire to become feminine. This conflict seems to be philosophical as it brings forth the nature of the self. This conflict can be understood in the backdrop of Paul Ricoeur's (1992) idea of the nature of the human self. From the character development in a narrative Ricoeur derives the theory of the internal dialectic of the human self. In the narrative there are two kinds of selves: a self that remains stable and consistent, which he calls 'idem' or 'sameness' and a self that subjects to constant change and transformation which he calls ipse' or 'selfhood' or 'ipseity (Hengel, 1994, p. 458-80). These two selves are in constant interaction and 'the human self is constituted precisely in this dialectic of 'sameness' and 'ipseity' (ibid.). 'Idem' underscores the truthfulness and honesty to oneself in spite of all the changes and transformations which mark the course of life.

It means, individuals are subject to constant physical and psychological changes and are led to transform in the course of life history. Continuous changes and transformations are inescapable part of one's identity. This fact is echoed in the film many times-the metaphorical use of building alludes to a notion that transformations never complete-it is an ongoing process. But at the same time, one has an urge to attain some degree of sameness or stability over time. As Rudra's words to Shubho at the end of the film reflect, he wishes to be the same energetic, creative dancer that is the core of his personality. That is Rudro's crowning wish. He can move on with his 'non-natural' desires and wishes without getting a feminine appearance. One can be true to oneself even when transformations happen. The journey to Rudra's realization underlines this tension between what changes and what remains the same over time.

In the film the interplay between 'ipse' and 'idem', between stability and instability defines Rudra's existence. Without these two kinds of identities

there is no self. So, the character's confrontation between 'ipse' and 'idem' constitutes the philosophy of the film. And it is the philosophy of human existence as well.

## References

### Books

- Bruss, Elizabeth. (1980). Eye for I: Making and unmaking autobiography in film. In James Olney (Ed.). *Autobiography: Essays theoretical and critical* (pp. 296-320). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Butler, Judith. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Eakin, Paul John. (1985). *Fictions in autobiography: Studies in the art of self-invention*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Egan, Susanna. (1984). *Patterns of experience in autobiography*. London: North Carolina Press.
- Halperin, David. (1990). *One hundred years of homosexuality*. New York: Routledge.
- Halperin, David. (1995). *Saint Foucault: Towards a gay hagiography*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hope, William (Ed.). (2005). *Italian cinema: New directions*. New York: P Lang.
- Lejeune, Philippe. (1989). *On autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Maurice, Merleau-Ponty. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. New York: Routledge.
- Ricoeur, Paul. (1984). *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Ricoeur, Paul. (1991). Life in quest of narrative. In David Wood (Ed.). *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and interpretation*. (pp. 20-33). New York: Routledge.
- Ricoeur, Paul. (1992). *Oneself as another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Simms, Karl. (2003). *Paul Ricoeur (Routledge critical thinkers)*. New York: Routledge.

### Journal Articles

- Butler, Judith. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519-531. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/>
- Butler, Judith. (1993). Critically queer. *GLQ- A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1(1), 17-32. Retrieved from <http://glq.dukejournals.org/content/1/1/17>

de Man, P. (1979). Autobiography as De-facement. *MLN*, 94(5), 919-930.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2906560>

Eldeman, Lee. (1995). Queer Theory: Unstating desire. *GLQ- A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2(4), 343-346.

Hengel, J., van Den. (1994). Paul Ricoeur's oneself as another and practical theology. *Theological Studies*, 55, 458-480. Retrieved from <http://tsj.sagepub.com/content/55/3/458>

Jagose, Annamarie. (1996). Queer theory. *Australian Humanities Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-Dec-1996/jagose.html>

Lauretis, Teresa. (1991). Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities- An introduction. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 3(2), III-XVIII.

O' Dwyer, Kathleen. (2009). Paul Ricoeur: The Intersection between solitude and connection. *Lyceum*, 11(1), 43-72. Retrieved from <http://philpapers.org/rec/ODWPR>

### **Newspaper and Website Articles**

*Ibnlive*. (2012, September, 03). Chitragada is a self-retrospective trip: Rituparno Ghosh. Accessed from <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/chitragada-is-a-self-retrospective-trip-rituparno-ghosh/287898-8-235.html>

*Newseastwest*. (2013, June, 3). Filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh was adamant on changing his sex, says Prosenjit Chatterjee. Accessed from <http://newseastwest.com/filmmaker-rituparno-ghosh-was-adamant-on-changing-his-sex-says-prosenjit-chatterjee/#sthash>.

Yengkhom, Suamti. (2013, May, 31). Rituparno Ghosh: It was the heart that bled. *Times of India*. Retrieved from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news-interviews/Rituparno-Ghosh-It-was-the-heart-that-bleed/articleshow/20358217.cms>

### **Film**

Rituparno Ghosh (Director). (2012). *Chitragada: The crowning wish*. India.

# Narratives and Aesthetics of Iranian Children's Films

Communication & Journalism Research

8 (1) pp 42-51

©The Author (s) 2019

Reprints and Permissions:

masscomhod@uoc.ac.in

ISSN 2348 – 5663

**Dr. Abdul Muneer V\***

Associate Professor of Journalism, EMEA College of Arts and Science, Kondotti, Kerala, India

## Abstract

Films over the period have subjected children in productions to represent the adult world. These children have been used in place of men and women to give expression to their anguishes and aspirations. In Iranian films, children appear in a particular way: more often than not, these appearances are fraught with certain political intentions resultant of varying social milieu of the country. Children in Iranian films have been fortunate to show their faces in front of the world through global festivals because of the quality of the films they were central figures of. Politically, this has been a rule after the Iranian revolution. Towards the end of the 1990s, children became the hallmark of cinema from Iran. The young characters in Iranian films were used by the filmmakers to make the world realise the worth of Iranian culture. They wanted their young characters to symbolise innocence and emotions whereas the Iranian polity and society had been stained with violence and perceived by the world with scepticism.

Against this background, the article is an effort to unravel the meanings behind the employment of children as protagonists in the modern films of Iran. This analysis has been made by reviewing some of the prominent productions. Through the analysis, it is being concluded that the portrayal of children in Iranian films is a tact employed by the film makers to bypass the censorship and other consequences following the strict rules imposed by the political atmosphere after the revolution. The New Wave cinema depicts multiple modern characteristics of the Iranian society among the problems confronted by young people and their social institutions. The employment of children as key figures in their movies helped the producers to indirectly present the various problems of the society in a symbolic manner. Films of the 1990s had a common structure that was built around the mystery of the proactive child. The themes of the films discussed were made so in order to accommodate the child figures in them.

## Keywords

Children's Films, Portrayal of Children, Iranian New Wave Films, Victim-child, Wise Child

Any analysis of films having children as central figures asks for multiple tools to make it a successful review. The phrase "Children's Films" is rather an umbrella term under which many genres can be classed. Some films are made for children, while some others have children as characters but may not necessarily be meant for children (Meibauer, 2013). Therefore, when the term "Children's Films" is used, it has to be treated with clarity.

---

\* **Correspondence:** muneervalappil@emeacollege.ac.in

Bazalgette and Staples have defined the term children's films: "This term can mean simply the exhibition of films for general audience containing some children; it can also mean the dedicated production of films for children. By 'children' we mean people under the age of about twelve" (Bazalgette & Staples, 1995, p. 92).

While making children's films, the filmmakers need to be aware of the cultural and educational status of the audience. Consequently, for a true analysis of children's movies, the analyst will need to adopt an approach that will have room for other disciplines like mass communication, child development, cognitive psychology, and literacy studies (Meibauer, 2013).

### **Children's Movies Around the World**

Children are traditionally understood to be carrying characteristics implied in the term 'innocence'. According to Christian tradition, children are devoid of rational thinking. They are considered merely as little devils. Movies produced in America have portrayed children as being innocent. Walt Disney movies have represented children as stereotypes fitting into normal families and surroundings. All these projections have been accepted by the audience without much resistance. In films produced elsewhere, children are often pictured as pranksters. Movies produced in Britain are examples. Films produced in Japan, especially anime, employ child characters as carriers of the country's identity (Wibawa, 2010). Cinema produced in countries like Brazil and Italy also have children as key figures. In such movies, these characters are placed in real-world situations amongst often insoluble problems (Traverso, 2005). While Brazilian films have orphaned children in them, in Italian movies, children are placed inside families that struggle on various accounts. Fisher quotes Deleuze as saying that Italian Neo-Realist movies portray children not merely as weak and lacking identity. They present young children as heroic (Wibawa, 2010). Italian movies *Children are Watching Us* (1943), *Shoeshine* (1946), *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), and *Germany, Year Zero* (1948) etc have the protagonists having mature aims in their lives and they strive to realise their aims.

