

## **CHANNELING CULTURES: TELEVISION STUDIES FROM INDIA**

By

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***Biswarup Sen and Abhijit Roy (eds.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014. Hardcover, Pages 322.***

Television Studies is a new area in the academic disciplines in India. While Film Studies as a discipline flourished in the last two decades, there has been also progress in the fields of Media Studies, Cultural Studies and very recently in New Media Studies. But television which emerged in the last three decades as the largest and most popular media in India has not been properly addressed in the critical disciplines. Empirical researches on television programmes are often conducted from the vantage point of 'mass communication' but they usually address pragmatic and functional aspects of Indian TV. There exists very little amount of academic publications in India which is able to address television theoretically by exploring the political economy of television culture. This anthology, edited by Biswarup Sen and Abhijit Roy, aspires to fill up the void in the sphere of our existing knowledge related to television studies in India.

Television nowadays in India has become one of the most important spheres of popular culture which claims a considerable span of time in our everyday mores. After the liberalization of Indian sky through global satellite broadcasting in the early 1990s, television in India exclusively redefined the older paradigms of communication and reception. The book edited by Sen and Roy includes most recent theoretical developments in television studies and aims at understanding the political economy of the shifting codes of televisual culture in India.

The book contains twelve chapters preceded by an introduction. The chapters are focused on televisual forms, cultural experiences of television and the political histories of television in India. The first chapter, 'TV after Television Studies: Recasting Questions of Audiovisual Form' by Abhijit Roy revisits the theoretical frameworks of Television Studies as a critical discipline. His essay maps the historical development of television studies starting from British *screen theory* to the most contemporary of media

theories. He critically engages with Raymond Williams' televisual 'flow form' in order to examine its applicability in the Indian contexts in the era of global television.

The next three essays engage deeply in the theoretical issues of Indian television. Purnima Mankekar's essay titled 'Televisual Temporalities and Affective organization of Everyday' observes how the satellite television in India produces particular regimes of affect which often works below the level of meaning. The first part of her essay discusses the cultural theories of feelings, sentiment and emotion, and how they can be productively used for the task of investigating certain televisual phenomena. She refers to 24x7 television coverage of the Mumbai terror attack of November 2008 in order to show how televisual performances of the incident shape the viewers' emotion and thereby negotiate between televisuality and the everyday life of Indian audience.

Sanjay Asthana's chapter 'Television, Narrative Identity and Social Imaginations' argues that hermeneutic approaches are more productive in understanding Indian television than other relevant cultural theories. He prefers Paul Ricoeur's "philosophical hermeneutics, and certain strands of neo-Marxist and postcolonial perspectives" over Marxist-Psychoanalytical formulations of the British *screen theory* in approaching televisual narrative forms. Asthana looks at the televisization of three "mythic-realist" literary narratives of modern India, Phanishwar Nath Renu's *Maila Anchal* (1954), Sri Lal Sukla's *Rag Darbari* (1968) and Munshi Premchand's *Godan* (1936), in the form of serials in Doordarshan. The author's concern in this essay is to critically observe how pre-capitalist performative practices in Indian society translated into the televisual form reconfigures mythic imaginations and realist rationales.

One of the following chapters which is concerned about theoretical investigation of Indian television is written by Shanti Kumar. Kumar's essay shows that the public/private dichotomy of Western theory is not adequate in understanding the development of Indian television and the media public constituted by it in postcolonial India. As the mediascape in contemporary India is a culturally heterogeneous and overdetermined field, revision of Western cultural and media theories, as suggested by Kumar, is a necessary task before they are successfully deployed in Indian and presumably other non-western television studies. In India, he observes, from the 1950s to the 1980s, state-sponsored Doordarshan outlined the idea of 'public' and 'citizen,' but since the proliferation of privatized satellite TV in this country the concepts of 'private as desires' and 'public as cultures' as two pure categories has not been properly working as they are seen overlapping in almost every aspects.

The next chapter by Dipankar Sinha differs from the framework which believes that the transition from the state-run television in India to the global satellite TV signifies the transition of the audience of Indian television from the 'citizen' to the 'consumer'. He rather prefers to identify this change as a shift from the client (of state-run TV) to the consumer (of global television). Sinha argues that Doordarshan was never able to produce 'citizen' as viewing subject in terms of either aesthetics or content, since it always anxiously denied the democratic right to fair information to the citizen and consequently just functioned as a part of bureaucratic state-machinery.

Next two chapters of the book discuss the cultural politics of news programmes in the contemporary Indian television. Daya Kishan Thussu's chapter focuses on the changing form, structure and presentation of news in the period of transition from the national to the private satellite television which finally transforms it from a set of information to a package of 'infotainment'. A similar kind of investigation is

done by Nalin Mehta. In his quite diligently informative chapter he critically reveals the connection of the advent of 'live news' forms and the growing economic and cultural interest of 'global capitalism' in the Indian sky after the liberalization.

John Hutnyk's chapter 'NDTV 24x7 Remix: Mohammad Afzal Guru Frame by Frame' works on certain contemporary issues of Indian media politics and media democracy. Hutnyk invokes the recent theoretical works on cultural nationalism by M. Madhava Prasad, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Rustom Bharucha which examine the production of 'otherness' in the contemporary Indian film, television, political performances and media representations. His essay centers on the Afzal Guru case presented in NDTV talk show 'The Big Fight'. Hutnyk critically explicates "the justice process as it was played out through the televisual public sphere" and how the media trail successfully manufactured a 'collective consciousnesses' and finally influenced the Supreme Court verdict.

Chapters by Biswarup Sen and Santanu Chakrabarty throws light on the two most popular genres of television in contemporary India. Sen discusses the reality show *Big Boss* aired in seven episodes on the Colours channel while Chakrabarty talks about K-serials in Star Plus channel. Sen illustrates how the reality shows correspond to the neo-liberal desires triggered and gradually shaped by the agencies of globalization. Chakrabarty in his essay 'The Saffron Hues of Gender and Agency on Indian Television' analyzes the narrative forms, moral economy and certain performative gestures in order to show how K-serials manifest the desires of Hindutva in the era of neo-liberal globalization.

The last two chapters are written by Nilanjana Gupta and Uma Vangal focuses on the contemporary development of regional television in India. Gupta argues that unlike national channels Bengali news television invites the viewer to emotionally identify with the presentation of the news items. Vangal's essay, the concluding chapter of the book, examines soap operas and reality shows on Tamil television from the perspective of gender.

Arvind Rajagopal's 'Afterword' is a valuable inclusion in the book which provides us with important insights regarding the development of Television Studies. He revisits the media and cultural theories and the conditions of possibilities of Television studies in India.

The book is a well planned instance of academic publication. The chapters are ordered following thematic and methodological connections. Two areas which has been not discussed are the music channels and sports television in India. However it has successfully covered the most important issues of television culture in India.