

4. Media Education as a Development Project: Connecting Emancipatory Interests and Governance in India

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ABSTRACT

The recent explosion of communication tools and services within last two decades has posed new questions that are beyond the comprehension of existing pedagogy in Indian communication studies. Indian society has witnessed a widespread proliferation of media technologies to such an extent that they have become ubiquitous in society. However, media education, in India, remains an almost unexplored area of studies. This contribution analyzes the reasons for this lack of interest in light of the international research debate. It also considers alternatives to a Western view of media literacy, based on Sen's concepts of «capabilities» and «functionings». It shows the advantages of articulating emancipatory interests and media governance but considers also the local limitations of such an enterprise, if media education is not recast in new pedagogies and profound educational reform, that extends beyond the child to the whole of society.

KEY WORDS

Media technologies, media education, research, social responsibility, capability, development.

1. Media Literacy as a Non-Priority

Media education as a field of enquiry has received less scholarly attention among pupils and pedagogues in Indian society than other fields. Although there are stray writings and projects initiated by international bodies like UNESCO, it has rarely gained academic acclaim or collective concern. Though the field has been the object of critical attention and academic debates across the world, it seems that the prefix of «media» to education has foreclosed any scholarly attention in India. When the idea of media education as a subfield of education has been recognised, at best, it has been dismissed as too elitist a proposition, especially in a society where quite a substantial amount of the population is yet to enjoy the privilege of basic and elementary education. For historical reasons, education was denied across caste groups in Indian Society. Only the upper echelons of the caste groups had access to reading and writing. Since independence, efforts have been made by various governments to introduce a variety of schemes to reach the larger society by making them literate. The recent countrywide total literacy campaign «Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan» is a programmed effort in that direction. Much energy has been invested by the governments of the day to reach the weaker sections of society by initiating the ability to read and write. But they have not explored alternative avenues to make the people media literate contrary to other areas of technology where there are attempts to leapfrog and catch up with the West.

In the recent years Indian society has undergone a transition from print literacy to electronic visual mode. These transitions are not to be seen and read as replacement of one mode with the other, instead, there is an overlapping of both. Further, the recent explosion of communication has seen the society moving from media scarcity to media abundance. All these developments have lost sight by the policymakers or the policy makers have made it, like in other fields, a mere resource allocation and distribution. Consequently, the supply of audiovisual aids to the existing pedagogy in the school education received priority. Media Education as a distinctive pedagogy in its own right has been rarely realised and understood in Indian society. The recent debates about inclusion of ICTs in the school curriculum did not deal with how to make the children learn or read and write through ICTs but with how it would be an addition to the conventional classical learning system in schools. While the conventional learning system is yet to reach the length and breadth of the country, the sudden haste for initiating ICTs in school can be explained by the state eagerness not to miss the requirements of ICT skilled manpower for future demands in the world. Despite the recognized rigour and seriousness of the field, at best, it has been incorporated as education technology for teaching purposes or used for teaching the grammar of the medium by various media schools and departments in the universities to produce a trained labour force for the growing requirements of the media industry in India.

The recent explosion of communication tools and services within the last two decades has posed new questions that are beyond the comprehension of existing pedagogy in Indian communication studies. Indian society has witnessed a widespread

proliferation of media technologies to such an extent that they have become ubiquitous in society. In this media saturated environment nobody can avoid some contact or other with some form of media. In fact, it has become a part of life that knowingly or unknowingly affects people's daily experiences and understanding of the world around them. Different media like the press, television, radio, Internet, cell phone technologies and other ICTs superimpose upon one another and collectively contribute to the production and expansive circulation of text, visual, sound, multimedia and all the other products that Indians encounter as media messages in their day to day life. While the access to different media, the vast choices in the media itself, as well as the global flow of communication undoubtedly offers great opportunities, it also poses many challenges to a developing society and an expanding market.