### **Film-Farsi: The New Wave Iranian Cinema**

In all the countries of the world where there is a tradition of cinematic culture, the parallel cinema evolved as a revolt to the commercial stream. The Iranian cinema is no exception to this rule. The so-called New Wave Iranian cinema which had its inception in the 1940s also developed to stand against the industrial moviedom called "Film-Farsi." This movement started as a spontaneous recognition of the necessity to give expression to the

cultural ethos of the country. Initially, the movies produced in this manner could not fulfil their aspirations, yet they succeeded in marking a difference and introducing something new and yet unexperienced to the audience. The artists involved in this new movement used the means of the movie to display the values that were unique to their country and its culture. These films raised many basic questions about the Iranian identity in terms of similarities and differences with other countries. This way, it was like a mirror held to the Iranian reality (Sarsangi & Soleimanzadeh, 2018).

### **Why Children?**

Iranian filmmakers have a distinct place in the world cinema today. They achieved this distinction by demonstrating to the world that they can produce good cinema by making children as its focal point (Jones, 2000). The whole trend of films with children as central characters started back in 1969, ten years before the Revolution. During this period, many films related to children and their future were made. These films deliberately presented children as a challenge to the main stream traditions. Young film makers who were part of the Centre for Young People's Intellectual Development (CIDCYA) were the most responsible for productions of this period (Zahedi, 2014). A few years hence, the films produced by these young men would carry a distinct feature that H. R Sadr describes as “innocent and hard-working children to convey symbolically certain apparently abstract ideas in a realistic way” (2002).

Time after time, a lonely child came on the screen that had to find solutions to complicated problems created by the socio-cultural atmosphere using its own thinking capacity. The audience could easily see through these children the reactions of the grown-ups. At the same time, these child characters were seen to use their own child-like logic that were unlike the logic of the grown-ups (Zahedi, 2014). The society that the spectator witnesses in the Iranian cinema is formed by people living in Tehran's suburbs where families live in harmony. The leading actors representing this society in films are children (Jones, 2000).

The child-protagonists of the Iranian movies caught the eye of the world through global festivals and after being screened in theatres outside of Iran. Later, these children functioned as ambassadors of Iranian cinema. The repeated successes of Iranian movies in international festivals were indebted to the Kiarostami Film-making School. Also was their indebtedness to Majid Majidi's *Children of Heaven* which incidentally was the first ever Iranian movie to be nominated for the Oscar (Bacheha-ye Aseman, 1997). The child characters in Iranian cinema of the 1980s were responsible for the avoidance

of new censorship laws that came into effect after the Revolution (Zahedi, 2014). Iranian children helped the filmmakers escape the strong-handed censorship rules put forth by the government. The children replaced actors and actresses who came on screen to sing and dance. They also came in place of unveiled woman that was taboo in the eyes of the new regime. All these circumstances forced the hands of the film makers to employ children as their key figures (Naficy, 2011).

The New Wave Iranian cinema is a product of the pressures exerted by the social and political atmosphere of the country and its censorship laws. The government had set up a department named Islamic guidance and culture ministry (MCIG) with exclusive powers to impose controls over artists who were into film making. This department maintained that women appearing on the screen wear veil. According to the rules imposed by the governmental agency, the film makers were to avoid straight forward treatment of themes and exhibition of scenes which would tarnish the image of the state. The governmental department wanted film makers to uphold the traditional values of the country in their movies. Against this background, the Iranian film makers came forward to cast children as major figures in their productions to avoid being censored. They were exploiting the notion that the children are embodiments of compassion and innocence. According to Andre Bazin, the audience respond to the child figures in a differently from the normal ways to adults as children are historically perceived as innocent and incapable of corruption. Therefore, children can represent a sharp contrast to the situations of war and violence (Banerjee, n.d.).

Here are some of the most celebrated movies from Iran that have won acclaim on global stages:

### **1. *The Runner* (Amir Naderi, 1984)**

*The Runner* by Amir Naderi has a unique place in the Iranian New Wave Movement as the first representative of the trend. The film boasts of an experimental structure that consciously avoids adherence to traditionally held filmmaking patterns. The film has its central figure a poor boy named Amiru. Amiru is a boy who has been made a destitute and homeless by the war. After engaging his daily life doing different jobs, Amiru finds out that the only way he can make his dreams come true is by educating himself. After joining a school, Amiru has to confront many situations involving other children in the school. He participates in a competition in the school where he competes with his mates by saying the alphabet in a single breath. Through this, Amiru tries to win the respect of others.



## **2. *Where is the Friend's House?* (Abbas Kiarostami, 1987)**

In Abbas Kiarostami's 1987 movie titled "Where Is the Friend's House?" The protagonist is an eight-year-old boy named Ahmed who by mistake takes his friend Mohammed's notebook. Ahmed wants to give the notebook back to his friend to avoid the friend from being sent away from school. Ahmed, very consciously makes a decision to spot his friend's house in the nearby village. The film is set in an Iranian village named Koker. The movie is part of a trilogy known as the "Koker trilogy." The other films that form the trilogy are "Life and Nothing More" and "Under the Olive Trees". He has taken the title of this movie from a poem written by Iranian artist Sohrab Sephehri (1928–1980). The film was an immediate success and has remained as one of the famous director's well-received productions.

## **3. *Bashu, the Little Stranger* (Bahram Beizai, 1989)**

*Bashu* by Bahram Beizai (1989) is an Iranian classic. It has war-time as its setting. The protagonist is an Iranian boy who loses his family during the Iran-Iraq war. Bashu, looking for refuge, is accommodated by a village woman who herself has two young children. The woman overcomes all the adverse circumstances to accommodate the boy. She even has to convince her handicapped husband. The major themes in the movie are love, solitude, and acceptance.

## **4. *The White Balloon* (Jafar Panahi, 1995)**

*The White Balloon* tells the story of a seven-year old girl who wants a goldfish as a gift for New Year. She is given money to buy the fish by her mother, but she is afraid that she might not be able to buy the fish as the shops are going to close for the holidays. The girl's name is Razieh who with her brother Ali struggles to get to the market in time avoiding treacherous characters in their way. *The White Balloon* is a 1995 production by Jafar Panahi.

## **5. *Birth of a Butterfly* (Mojtaba Raei, 1997)**

This film has been made by combining three stories. The stories tell a tale about children caught in highly emotional situations escalated by loss and isolation. The first story is touching and is about a father strictly sending his son away from home so that he will not have to see his mother die. The second story is about a disabled boy who is left alone at home when his family is away visiting a religious destination. The third one is about a teacher's dilemma when people in his village want to believe that he possesses spiritual powers. This movie would be better appreciated by the Iranian natives while the foreign audiences might be carried away by the scenic beauty of the Iranian countryside captured in the movie.

### **6. *Children of Heaven* (Majid Majidi, 1997)**

The celebrated movie by Majid Majidi titled *Children of Heaven* produced in 1997 is a realistic cinema that is about the difficulties confronted by a boy of nine years. The protagonist's name is Ali. Ali, by mistake loses his sister's shoes. To avoid angering the parents, the brother and sister decide to secretly share the brother's shoes between them. The sister's name is Zahra; she wears the shoes when she goes to school in the forenoon, and in the afternoon, when Ali's classes start, he is given the shoes. In this arrangement, time is a villain and Ali is always late to get to his sister. This predicament makes him find a way out. "Children of Heaven" became the first Iranian film to receive an Oscar nomination.

### **7. *The Apple* (Samira Makhmalbaf, 1998)**

*The Apple* is half documentary and half feature. It tells about two teenage Iranian girls who have been kept in captivity by their father from the day of their birth. The father explains this situation to a social worker and says that he allowed the girls to go out of home. The chances were they would be spoiled by other evils in the world. The girls are decapacitated by their imprisonment.

### **8. *The Colour of Paradise* (Majid Majidi, 1999)**

In *The Colour of Paradise* Majid Majidi once again brings children as his central figures. The main character in the movie is a visually challenged boy who comes home for his holidays. The boy's name is Mohammed and he is not let down by his sight impairment. He banks on his other senses to understand the world. Young Mohammed is a very optimistic character, a trait that is not shared by his father for whom his son is a liability. Mohammed is motherless. The father's only concern is his remarriage. The movie demonstrates how a blind boy can experience the world by touches and by hearing sounds.

### **9. *Baran* (Majid Majidi, 2001)**

In *Baran*, the main character is an Iranian adolescent boy called Lateef. Lateef is telling the story of Afghan refugees. His life changes when he is devoted to the caring of a man whom he does not know. *Baran* is a touching story about unreciprocated love.

### **10. *Persepolis* (Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi, 2007)**

*Persepolis* is about the euphoria of the Iranian revolution and the disappointment at the new regime's failure to live up to people's expectations. The story is told from the point of view of a young girl named Marji. Marji is critical of the new government's tyrannous ways. Uneasy about their daughter's ranting, Marji's parents send her to Vienna for higher education. The film also portrays Marji's confrontations with disagreeable characters abroad. Finally, Marji returns home to find that her country has changed for worse for girls and women.