These transformations, pertaining to the structures of communication and processes constituting them, continue to imprint various facets of contemporary India. What attracts attention is the lack of awareness among the citizenry regarding the emerging challenges posed incrementally in various domains –by the state, within the market and in civil society–, engulfed as they variedly are in the evolving dynamics of communication. Further, the trade organizations representing the so-called new media –IT, Mobile Telecom & Internet– include representatives of the service sector, more than those of manufacturers. While some of these existed in a muted or dormant form from the early 1980s on (such as those of hardware / component manufacturers and software producers), they were tremendously boosted with the Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) policies of the early 1990s. Thus, such trade bodies like NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) and MAIT (Manufacturer's Association for Information Technology) appear comparatively stronger and more vibrant than before; others like ISPAI (Internet Service Providers Association of India) & COAI (Cellular Operators Association of India) –a response to the advent of new techno-commercial landscape– were born and grew rapidly by riding the wave of the so called «communication revolution» of the late 1990s.

The trade bodies representing sectors that today are in private hands were for long under government control. In sectors like TV, Radio & Telecom that were monopolised by the government, private producers –involved in varied capacities– had a sparse set of issues around which common cause could be built and policy measures could be shaped. Not only have these emerged as major lobby groups today, but they also have grown in number– something indicative of the complex and rival interests that have emerged within concerned communication sectors, the most prominent being trade bodies representing «national» and «international» television broadcasters.

This evolution has created a scenario wherein the priorities and emphases of trade bodies –not to forget, their degree of transparency– have come to vary tremendously. Moreover, there are differences in the ways in which trade bodies in different sectors view and act upon matters of governance, as much within their respective sectors as, in their interaction with the state and in response to global/

multi-lateral organisations (ITU, WTO, WIPO, UNCTAD). These phenomena have, in turn, tended to determine the extent to which trade bodies have proved to be successful in shaping public policy, be it together with, or independent of, state instruments.

Today sector-specific trade bodies provide a platform for private players in the communication industry to protect and further their interests, advocate best practices, mediate between several domestic and trans-national stakeholders, and impress upon public policy through the legal *juro-administrative* mechanisms of the state. Beyond such trade bodies, the proactive role of specialised cells dealing with the communication industry within APEX trade industry associations (CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM) can also be observed. Perhaps their most significant role is to provide a forum to address contentious issues within the communication industry, especially those where the interest of specific sectors run contrary to those of others, such as CDMA Vs GSM, Mobile Vs Internet telephony.

The changing structure of the media calls for a serious reconceptualisation of the place of media in society and consequently of media education policies. The new institutional structures are not yet completely crystallised, but it is clear that they will involve a range of actors and will transcend national borders. At this point, the only actor that has been managing to pursue an agenda with anything approaching consistency is the trans-national corporate media; concrete policy developments at every level are still being driven essentially by economic concerns.

While it is undoubted that recent innovations and applications of communication technology have opened and widened possibilities for expression and information, if civil society in India is not careful, freedom from state control will be replaced by an insidious form of corporate control. Unlike the state, corporations are not directly accountable to citizens, i.e. neither are their performance regularly validated through electoral processes nor is even a minimal level of transparency feasible through legal instruments. With radical changes in economic policy and priorities in the early 1990s, serendipitously overlapping with the emergence of new technologies of informatics and media, a new institutional dynamics has begun to emerge, placing media under the civil eye.

There is a need to set the question of media policy on the public agenda. But more often than otherwise, the notion of media policy is conceptualised as though it were limited to the government or/and other formal apparatus of the state. It is not limited to that alone. Indeed, with the state's retreat from public policy involvement, media policy is being increasingly handled on the periphery of formal state concerns. Media industries have made this sector one of the most lucrative and important growth areas of global capitalism, and they do not hesitate to undertake the political activity necessary to promote their interests.

This changing media scenario is also heavily marked by some paradoxical trends: tensions between the heavily media saturated urban areas and the relatively less media engaged rural areas, between globalization and localization, between privatization

and commercialization between state control and private sector control. There is a veritable volley of information and media messages that individuals face in the shape of printed news, films, soap operas, information in 24 hours TV channels, in the Internet, in the multiple radio channels, across the breadth of the country. The information is knowingly or unknowingly used in many ways. It is applied in deciding and setting crucial democratic issues, in practices related to governance. In some unfortunate times, information is reduced to moral panicking, sensationalization of news, riots and violence in the name of religion, caste and other differences.