### **Portrayal of Children**

When Iranian Revolution brought new censorship laws making political discussions in cinema impossible, Iranian film makers began to feature children as main characters in their movies as a tactic to bypass provoking the power. According to Sadr (2002), children figuring in Iranian movies are in fact used as substitutes for grown-ups. This strategy has been adopted by the film makers to enable themselves to deal with issues that might otherwise anger the rulers. Sadr opines that children in Iran "were freer than adults; they could go anywhere and do more or less anything" (2002: 235) (Wibawa, 2008).

Iranian cinema centring on children in effect portray on the screen several unprecedented aspects of Iranian society namely alienation of the young, the unemployment situation, disintegrated family and violence. In place of war-based themes, the new movies started to subject the problems of daily life for treatment. Jafar Panahi's 1995 film *The White Balloon* is a classic example for the child-centred cinema. It tells about a young but serious girl who overcomes passivity to become energetically active to face up to situations in front of her and resolve the complexities of life around her. Covertly, this girl transforms her will power to the spectators. *The White Balloon* has won many prestigious awards including the Cannes.

### **Lost Innocence**

As far as Iranian cinema is concerned, employing children in major roles has been a developmental tactic as it represented, interpreted and reflected on Iranian life. These children are generally portrayed as innocent and hardworking. Through these portrayals, the film makers have been able to project some ideas in a symbolic manner. Even though, the world might forget the Iran-Iraq war that raged for eight years, those who have seen Iranian movies would not ever forget the children depicted on the screens of Iranian movies. These children who have to move away from their natural

situations and have to do tasks like the adults, it is sometimes perceived as a case of lost innocence.

The children appearing in Iranian movies maybe termed as non-actors. They do not act like the adult professional actors perform. This fact provides Iranian movies a subtlety and genuineness. Their naturalness and innocence give the characters authenticity and individuality as they are coming right from the middle of the social situations. The faces of the children reflected the heaviness of their inner life. Iranian movies have created some enthusiastic ‘non-actors’ whose performances have thrilled the audience and this often is described as loss of innocence. There are child characters embraced by audience worldwide. Ahmadzadeh in “Where is the Friend’s House?” and Afravian in “Bashu, The Little Stranger” are some among them (Sadr, 2002).

### **Victim-child vs Wise Child**

Traditionally in mainstream cinema, children are pictured as victims. But in the New Wave Iranian movies, the audiences are served with wise children. This is not accidental. It is a deliberate strategy on the part of Iranian film makers as means to their end of presenting a realistic picture of Iranian life on the one hand, and on the other to overcome the restrictions imposed by the rulers in the name of prudence and censorship. This practice of centring children in Iranian movies has a history of nearly twenty years. During these years, an observer can see three distinct phases. These phases are the phase of rebellion, the phase of enthusiasm, and the phase of reflection. In all the examples cited in this article, there can be observed the wise child coming as a reaction to the necessity of representing the modern Iranian socio-cultural situation and the crisis of identity resulting from that. Iranian movies use the school as a setting and are used as a sample of the social space to project the problems of society. The children in Iranian movies are in search of their identity. In their search, they move away from their immediate circles of family and its protection. Thus the child has become an inevitable tool that is used to escape the controls meted out by the state power. Each Iranian director has used the child figure in his or her movie in unique way (Zahedi, 2014).

Different directors have treated the child-subjects differently. For instance, while Beyzaei disintegrates the child-symbol only to reconsolidate later, Abbas Kiarostami uses a postmodern technique of deconstruction. The difference between the modern treatment of the child and the previous ones is that while the traditional child-characters had been helped by their families and so on, the modern child uses his own smarts to get over the hurdles. The

modern child learns by himself in the absence of a teacher-figure. The traditional wise child returns home to the safety of the family after all his travails; but for the straying modern child, there is no homecoming. This highlights the identity crises experienced by the whole of the society, the collective (the family) as well as the individual (Zahedi, 2014).

There was a surge in the production of child-centred movies in the 1990s. Already existing and newly-invented stories were adapted to movies during this period, but the common feature was the child. Jafar Panahi's films "The White Balloon" and "The Mirror" tell the stories of two girls whose portrayal marked a high point in the history of movies with children. Panahi's *The Mirror* was experimental in making the film by breaking the narrative into two distinct levels. The director uses the child as an allusion to the present situation obtaining to the audience. The protagonist in the mirror slips away from those who want to have a say over her role.

## Conclusion

The Iranian children movies went on a tour of the world after the Islamic Revolution on the wake of some success stories at global film festivals. In the 1990s, Iranian children in the movies became brands for their cinematic productions. The child-centred cinema's history started ten years before the revolution where children and their education were the concerns. Later, film makers used the ethos as a means to correct the vision of the world about Iran portraying children as symbols of innocence and compassion.

By portraying children in their movies, Iranian film makers managed to bypass the restrictive laws imposed by the government. Children-centred movies brought to the view of the audience multiple aspects of Iranian social life like the alienation experienced by children and the unemployed youth, and also fragmented families. As an opposite reaction to the stereotype of child as victim in romantic movies, the wise-child emerged in Iranian cinema to represent adult character. The 1990s saw a spurt in such movies where the myth of the wise child is used as an apparatus. The stories adapted for this purpose were done so around little boys or girls.

## References

- Banerjee, P. (n.d.). *Understanding the importance of Children in Iranian Cinema*. *Literature Review Introduction*.  
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/34fd/ad763f50bb83f1708386272eab5ec87a6255.pdf>

Bazalgette, C. & Staples, T. (1995) Unshrinking the Kids: Children's Cinema and the Family Film. In: C. Bazalgette & D. Buckingham (eds). London: BFI. 92-108.

Jones, J. (2000, July 14). Children of the revolution. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2000/jul/14/culture.features1>

Meibauer, B.K. (2013). Introduction: New Perspectives in Children's Film Studies. *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*,5(2), 39-44. doi: 10.3167/jemms.2013.050203

Naficy, H. (2011). *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*. Vol. 04, Duke University Press.

Sadr, H.R. (2002) Children in Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When we were Children. In: R. Tapper (ed). *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. 227-237.

Sarsangi, M. & Soleimanzadeh, H. (2018). Contemporary Iranian cinema from another perspective. *Journal of Fine Arts* 1(3), 16-21.

Traverso, A. (2005). Migrations of Cinema: Italian Neorealism and Brazilian Cinema. In K. Wilson (Ed.), *Radical Fantasy: Italian Neorealism's Afterlife in Global Cinema*. Wayne State University Press.

Wibawa, S. (2008). *The Representation of Children in Garin Nugroho's Films* (Unpublished master's thesis). Curtin University of Technology, Australia.

Wibawa, S. (2010). The image of children in cinema. *Indonesian Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(2),

Zahedi, F. (2014). The Myth of Bastoor and the Children of Iranian Independent Cinema. *Film International*, 12(3), 21-30.

# Gender Sensitivity in Journalism Education: The Case of University Education in Kerala

Communication & Journalism Research

8 (1) pp 52-61

©The Author (s) 2019

Reprints and Permissions:

masscomhod@uoc.ac.in

ISSN 2348 – 5663

**Anju John \***

M.Phil Candidate, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication University of Calicut, Kerala, India

**Dr. Muhammadali Nelliullathil**

Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut, Kerala, India

## Abstract

The concept of gender sensitivity has been developed as a way to reduce barriers to personal and professional development created and sustained by sexism. Gender sensitivity helps generate respect for individuals regardless of their sex. As education is the best way to change the attitude among the people on different social issues. Gender sensitive pedagogy in the curriculum is the finest way to develop the sense of gender equality. Gender sensitive education helps pupils determine which assumptions in matters of gender are valid and which are stereotyped generalizations. It opens up the widest possible range of life options for all genders. This study is an attempt to analyze how this approach has been reflected in mass communication education in Kerala. We take the syllabi of PG level media programmes in the universities in Kerala as a case point to find out to what extent mass communication education in the region is accommodative to gender questions and concerns. After a qualitative thematic analysis of the syllabi the authors argue that the proper utilization of gender education will help eradicate the existing gender inequality and gender stereotyping both in education and professional practices, but university level media education syllabi practically fails to cater to this approach.

**Keywords:** Gender Sensitive, Journalism Education, Mass Communication

## Introduction

How do gender gap and gender inequality impact the media and its content; and from where can we start to eradicate the problem? This research tries to trace the issues involved in gender mainstreaming in journalism education. Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender (UNESCO). It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles. Gender systems are often dichotomous and hierarchical, and gender binary systems may reflect the inequalities that manifest in numerous dimensions of daily life. Discrimination based on gender is a common civil rights violation that takes many forms including sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, unequal pay for women who do the same job as men, and discrimination in employment and education

---

\* **Correspondence:** anjuvazhavatta@gmail.com

(Kalakoti, 2018). To overcome gender inequality we need to have gender sensitive society, which can only be changed through education.

Gender sensitivity is the systematic consideration of differences between conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all policies and actions. The concept of gender mainstreaming was introduced in the 1990s as a key policy strategy to achieve gender equality. The Women's Conference in Beijing, 1995, endorsed the strategy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all public policies in order to counter gender bias in society and policies and to produce gender-equal policies (United Nations, 1997). Nowadays the inclusion of gender sensitivity in curriculum is a main agenda because gender mainstreaming promises to bring about change and transform the status quo and to eradicate the unequal representation and stereotyping of women through education. This study focuses on gender mainstreaming aspects of journalism curriculum in four universities of Kerala, south India.

Kareithi (2014) observed that in the digital era the hegemonic masculinity in media has increased because of curricula without gender sensitivity. The researcher also found that new technologies had allowed greater freedom for the media to create highly seductive images that transfix audience attention while avoiding critical interrogation. Social media and other internet-based technologies have increased the media's powers of replication, amplification and extension of stereotypes of masculinity across the globe. And as media consolidation shapes the uniformity of tastes, it is becoming increasingly clear that some of the erstwhile local models of hegemonic masculinity in specific regions of the world have achieved ascendancy on a global scale. As a solution the researcher suggests the revision of curriculum addressing the problems of women and exploring the ways in which the stereotypical images affect the dignity of women.

The study "Violence against Women Journalists" (Srebeny, 2014) observes that the main source of the violence is the one faced within the firm and from co workers. In a male-dominated profession in some of the most violent, unstable and patriarchal societies, the dangers to women journalists might always be present. And as a solution, the researcher suggested that the working atmosphere and academic sections of journalism profession should undergo gender mainstreaming.

The study, "Women in Decision Making Structures in Media" also pointed out the problem of stereotyped content. The study conducted by (Ross, 2014) found how senior women experience their media workplace and what kinds of gender-equality and/or women-focused policies are in place in those



organizations. In conclusion, the researcher suggests the implementation of gender neutral newsroom. Newsroom workers and professionals were treated as 'sex neutral' while 'gender' had yet to emerge in media studies – or in any other discipline for that matter – as a useful concept. Another study by (Sarikakis, 2014) points out that the lack of gender mainstreaming policy in the media is the outcome of regulatory bodies and the state, historically based on patriarchal cultures, the dominance of profit-oriented media systems over public service media and media with public service remit and ingrained cultural beliefs of gender superiority/inferiority. The researcher recommends that gender mainstreaming should, depending on the context, both be a policy and a strategy for improving women and girls' position in society.

The studies so far categorically propose gender mainstreamed education as one of the potential solutions for the overpowering masculinity in media operations and consequent inequality faced by women professionals in the field. Gender sensitive media education is supposed to inculcate the gender neutral perspectives and multiculturalism in media profession. Academic initiatives towards this direction are already started in developed countries taking cues from the strategies and policies developed and propagated by international agencies like UNESCO. But, despite countless efforts, in developing nations like India, gender mainstreaming is yet to be introduced in media education. The present study focuses on the gender mainstreaming aspects of post graduate level journalism education curricula followed by four major state funded universities in Kerala, a state in south India, which is known for total literacy for both men and women and high development indices despite its low social infrastructure. The universities selected are Kerala University, Calicut University, Malayalam University and Kannur University. The general objective of the study is to find out how gender sensitive factors are incorporated in the syllabi of university level journalism education in Kerala. To materialize this the researchers conducted a thematic analysis of journalism syllabi followed in the select universities in Kerala in respect of the themes: women related media laws, feminist media theories, women in media history, gender sensitive reporting, sexism in language, development communication and women empowerment.

## **Methodology**

Being an explorative study the authors do not propose any hypothesis, rather a qualitative content analysis of the syllabi of the universities in Kerala was carried out to arrive at conclusions. Content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication texts in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Kerlinger,

2000). In this qualitative content analysis the corpus selected for the study is undergone subjective evaluation based on the themes the researchers identified as appropriate to the objectives of the study.

### **The Corpus under Analysis**

The corpus under the analysis of the study was the syllabi of post graduate journalism programmes of the select universities in Kerala. A detailed account of the syllabi taken for the analysis is given below:

<b>Universities</b>	<b>Syllabus</b>	<b>Effective from</b>
Calicut University	Master programme in mass communication and Journalism	2014 (Admission)
Kerala University	Journalism Mass Communication and video Production	2014 (Admission)
Kannur University	Mass Communication and Journalism	2015 (Admission)
Malayalam University	MA Journalism and Mass Communication	2013 (Admission)
MG University	MA Journalism and Mass Communication	2014(Admission)

### **Unit of Analysis**

The basic unit identified for analysis is the syllabus of each course under the programme of the university. Being an interdisciplinary subject that is framed as a potpourri of a wide-ranging domains in communication from multiple angles such as history, law, culture, sociology, technology and more, it was essential to fragment the entire syllabus into course based analysis considering the appropriate themes identified for the study.

### **Themes identified**

- Women related Media Laws

Women related media laws mainly discuss the laws like related to indecent representation of women, sexual harassment, media freedom, under representation of women in media, freedom of information, online abuse, working women journalist organizations etc.

- Feminist Media Theories

Feminist media theory relies on feminist approaches to media practices and the political economy it afforded. That is, it applies philosophies, concepts, and logics articulating feminist principles and concepts to media processes such as hiring, production, and distribution; to patterns of representation in news and entertainment across platforms; and to reception. Unlike approaches that hide their politics, feminist theorizing is explicitly political. It addresses power (Krijnen, 2015)

- Sexism in Language

For the absence of multicultural approach and sensitivity as well as the lack of respect for individuals, the form and content of mass media are very vulnerable to sexism primarily effecting female and trans genders. It has been linked to stereotypes and gender roles, and leads to create ideas like one sex or gender is essentially superior to another. Extreme sexism may foster sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of sexual violence.

- Gender sensitive reporting

The gender sensitive reporting means taking a gender natural approach when reporting news. The components of gender sensitive reporting are equal representation, avoiding gender stereotyping and following gender balance.

- Media and women empowerment

The topic mainly focuses on how development communication and women empowerment are interrelated. And how development communication helps to developed women community to self-sufficiency.

- Women in media history

In history of mass media across the global women played a crucial role though the subject still remains his own story. In this respect, it is vital to enquire how women contribution to the origin and growth of mass media in different social contexts is reflected in media curriculum.

## **Analysis**

Content analysis of the syllabi was done to explore how mass communication and journalism students are prepared for gender-neutral media practices. Such an approach will help to increase the coverage of gender issues in the media and to change the attitude towards the women journalists. This content analysis focused on the factors related to gender in the syllabus of five universities.

While conducting this theme based analysis, it is found that the universities in Kerala traditionally follow almost the same pattern of curricula and syllabi for their post graduate media education, perhaps following the UGC model curriculum or UNESCO recommendations for media education. Hence, the pattern of coverage of the themes identified for the analysis was found to be spread over the course syllabi identically with minor variations. However, it was found that when some universities totally skip some areas the others give some importance to them. This variation is due to the perspectives of those who worked behind framing curricula and syllabi, rather than a concerted effort or a common policy derived out of any affirmative action from the academia.

A common trend seen in the syllabi is that most of the universities teach media laws with significant focus on women related media laws in the country, of which the prime one is an act related to the indecent representation of women. Though the Indecent Representation of Women Act is for common purpose, the practical application of the same is closely related to media operations including portrayal of women in advertisements. When Calicut, MG, Kerala and Kannur universities have included this law as a subject of study in their syllabi of the course Media Laws, Malayalam University, the latest entrant into media education with focus on Malayalam language is found to miss any reference to media laws related to women. However, in its fourth semester, portrayal of women in media found a place with proper significance.

The second theme subjected for analysis was feminist media theory. The theory was originated in the context of an entire wave of feminist academic media research that had the goal of providing evidence that would support the criticism of the women's movement, has started in USA in the early time of feminism waves. Feminist media theory activists' focus on the representation of women in terms of numbers and stereotypes, certain approaches to pornography, offensive terminology and hate speech as well as demands for 'more realistic' representations of women. This criticism is also founded in quite different starting assumptions and understandings of media representations, meaning, and group identities (Krijnen, 2015).

None of the universities in Kerala, except for the University of Calicut, included this very prominent theory that revolutionized the academic analysis of media practices fundamentally incorporating feminist approaches. The syllabus of the course Film Studies offered by the University of Calicut has included this theory among many perspectives to study media, particularly films. Also, the syllabus of the course Themes, Theories and Issues in Mass Communication taught in the second semester at the University of Calicut has a component titled ‘ Media and Gender’ which facilitates a theoretical framework for media analysis.