In their everyday life, Indians need to build up a critical engagement with media. Especially so, because media have come to affect their social experiences, political consciousness, and the construction of knowledge, relaying dominant definitions as well as communicating cultural expressions and meanings. Unquestionably then, one needs to pay attention to the specific forms of media as well as finer nuances in terms of the organization of national and private media systems, the process of media production and the way they articulate both with the public and the state. A focus of this kind opens grounds into the questions of the process of media production, its constraints and benefits in a democratic set up, the cultural expressions and meanings that are offered by various media and questions of public interpretations of media messages. While some of these issues are dealt with in the social sciences, the case needs to be made for a more specific examination of issues of communication, culture and their implication in education and a larger institutional incorporation of a critical intellectual engagement with these issues. In this context, media education is one of the main fields that specifically deals with a theoretical, philosophical and empirical engagement with these issues.

2. The Need for Media Education, in a Non Elitist Perspective

The development of print media led to the standardization of formal communication of knowledge and meanings. With the introduction of compulsory formal education, print literacy became a prerequisite to receive knowledge and ideas that were produced and retained in written form. This representation of reality through the printed words has undergone vast changes with the development of other kinds of visual and electronic media. Still one might argue that printed communication is considerably important considering that communication through computers or Internet is still beyond the reach of millions of people at least in the developing world. One might feel that studies of these forms of communication and its social implications might be elitist. However, today, it is not merely the text that represents reality with the intention of communication, but a wide combination of sounds, texts, and images.

This combination of different media generates representations that convey a sense of «naturalness» of media messages, as the representations are closer to the realities than what they actually represent. In such a scenario, how does one begin to engage critically with the media and understand their impact on society? Media education as an intellectual and critical engagement helps people make a better sense

of the different media products available. In this media saturated environment, the boundaries of formal education are merely confined to a concept of literacy that stresses proficiency in reading, writing and speaking need to be reconsidered. One of the main reasons is that individuals need to be equipped to deal with the vast amount of knowledge that circulates in this media rich environment. So, the very concept of education itself goes into some serious reappraisal when considering the importance of media products.

In India, however, the fact remains that as for now it is an almost unexplored area of studies. Locating media education within pedagogies of learning is a difficult task particularly because the field of enquiry has had very different approaches with respect to various locales and prevailing education systems. Again, the task itself becomes a challenging engagement because the theoretical underpinning of the field has developed very differently. Besides, the majority of the works seems to be focused on discussion of empirical aspects of media education. One cannot clearly distinguish areas of media education as separate from the areas of media studies and as subjects that deal with the media. They are interdependent. Conceptual approaches to media education differ from locale to locale and also in terms of curricula, philosophy and pedagogy (Kubey, 2001).

Media education also requires not only carefully thought out empirical work and approaches but also an examination of the educational and theoretic assumptions that underlie the pedagogy of each approach, for instance the role of media itself or the nature of audience etc. To consider media education more closely, one has to begin also with interrogating the theoretical foundations of educational practices. In Great Britain, for instance, one finds the cultural studies approach to media analysis and media education in which the audience is seen as actively negotiating texts, constructing their social worlds and identities through active engagement with the media (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 2001). Australia has been the first country where media education has been made mandatory and part of schooling from kindergarten through twelfth grade (Quin & McMahon, 2001).