Form and content of media, particularly media language, are most often found to be sexist, perhaps due to the influence of general trend among the public in using sexist language in their everyday life. Most of the journalists, particularly local reporters and those in the less prominent and unprofessional media follow the traditional nuances of language without considering the sexist elements in place. Putting an end to this traditional practice is to be stemmed up from the academia with proper language policy. Sensitization into this aspect of language use is not found to have any place in the media syllabi of the universities in Kerala, except for the syllabus of the course titled ‘Creative Writing’ followed in the University of Calicut for its second semester where sexism in language is included under the topic ‘sexist and disorder language’.

Gender sensitive reporting is not seen included as such in the syllabi of any universities in Kerala for their PG level media education. However, the components like stereotyping, gender and media, multicultural writing and sexist language are found to have a place in syllabus. It can be deduced from this presence of the components that construct the concept of gender sensitive reporting that all these scattered elements will contribute to making the students sensitized into gender balanced media operations, particularly reporting news. University of Calicut included these themes in their second semester course: Themes, Theories and Issues in Communication, with a view that they are to be considered as a prevalent issue in media landscape and to be analyzed from theoretical framework. However, these components are totally absent in the syllabus of practical oriented course in the first semester ‘News Reporting’. However, the syllabi of Malayalam University, included gender sensitive reporting directly as a component of their reporting course. Kerala University syllabus addresses this issue incorporating Gender and Media, Gender and Equality in their syllabi.

Media and Women Empowerment is the yet another theme subjected to analysis. All the universities in Kerala included this theme in their subject either in the course titled Development Communication or in

Communication Theory. The syllabus of Kannur University has direct mentioning of gender and development and *Kudumbasree* in the course related to Development Communication.

Kerala University, Vocational subjects like Development Communication and media society cover two topics related to gender issues like gender equality and gender and media in the areas like theory, broadcast, reporting, photojournalism, advertising are covered without discussing the element of gender and gender issues.

Women in media history are totally absent in media syllabi in the universities in Kerala. Women have contributed a lot to the development of mass media across the world, and India and Kerala social contexts are not exceptions. Even textbooks have no significant references about women journalists, entrepreneurs and managers. This absence of historical contributions of women is not an accidental one; rather it's a normalized pattern in writing history, particularly in patriarchal societies like India. This significant absence is equally felt in the history of all subject areas including science, technology and social sciences, that too at all levels of education

## **Conclusion**

All the universities in Kerala follow almost same pattern in their syllabi for PG level journalism education, with minor exceptions. However, the significance given to women issues and gender sensitivity particularly related to the themes identified above in varying degrees. From this it can be deduced that it is the approach of the syllabus developers, not any common policy that determined the extent of gender sensitivity found in journalism syllabus in Kerala and this situation warrants deliberate and collective attempts to sensitize education administrators and faculty who mainly prepare the syllabus of the programme to gender equality and related concepts also a common policy in this regard is to be formed with government imitative

Among the themes analysed, media and women empowerment is the only area directly or indirectly covered by all the media syllabi at the universities in Kerala. Opposite to it, the theme women in media history are totally absent from the syllabi of all the universities.

While the University of Calicut covers feminist media theory, sexist language and media laws related to women other universities skip these themes from their syllabi. Malayalam university syllabus covers women magazines, gender sensitive reporting and women and media in their syllabi.

In the syllabi of MG, Kerala and Kannur universities, the reference to women issues and related themes are less compared to other two universities.

From the analysis it was found that though the pattern of curricula and syllabi followed by the universities in Kerala for their PG level media education is identically, their approach to gender sensitive curricula and syllabi lacks proper policy and direction. This is not the case of media curriculum alone, but the same would be the case in almost all domains since there is no proper education policy that aims at gender mainstreaming in education. Interestingly trans-gender perspectives do not find even a single reference in any syllabus in the universities in Kerala. At the same time, central universities like Pondicherry University dared to incorporate transgender perspectives in their media syllabus.

From the findings it can be concluded that a proper gender policy in relation to higher education curriculum in general and media education in particular is need of the hour since gender related issues are being surged in all the spheres of the society including media. As media are considered as mirrors of the society, the best approach is to sensitize media to the gender-neutral practices. This is possible only when media education is mainstreamed both in theory and practice.

The present study is limited to the qualitative thematic analysis of the syllabi of PG journalism programmes offered by the universities in Kerala, and it is doesn't include pedagogical practices like classroom delivery, extracurricular activities, research practices that include research trends, assignment and conferences and seminars. Also important is an exploration of qualitative and quantitative representation of gender in students' admission, attendance, drop-out, performance, and placement. Equally significant is to explore how gender is represented in faculty and administration.

In short, gender mainstreaming of media education is all the more important this time when media are becoming more vulnerable areas of sexism and gender violence, both in terms of form and content as well as management and practices.

## **References**

- Danica, Minie. (2007). Feminist media theory and activism: Different worlds or possible cooperation. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3ffb/d624a0662ce3cd28a70bbd65490c34aac80c.pdf>
- Dube, Bevelyn. (2013). Challenges for journalism education and training in a transforming society: A case study of three selected institutions in post 1994 South Africa, Stellenbosch University.

- Gallagher, Margaret. (1979). *The portrayal and participation of women in the media*. Paris: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- Gallagher, M. (2011). Gender and communication policy: Struggling for space. In Robin Mansell & Marc Raboy (Eds.). *The handbook of global media and communication policy* (pp. 449-466). New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing.
- Gender Equality Commission, (2013). Media and the image of women, Amsterdam. <https://rm.coe.int/1680590fb8>
- Kalakoti, H. (2018, June). Importance of nurturing gender sensitivity through education. <https://digitalllearning.eletonline.com/2018/06/importance-of-nurturing-gender-sensitivity-through-education/>
- Kareithi, P. J. (2014). Hegemonic masculinity in media contents. [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/gamag\\_research\\_agenda\\_kareithi.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/gamag_research_agenda_kareithi.pdf)
- Ross, K. (2014). Women in decision-making structures in media. In Aimee Montea (Ed.). *Media and Gender: A scholarly agenda for the global alliance on media and gender*, UNESCO. <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/17331/>
- Sarikakis, K. (2014). Power, patriarchy, profit: Barriers to gender, [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/gamag\\_research\\_agenda\\_sarikakis.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/gamag_research_agenda_sarikakis.pdf)
- Sreberny, A. (2014). Violence against women journalists. [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/gamag\\_research\\_agenda\\_sreberny.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/gamag_research_agenda_sreberny.pdf)
- van Zoonen, L. (1989). Professional socialization of feminist journalists in the Netherlands. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 12(2), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.1989.11089733>
- van Zoonen L. (1995) Gender, representation and the media. In John D.H. Downing, Ali Moohammadi, & Annabelle Sreberny (Eds.). *Questioning the media: A critical introduction* (pp. 311-328). London: Sage.



# Mediating Science and the Public: Biotechnoscience, Media and Science Communication in India

Communication & Journalism Research  
8 (1) pp 62-75  
©The Author (s) 2019  
Reprints and Permissions:  
masscomhod@uoc. ac. in  
ISSN 2348 – 5663

**Jawhar Cholakkathodi \***

Ph. D. Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad, Telangana, India

## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to understand how bioscience, media and the public interact with each other and shape the discourse on the regulation of transgenic technologies in India. For this propose I looked at the news paper reports related with the Bt Brinjal controversy which took place in the last two decades. The communication of policy science to the public is more challenging than the communication of the basic science. I analyzed biotechnology related coverage in three national English dailies such as *The Hindu*, *Times of India*, and *Indian Express*. Paper mapped changing trends in the media reporting on transgenic products and processes. Thus, paper argued that analysis of the media coverage helps us to unearh the production of knowledge in a mediated setting.

## Keywords

Biotechnology, India, Print Media, Public Engagement, Public Understanding of Science, Science Communication.

## Introduction

Academic discussions about recent media debate about the science and society is mostly centered on GM crops and biotechnology. Thus, the analysis of the media coverage and reports about biotechnology helps us to understand the dynamics of science communication in the contemporary time. This paper looks at how bioscience, media and the public interact with each other and shape the discourse on the regulation of transgenic technologies in India. For this propose I will look at the news paper reports related with the Bt Brinjal controversy which took place in the last two decades. The mapping the trends in the media report on Bt Brinjal controversy helps us to unearh the production of knowledge in a mediated settings. It also helps us to understand different frames used by scientist, technocrats, policy makers, policy analysts, civil society activist, and lay public.