Len Masterman provides a comprehensive view of the development of the history of media education. According to him, the origins of media education were in the 1930s and the first phase of the subject's development lasted till about the early 1960s. Media education started out as a defensive and paternalist movement, as education against the media for it encouraged children to develop discrimination by differentiating between the authentic «high» cultures and the debased, anti-cultural values of largely commercial mass media (Leaves and Thompson, 1948, in Masterman, 2001). The second phase of media education evolved out of the Popular Arts movement (Hall & Wahnneil, 1964, in Masterman, 2001). With developments in film theory, the question of «value» still remained central and discrimination within and not against the media became a primary objective. In the 1970s, media education began to base itself broadly on «culturalist» concerns and was influenced by developments in the field of semiotics, theories of ideology, and the social context of production and consumption. In the 1980s, media research reconceptualized media

audiences by systematically linking them to cultural codes related to socioeconomic positions or subcultural positions which had till then been neglected in media research. The implications for media education were that it began to move from an almost exclusive attention to textual meanings to considering issues of the sense made of the texts by different audiences (Masterman, 2001: 23-39).

While this overview captures the trajectory of media education in developed countries, it also reflects the scholarship in communication studies that informs the contours and growth of media education as a discipline in the developed countries. On the contrary, there is no connection between media education and communication scholarship in India, although, as a social phenomenon, communication has been well integrated into people's everyday lives. It has received much less attention in terms of habits of analysis and exegesis. Moreover, theorising communication has been driven less by intellectual curiosity than by value commitments and ideas benefit to individuals or society. As a result, there could be no unified body of normative theory because of the diversity of values and aspirations of theorists and their followers. Communication and media theorists in India have embraced a notion of communication that emerged from national reconstruction and was based upon a sense of social responsibility among social scientists. It undermined the role of culture that was the basis of its foundation, and adopted instead a pragmatic approach for national reconstruction. The role of culture was sidelined in the development project (Das, 2005).

Thus, the trends during the 1960s and 1970s broadly reflected concerns for national reconstruction as well as national integration (Melkote, 1991; Vilanilam, 1993: 142-164). A sense of urgency directed the research about the processes of mass communication and their effects upon society, which required explanations and solutions to a variety of social, political and economic problems for a growing nation. The perspectives of communication studies were those of mainstream social science research. Both relied on a pragmatic model of society, advocated modern individualistic values and were guided by instrumental efficiency.

The 1980s and 1990s projected a shift with the decline of state monopoly and the rise of market forces for disseminating communication and culture. Communication appeared less and less as a cultural proposition and became more and more a commodity for sale in the global world. The consequence was a reinforcement of a technocratic conception of communication in Indian society. The commercialisation of Indian communications radically questioned the autonomy of a Nation-state communication system. At the same time, the idea of a public service closely linked to that of public monopoly, was called into question. Furthermore, the emergence of new technologies projected the apparatus of communications into much more complex communication network systems. Such network systems are directly affected on the one hand by the structural transformation of international exchanges and, on the other hand, by the constant transformation and renewal of communication technology. As a result, communication becomes increasingly dependent on technological innovation, professional training and ideological control. Nevertheless, in recent years,

more and more media entrepreneurs and stake holders have come up to compete with their claims on the field, which are subject to scrutiny. For instance, the Southern part of India is spearheading the movement by introducing media education as a part of the school curriculum. Besides, a few higher institutions such as Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi have introduced it as a part of undergraduate curriculum. There are other states in India where it is yet to be part of the school curriculum, and it remains as a part of the extra curricular activities, outside school. But the field has gained significance among civil society groups such as Gandhian organisations, women's groups, SIGNIS and so on (Gonçalves, 1996; Scrampical & Joseph, 2000; Joshva & Kurian, 2005). Most of these organisations have developed media education kits for circulation. Similarly, the corporate houses such as «Times of India» and «Hindustan Times», two leading metro-based English newspapers, have not lagged behind. These foundations have initiated Newspapers In Education (NIE) to reach the schools in selected areas in India. These stakeholders have differing interests and visions. A detailed analysis of these efforts has yet to be undertaken.

Kumar (1999) captures the trends in the field and summarises them aptly in a fourfold typology: a) protectionist theory; b) critical autonomy theory; c) cognitive development theory; d) liberation/development theory derived from the Latin American experiences. Kumar has been in the forefront in justifying the need for an alternative perspective to address the issue of development. But his position takes him to a political project by which media education is equated with media activism. However, its focus on development is inadequate to grasp the contemporary scenario in India. On the contrary, Sen (1995) provides fresh thinking and redefines the term «development» from the perspective of developing countries. Sen outlines a framework to analyse a variety of social issues, such as well-being and poverty, liberty and freedom, gender bias and inequalities, justice and social ethics (Sen, 1993: 30). It points to the information necessary to make a judgement, and consequently rejects alternative approaches which it considers normatively inadequate. Thus, the capability approach involves «concentration on freedoms to achieve in general and the capabilities to function in particular» (Sen, 1995: 266). The major constituents of the capability approach are functionings and capabilities. Functionings are the «beings and doings» of a person, whereas a person's capability is «the various combinations of functionings that a person can achieve. Capability is thus a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another» (Sen, 1992: 40). A person's functionings and his/her capability are closely related but distinct. «A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve. Functionings are, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions. Capabilities, in contrast, are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead» (Sen, 1987: 36).

One of the major strengths of the capability approach is that it can account for interpersonal variations in the conversion of the characteristics of commodities into functionings. These interpersonal variations in conversion can be due to either individual or social factors. This is not a side-effect or by-product of the capability approach, but is of central importance to Sen: «Human diversity is no secondary complication

(to be ignored, or to be introduced 'later on'); it is a fundamental aspect of our interest in equality» (Sen, 1992: 11). Indeed, if human beings would not be diverse, then inequality in one space, say income, would more or less be identical with inequality in another space, like functionings or capabilities (Sen, 1991). Sen's insistence on the importance of human diversity is thus crucial for his defence of functionings and capabilities as the relevant space for well-being evaluation.

The capability approach accounts for diversity in two ways: by its focus on functionings and capabilities as the evaluative space, and by the explicit role it assigns to individual and social conversion factors of commodities into functionings. Sen makes a distinction between basic capabilities and fundamental capabilities. Basic capabilities are a subset of all capabilities; they refer to the freedom to do some basic things. The relevance of basic capabilities is «not so much in ranking living standards, but in deciding on a cut-off point for the purpose of assessing poverty and deprivation» (Sen 1987: 109). Hence, while the notion of capabilities refers to the freedom of all kinds of functionings, ranging from very necessary and urgent ones to highly complicated ones, basic capabilities refers to the freedom to do some basic things. As Sen (1993: 41) writes, «the term 'basic capability', used in Sen (1980), was intended to separate out the ability to satisfy certain crucially important functionings up to certain minimally adequate levels». Basic capabilities will thus be crucial for poverty analysis and more in general for studying the well-being of the majority of people in developing countries, while in rich countries well-being analysis would rather also include capabilities which are less necessary for physical survival.

As the capability approach could best be seen as a framework of thought, the relevance of either basic capabilities or all capabilities depends on the issue at hand. But it is important to acknowledge that the capability approach is not restricted to poverty and deprivation analysis, or development studies, it can also serve as a framework to understand media education in the developing world and the developed world by differentiating their capabilities and functionings.

3. Situating Media Education as Another Form of Pedagogy

Teaching methodology within media education has varied with the objectives and also with the pedagogical practices in education. For instance, in the early years of media education the paternalistic objectives took the form of a disguised narrative whereby the teachers specifically sought to improve the media tastes of students. In recent years, changes in media have seen different teaching styles involving different media like radio, TV and others. They increasingly transform the methodology of media education from hierarchical «discussions» (from teacher to student) to a reflective, «dialogue» form, involving teacher and student. At present, media education has developed a distinct epistemology (Masterman, 2001: 44-45). Masterman also argues that «teaching effectively about the media demands non hierarchical teaching modes» (1985: 27).