The communication of policy science to the public is more challenging than the communication of the basic science. While the basic science is more concern with the theoretical and technical details related with knowledge productions, the policy science is wider in nature which concerns with ethics,

---

**Correspondence:** Email: jawharct@gmail.com

political mobilization, ecological and environmental issues, governance and regulations of risks associated with it. Policy science also considers socio-political issues related with the application of knowledge and technologies. In another word, policy sciences have to consider different dimensions of the new knowledge and technology.

While introducing Bt brinjal in the agricultural domain of the country it have to consider the goals of this new technical interventions. It also has to look the current trends in the agricultural, agro-economic, agro-ecological and market fields. The analyses of the percent condition of the technological applications, income from agricultural production, etc are very important policy questions. It also has to consider the short term and long term consequences of the technology and the projection of future developments. The invention, evaluation, and selection of available alternatives in the market and in the technoscientific field are another crucial dimension of the policy science. So, proper communication of policy science to the public is more challenging than basic science. Science communication research focuses on the communication of basic sciences. They ignore the complexities related with the communication of policy sciences.

First part of the paper discuss about the development of science and different efforts to communicate it with the public. I mapped it from the colonial period to the recent debate about the Bt brinjal controversy. In the second part I briefly explained the methodological complexities involved in this investigation. I selected three English dailies, *The Hindu*, *Times of India*, and *Indian Express* to understand the current trend in the media coverage on biotechnology and related debate. Third part emphasizes on the biotechnology controversy in the last three decades. This part will help us to locate media debate in the larger context of agricultural biotechnology governance. Emphasize of the fourth part is to the trends to the media debate. This part will explain some common trends in the media coverage on GMOs and biotechnology. In the final part I conclude the paper by summarizing the debate.

### **Western Science in Modern India- Science Communication in India**

In this session I will give a brief history of science communication in India context. Science communication in India broadly looks at the construction of science related stories and reports and their impact on the readers and audiences. The socio-cultural and historical context play an importance role in the knowledge production process and as well as the communication of it to the masses. According to David Arnold,

"there were three main elements that broadly typified science, technology and medicine in India over this 200- year period. Firstly, there were the traditions of India's own science, technology and medicine, themselves subject to wide internal variations and different historical influences and cultural practices, and the legacies these provided for the subsequent era of British rule. Secondly, there was the nature of Western (or 'colonial') science, technology and medicine as practised in India, their social and intellectual impact, their organisational forms and dual relationship to the colonial regime in India and to metropolitan science in Europe. And thirdly, there was the authority of science, technology and medicine as central attributes of India's modernity, drawing upon indigenous as well as Western sources and finding contested expression in both imperial ideology and nationalist agendas (Arnold, David: 2000)."

These three phases have their own variants of communication modalities and institutional frameworks. In the traditional Indian science knowledge production and its dissemination were highly bonded with cultural and religious practices. Caste position in the hierarchical structure played an important role in this process. British rule reconfigured these hierarchical relations and helped to the spread of western science in modern India. In the independent India we witnessed the development of modern institutional setups and civil society movements for the communication of science.

Before going to the details of the topic I will briefly explain the historical trajectory of the development of modern science and effort to communicate it with a larger audience. During the colonial period India witnessed the penetration of modern science in the everyday life of the people. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century different individuals and small groups of peoples took initiatives to communicate science with the public. During this period a number of books were translated to Indian languages from English. These efforts to disseminate modern science in to the public were limited in its reach, mostly concentrated in urban upper class and caste people. During the freedom straggle leaders of the movement emphasized on the inculcation of scientific outlook and scientific values to people of the country. And since independence India witnessed a rapid development in science and technology. India's scientific establishment is spread across the country. Under CSIR we have 38 research laboratories and research centre. Along with this Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and the Defence Research Development Organisation

(DRDO) play an important role in development of the country. Beside these establishments, we have good number of prestigious research institutions in the private sectors, such as Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). Through these scientific establishments India achieved different kinds of progress in the field of agriculture, medicine, environment, biotechnology, satellite technologies etc. They achieved different patents and brought technologies in to the market for the benefits of the public.

In the Nehruvian era both science and science communication effort got flourished. He coined the term 'scientific temper' which emphasized on the application of critical and scientific thinking in the day to day life. According to Jawaharlal Nehru,

The applications of science are inevitable and unavoidable for all countries and peoples to-day. But something more than its application is necessary. It is the scientific approach, the adventurous and yet critical temper of science, the search for truth and new knowledge, the refusal to accept anything without testing and trial, the capacity to change previous conclusions in the face of new evidence, the reliance on observed fact and not on pre-conceived theory, the hard discipline of the mind—all this is necessary, not merely for the application of science but for life itself and the solution of its many problems (Nehru, 1946, p. 512).

For Nehru, use of material and practical benefits of science and technology for the development of the nation along with the use of scientific method and approach in the daily life of the people. As Chakraborty, Anwasha, Raman, Usha and Thirumal, Poojraj (2020) "the enduring legacy of Nehru and his contribution to post-colonial scientific debates: the shift of understanding from science and technology as an imposition of Western authority, to science and technology as answerable to the state and the public for its capability of delivering a better, more inclusive and humane society".

In 1952 the National Institute of Science Communication (NISCOM) began publishing of the Hindi popular science journal *Vigyan Pragati* (Progress in Science). And NISCOM also published *Science Reporter* (English monthly) and *Science Ki Dunia* (an Urdu quarterly). In 1960s we witnessed the formation people's science movements accross the country such as 'Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP)' and All India People's Science Network (AIPSN). These movements played an important role in the communication of modern science in the grass root level (Jawhar, C: 2011). Along with this,

different governmental and other initiatives took place for the development of science communication infrastructure in the country. In 1976, by the 42nd constitutional amendment the inculcation of scientific temper was added to the Indian Constitution. According to this amendment the development of scientific temper is the one of the 10 fundamental duties of every citizen under Article 51(A) (H) which sited 'to develop the scientific temper, humanism and spirit of inquiry and reforms' (Raza et al., 2014)

As we see Indian scientific establishments are very large in size which cover different field of expertise and discipline. This complex situations demand more science communicators and journalist to bridge the gap between scientists and the public. Unfortunately, in India the media coverage for science is relatively very less compared to other developed and developing countries. But in the last one decade we can see some positive trends in the field of science communication and journalism. At the same time the population and literacy dynamics of the country should be keep in mind. So, the herculean task of the communicators and journalist is to communicate science in a country with a one billion pulse population and among them a significant number of people are illiterate. The linguistic diversity also triggered the gap between science and society in the country.

In this context public engagement with science plays an important role in the process of bridging the gap (real or imagined) between scientific establishments and the public. In the academic literature, the debate about science communication have moved from *public understanding of science to public engagement with science*, from *deficit model of communication to dialogical model* of communication, deficit model (Miller, J.D, 1998) to contextual model and *science and society to science in society*. These shifts epitomize the changing nature of science and society relations as well as the nature of science communications.

In the modern time print and visual media play an important role in the public engagement and public communication of science. On the one hand it spread scientific and technological knowledge and information. On the other hand media helps to shape public opinion on critical and controversial issues related with technoscience policies. In the contemporary time both scientists and civil society groups use media to communicate their versions of science to the public. For scientific community engagement with media help those to communicate their research and other activities with the public and it also will help them to collect public opinion regarding mega research project. This public attention also helps scientific community to mobilize public and privet fund for their research and related activities.

The important function of these public engagement and communication effort is to facilitate the public to participate in informed decision making process. The informed decision making process uphold the informative, logical and rational application of scientific knowledge and technological artifact. The governmental and nongovernmental institutions and organizations are taking good efforts to spread scientific knowledge to the public.

### Methodology of the study

In this paper I focused on the national English dailies, mainly *The Hindu*, *Times of India*, and *Indian Express*. Since we have a number of regional media houses and news papers we have to address this question, why English dailies? This four news papers are widely read by educated medial class of the population. Most of the times these paper are extensively read by politicians, bureaucrats, academics and the general public. Understanding and examining the coverage in these news papers will help us to get a dominant trend in the debate about biotechnology in the country. In 2019 Indian Readership Survey (IRS) conducted by Nielsen for the Media Research Users Council *The Hindu* was the second most popular English language news paper in the country. It marked 17% increase compared to the IRS 2017. *The Times of India* was the number one in the terms of the readership and *Indian Express* positioned fifth in the IRS 2019 report.

	Publication	IRS 2019 Q1	% Rise (2017-19)
1	The Times of India	15,236	16.8 %
2	The Hindu	6,226	17.47%
3	The Economic Times	3,701	19.27%
4	Mumbai Mirror	2,165	19.42%
5	The Indian Express	1,855	16.01%

Indian Readership Survey 2019

As Chakraborty, Anwasha, Raman, Usha and Thirumal, Poojraj (2020) noted "until the late 1990s, most large English and regional language dailies had multiple-page sections devoted to science, but by the early 2000s these sections had been incorporated into the main paper and reduced to one or two pages". They further elaborated that "despite the disappearance of exclusive science sections, the daily newspaper has more science and technology news today than in the past".

So, the focus on English dailies helps us to understand the dominant trends in the science journalism in the country. Methodologically speaking, I used discourse analysis to unearth the interrelation between science, media and society in the post liberalized India. Most of the time studies on science and media focus on the quantitative nature of reporting. They focus on the width and length of the science related news, the positions of the news report, number of headlines, etc. dominated the nature of the analysis. The coverage, the placement of news, and source of the information are another ways through which the academic analysis focused. Here I focus on the major trends in the media coverage on biotechnology in the English news papers. I am sure that it will be very different in the regional language news papers in different part of the country.

### **Biotechnoscience and the Public: Cartography of the Controversy**

The 'GM saga', during the last two and half decades has made a substantive contribution in the way we understand and engage with science and technology. It has also changed our perception towards the role of science and the public in policy making. In this period India witnessed the proliferation of public debate over and discussions about various aspects of this particular technology, ranging from the environmental and health related risks to the benefit for the farming community and the nation's food security. These controversies lead to the development of a mixed opinion among the public on the application of transgenic technology in Indian agriculture. It also reflected in the debate about the process of regulation and governance as well.

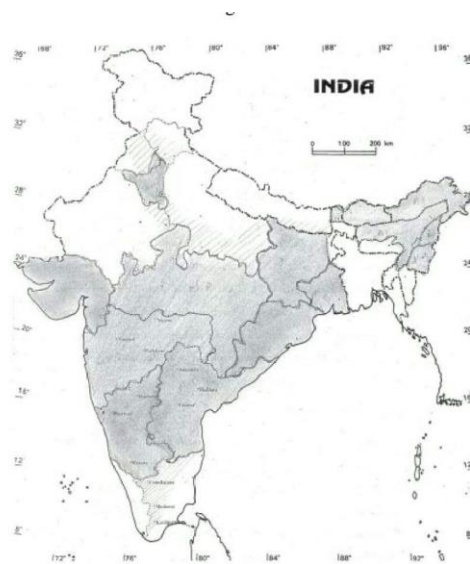
The last two and half decades has witnessed phenomenal development in the area of new life sciences around the world. Because of this, some commentators have called this century as 'century of biology' (Dwyer, J: 2008, Venter, Craig and Daniel Cohen: 2014). The applications of new bioscience and biotechnology in the field of medical treatments, agricultural productions, energy creations, etc. have testified this hope and it even has electrified the hype for a bio-economy and related economic growth. In the last couple of decades biotechnological interventions in the agricultural practices have reshaped the way we understand, practices and manage agriculture. Such interventions have changed the traditional agricultural practices, such as seed collection, seed production, pest resistance and production of plant varieties.

Thus, the developments in agro-biotechnology have created different kind of hope and hype on the economic growth and human development. As stated in *Report of the Task Force on Application of Agricultural Biotechnology*

(2004) “biotechnology offers opportunities for converting India’s biological wealth into economic wealth and new employment opportunities on an environmentally and socially sustainable basis”.<sup>2</sup> The trends in the cultivation of biotech crops in global and national context have testified this hope and hype.

Recently, after Bt cotton, the introduction of Bt brinjal for the open field trial and consequent commercialization triggered huge public debate in the Indian sub-continent. Brinjal is the second most popular vegetable in India after potatoes (Rajam. M V. *et al.* 2008). Its importance in the dilatory practices, medicinal value, biodiversity etc. made this vegetable popular among common people and genetically engineered brinjal triggered debate in the last decades. Another important reason for this public appraisal against or for Bt brinjal is that India is the place of origin of this vegetable and there are around 2400 varieties of brinjal in the country with different shapes and various colors.

Figure-1-3



Solid shading indicates a traditional brinjal growing area while light feathering indicates sparsely spread area under brinjal.  
**Source:** Series of Crop Specific Biology Documents, *Biology of Brinjal*. Ministry of Environment and Forest and Department of Biotechnology, Government of India.

<sup>2</sup> Task Force on Agricultural Biotechnology, *Report of the Task Force on Application of Agricultural Biotechnology* by: M. S. Swaminathan Chairman, Task Force on Agricultural Biotechnology, May 2004, Ministry of Agriculture, India, p. 6.



The development of new Bt brinjal by inserting a bacterial gene (*cryIAC*) derived from *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) which resists infection from various pathogens opened up a new debate and discussion in the context of India. The official reason for the introduction of this new technology in the traditional brinjal was to prevent high level of loss due to the fruit and shoots borer (FSB, *Leucinode orbonalis*) most common insecticide which weakens the plant and reducing yield. It caused 70 percent of the loss of the brinjal output and led to the heavy use of chemical pesticides in the field to resist insects.

On the other hand, those who oppose these arguments state that there are a number of domestic and wild varieties of brinjal in our country. The introduction of transgenic brinjal leads to the loose of varieties due to cross pollination and gene flow. And Genetically Engineered Brinjal will have adverse impact up on human health and environment. The controversy on Bt brinjal gives us a black and white picture of the story. This 'science war' between pro and anti-bt brinjal advocates didn't touch up on the gray areas in the debates and dynamics of the issues involved in the genetic engineering technology.

The media debates and controversies in and around the use of transgenic techniques in Indian agriculture have focused on the complexities involved in the relationship between science, politics and policy. But the important question is that can these technical developments fix the complex problem of agriculture in India? Since the larger aim of the new developments, especially the application of new technologies, is to ensure food security in the country and survival of the agricultural system and farming communities.

Agriculture as a policy domain, the politicians, technocrats and policy makers stress the need for the 'technological fix' or applications of 'sound science' for its development. In other word, this scientization of policy domain negate the role of complex socio-political and cultural variables in the operation of Indian agriculture. The underlying assumptions of this over-emphasis on the technological artifacts and scientific knowledge in solving complex issues is the idea of technological determinism or giving 'experts' the final say in the policy relevant issues. And it also reflects the ways the mainstream policy discourses look at the public and their engagement with the policy relevant issues. It considers public as ignorant, irrational or even hysterical (ESRC Global Environmental Change Programme: 1999). And the decision making in the area of science and technology is exclusively the business of the scientific experts and technocrats. This policy culture marginalizes different constituencies from the domain of policy making.

The involvement of different section of the public such as farmers' groups, environmental movements, traditional seed collectors and distributors, anti-globalisation movements, consumers groups, civil society activist etc. changed the nature of the issues. The involvement of these diverse constituencies highlighted the need of a more democratic intervention in the policy issues. The 'technical fix' for a complex issue was vehemently criticized in the democratic participation debate. Mapping these complexities and discussing the hybrid forums involved in the process of policy making will help us to understand the short comings of the current policy culture and the importance of widening the canvas of governance and public policy related to transgenic technology.

### **Mediating the Science: Reporting of Biotechnology related Controversies**

As I mentioned, since 1980's, the application of Genetic Engineering technologies in agriculture became a site of contestations, producing mixed responses in the society. On the one hand, policymakers, mainstream scientists and technocrats consider biotechnology as a solution for the local and global food crisis due to the unprecedented increase in the population. On the other hand, environmentalists, anti-globalisation activists, and various groups of farmers consider this technocratic intervention in agriculture a threat to the environment, biodiversity and local agricultural systems. Broadly, there were multitudes of stands, meanings and frames attached to the application of biotechnology and GM crops in agriculture.

After the introduction of Bt<sup>3</sup> cotton in the late 1990s and the 'Bt Brinjal controversy' on the commercial introduction of Bt Brinjal in the mid 2000s, biotechnology and life sciences have become contentious subjects in Indian media. Last three decades (1990-2020) represents a unique point in history in which India has tried to address different kinds of ethical, socio-political, legislative and administrative dilemmas related to the agricultural biotechnology. There are multiple studies on the risks and benefits of biotechnology, its effect on biodiversity and sustainable agricultural practices, and the corporate takeover of agriculture and its impact on small scale farmers (Chaturvedi, S; 2002, 2010, Bhargava, PM; 2009).

---

<sup>3</sup> *Bacillus thuringiensis* is a soil bacterium that carries in its DNA a gene which produces a toxin for certain insect pests (cotton bollworm, Asian and European corn borers). By transfer of this gene into the plant DNA, an automatic resistance is developed in the plant against such insect pests.

As we know, in India mass media (print and visual) act as an important source of information about biotechnology. The analysis of the news report on the Bt brinjal controversy in particular and GMOs in agriculture in general shows that the media play an important role in providing technical and scientific information to the public and as well as addressing critical questions related with risk related with biosafety issues. According to Scheufele (2007) "media plays a crucial role in providing people with the information necessary to make decisions about policy options and the potential risks and benefits associated with agricultural biotechnology" (Scheufele, 2007).

The print media engaged with the controversy by providing different frameworks of the actors, such as the regulatory agencies, policy analyst, public intellectuals, farmers' leaders, and local farmers. The media house act as commentator, communicator and educator on public policy related with the application of GMOs on agriculture. In India, print Medias like, *The Hindu*, *Times of India*, *Indian Express*, and *Deccan Chronicle* play an important role in defining the public debates about biotechnology and help to the formation of public opinion in and around biotechnologies. These media houses set the agenda and tone of the public debate by mediating between scientists, policy makers, technocrats and the public.

The analysis of the media coverage on biotechnology in the above mentioned national dailies shows the trend of 'issue-cycle perspective' (Brossard et al. 2007). According to issue-cycle perspective the media coverage to biotechnology is not constant but at varying levels due to triggering events (Navarro, Mariechel J. 2011). Different controversies, such as death of goats and sheep grazing on post-harvest Bt cotton fields (2007), commercial approval of Bt brinjal (2009), public consultation on Bt brinjal (2010), illegal Bt brinjal in the farms in Maharashtra (2019) etc. triggered media debates on biotechnology in India. During these controversies the framing of the issues and the focus of the debate varies according to the source of the information and who provide it.

The analysis of the media content shows different types of reporting on biotechnology, such as (1) Reports about the conference, 2) Comments and review of article from peer-reviewed article, 3) Opinion piece, 4) Statements of the experts. In these reports there are different frames and views on the benefits and risks of biotechnology. In these categories we see two kinds of reports. On the one hand we see scientist coming out in the public and campaigns against anti GM activist and politicians. On the other hand, in some instances scientist are coming to the public and reporting the negative aspects of the GMOs.

In the analysis of the media coverage shows some common trends. On the one hand, reports focus on the benefits in terms of controlling pests and saving the plants. On the other hand some reports focuses on the environmental and health related risks as well as the issues of food security. So these media played an important role in the process of polarizing or 'black boxing' the debate. Some time, the stories are biased or set to influence the reader to a specific frame. This unbalanced reports and opinion pieces created a kind of technophobia among the masses. These kinds of reports ignore the gray areas of the issue and marginalize the small scale farmers and consumers perspective on GMOs.

When we look at the reports about the application of GMOs in agriculture we can see different level of illusion. On the one level we see the illusion of understanding, where the reporter things that he understood the technical and scientific matters of the problem. And the readers also think that they understood the issue while reading reports. At the same time both, reporters and readers are reluctant to admit that they did not understand the scientific and technical details of the issues. My interactions, during the Sastrayaan<sup>4</sup> and multi-sited ethnographic work, with reporters and general public highlight the deficit of understanding and communication of scientific details. Most of the time reporters reproduce press release or media briefings of scientist and technocrats. The reporters are often reluctant to admit that they do not understand the subject; instead, they merely reproduce the contents of the press releases or briefings.

Another important trend is that most of the time the coverage of the biotechnology emphasized on the development narratives of the state and biotech industries, especially in the initial stage of its development. In the post liberalization phase, biotechnology and new innovations in agriculture were linked with the global market. The term such as progress, growth, bioeconomy etc. popped up in different time in the reports. This developmental narrative highlighted the benefit of biotechnology and projected it as a new development in agriculture and health.

Analysis of the recent media coverage, especially (2000-2020) shows a balanced reporting. During this period we can notice frequent reference to the terms like public consultation, public participation, public engagement etc. in different reports. These references were evident in the context of agricultural biotechnology and its regulation. During the time of Bt brinjal consultation media debates focused on the limitation of the current

---

<sup>4</sup> Sastrayaan is an outreach program to facilitate conversation between university science departments and general public.

technocratic and bureaucratic mode of governance.

Other major trend in the nature of reporting is the shift from the developmental or progressive narratives to public engagement or participation narrative. In the initial stages the news coverage focused on positive media coverage for the agricultural biotechnology. This homogeneous narrative produced mixed response in the society. But the involvement of different stockholders in the media debate led to the development of a heterogeneous narrative in the media. The biosafety issues were the focus of the debate in 1990s and early 2000s. But in the later part of 2000s and 2010s the debate shifted in to socio-economic and ethical issues related to transgenic technologies.

### **Conclusion**

As we know, majority of the Indian public remains relatively ambivalent and uninformed about the application and risk of agricultural biotechnology. Print and visual media played an important role in the process of communicating science to the general public. This paper is an attempt to understand the relationship between biotechnology, media and society. It will try to examine some common trends in the media coverage on biotechnology related stories in three leading English language news papers.

In India print media played an important role in shaping and reshaping public opinion about converging technologies in general and biotechnology in particular. As I mentioned, most of the studies on media and science communication focus on the issues and possibilities of 'framing' biotechnology in the media coverage. In this paper I mapped some common trends in the media coverage on biotechnology.

To sum up, in the media coverage Nehruvian imaginaries of development got prominence. At the same time scientific temper and scientific method got excluded from the day to day engagements. As different scholars noted the issue in the media coverage is that most of the reports biotechnology is often framed in a nationalistic perspective. It tried to equate development of science with the development of nation and create a sense of pride in the products of scientific development. In this context we miss a sense of critical appreciation for the process of science in general and development in particular.

### **References**

Arnold, David (2000) *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*, Cambridge University Press.

- Bhargava, P.M. (2009) "The social, moral, ethical, legal and political implications of today's biological technologies: An Indian point of view", *Biotechnology Journal*, vol. 1, pp. 34-35.
- Brossard, Dominique, James Shanahan, and T. Clint Nesbitt (Eds) (2007) *The Public, the Media and Agricultural Biotechnology*. CAB International, Wallingford, Oxon, United Kingdom. 405 pp.
- Chakraborty, Anwasha, Raman, Usha and Thirumal, Poojraj (2019) INDIA: Tracing science communication in independent India, in *Communicating Science: A Global Perspective*.
- Chaturvedi, S. (2002) *Status and Development of Biotechnology in India: An Analytical Overview*, RIS, Discussion Papers, RIS-DP # 28/2002.
- Chaturvedi, S. (2010) "Emerging Indian entrepreneurship in biotechnology and National Innovation System: exploring linkages and prospects", *International Journal of Technology and Globalisation*, vol. 5, n° 1/2, pp. 76-92.
- Dwyer, J. (2008) *Sustainability Science*
- ESRC Global Environmental Change Programme (1999) *The Politics of GM Food: Risk, Science and Public Trust*, Special Briefing No. 5, University of Sussex.
- Jawhar, C (2011) *Engaging with Science: People's Science Movement in India - The Case of Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad*, M Phil Dissertation submitted to University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad.
- Miller, J.D (1998) *The Measurement of Scientific Literacy' Public Understanding of Science*, Sage.
- Navarro, Mariechel J. (2011) *Science Communication: Building Consensus on Crop Biotechnology in Navarro, Mariechel J. and Randy A. Hautea. Communication Challenges and Convergence in Crop Biotechnology*. ISAAA: Ithaca, New York and SEARCA: Los Baños, Philippines.
- Nehru, J. (1946). *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Rajam. M V. *et al.* (2008) *Eggplant in Compendium of Transgenic Crop Plants: Transgenic Vegetable Crops*. Edited by Chittaranjan Kole and Timothy C. Hall, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Raza, G., Singh, B. P., Venkateswaran, T. V., Gopichandran, R. and Rautela, G. S. (2014) *Scientific temper: an arena of contestation in a globalised world*. Paper presented at the 13th International PCST Conference, Salvador, Brazil.
- Scheufele, Dietram (2007) *Opinion Climates, Spirals of Silence and Biotechnology: Public Opinion as a Heuristic for Science Decision-making*. In *The Public, the Media and Agricultural Biotechnology*. Edited by D. Brossard, J. Shanahan, and T.C. Nesbitt. CAB International, Wallingford, Oxon, United Kingdom. pp. 231-244.
- Swaminathan, M. S and Chairman (2004) *Report of the Task Force on Application of Agricultural Biotechnology*, Ministry of Agriculture, India, p. 6.
- Venter, Craig and Daniel Cohen (2014) *The Century of Biology, New Perspective Quarterly*.

# *Communication and Journalism Research*

VOLUME 8 ISSUE 1 JANUARY - JUNE 2019

*Communication and Journalism Research (CJR)* is a refereed journal published twice a year by the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut, Kerala, India. The journal presents a broad ranging account of the fast changing world of communication, bringing together a variety of studies in qualitative and quantitative approaches.



**Peer Reviewed Research Journal**

**COMMUNICATION & JOURNALISM RESEARCH**

VOLUME 8 ISSUE 1 JANUARY - JUNE 2019

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION  
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT  
KERALA, INDIA