Renee Hobbs writes that the implications of identifying «literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms» means

that a process of learning and an expansion of the concept of «text» to include all sorts of messages is included in this definition. This view considers students as actively engaged in the process of analyzing and creating messages. It implies some basic principles of school reform including: «an enquiry-based education; students-centred learning; problem-solving in cooperative terms; alternatives to standardized testing; and an integrated curriculum» (Hobbs, 2001: 166). Hobbs states that literacy defined as such would restore the important connection between school and culture, making education more relevant to the communities in which students belong. Besides, it reflects the kind of authentic learning which occurs when reading and writing take place in contexts where «process, product and content are interrelated» (Edelsky, Altwerger and Flores, 1991: 9 cited in Hobbs, 2001). In this view, language skills and learning are conceived of as being inherently social processes, requiring direct engagement and experience tied to meaningful activity (Hobbs, 2001: 172).

Again, the pedagogical approach differs in the developing countries as the informational needs and the cultural experiences are different from those of the developed West. Criticos writes that the issues addressed by Hobbs have implications for nuances in different social environments whether it is a highly industrialized society, a media saturated society, a rural agrarian society or even a democratic society (Criticos, 1991: 229-239). Connecting epistemological and emancipatory interests thus allow social experiences to inform school knowledge and encourages the development of children as critical citizens, which is necessary for a democratic society.

In the case of some developing countries, the increasing focus on media education comes from its being seen as an effective means to remove social inequalities generated by unequal access to the means of information. In the Philippines, for instance, some religiously-based organizations teach literacy to the under privileged sections of society. Other countries like South Africa work in the framework of programs set up to aid the third World countries through developing media education (Pinsloo & Criticos, 1991). A strong element in media education there is that its educational initiatives have strongly been influenced by political struggles against apartheid (in the media themselves). Media education initiatives have been used towards national reconstruction and the development of a critical citizenry. Criticos writes that media education in South Africa draws on critical pedagogy or «people's education» based on a creative and generative education as opposed to the dominant, consumptive and domesticating education. Borrowing from Paolo Freire's term of people «naming their world», this education sought to enable people to move towards «critical consciousness» through a process where oppositional media and new cultural forms are utilized to give a direct challenge to mainstream media and cultural repression (Criticos, 1991: 229-239).

Research results on the effectiveness of media education (like the efficacy of other traditional and innovative educational approaches) are practically non existent even in certain developed countries like the UK (Bazalgette, 2001). Still some literature does envision the scope of the field as well as identify some areas of enquiry. Media education is one of the best ways to facilitate critical thinking and student-centred

education and as such aligns itself with other subjects that aim at developing abilities of critical thinking like health education, education about democracy (Considine, 2001). Some scholars like Masterman feel that media education, when taught in an already established curriculum of subjects or as an integrated part of subjects as a whole, would be the most effective way of ensuring that every student learns about the media. The ensuing argument is that if media education is a part of an education for responsible citizenship to which every child has a right then its incorporation in an established part of education is the most effective way to achieve the goal. Linking media literacy to educational reform and authentic learning could assist to achieve multicultural educational goals by developing close links between the classroom, the home, and the community (Hobbs, 2001).

Quin and McMahon argue that the scope of media education has to go beyond text-based analyses to an examination of audiences and the broader technological environment. To this effect, they argue for a theoretical curriculum model encompassing the text, the audience and the context. One might ask why audience studies should have any relevance to basic education. The answer is that «it is critical and increasingly so as we develop multicultural approaches to education as students must come to learn, early on, that different people and different groups often understand and interpret the same texts and communication acts differently» (Kubey, 2001: 9).

Other groups that are concerned with the implementation of regulatory and self-regulatory measures address the scope and practice of media education in terms of «protection» that «provides children 'with the skills and understanding to interact critically with the media', and also in terms of young people's engagement in «critical participation as cultural producers in their own right» (COMECE, 2001). However, Livingstone cautions against such moral panics. While children do constitute a distinctive category of media audiences, some issues like their use of media and access to ICTs are not always constructively mediated by the school. Neither are they at home, where social inequalities can prevail and where viewing is constrained by the availability of one's own language programmes, etc. Besides young people's increasing dependence on global media contents to form youth cultures must not be overlooked. Each of these issues must be understood in terms of their contexts and each allowed for alternative interpretations. Livingstone writes that children and young people represent an increasingly influential segment of the population, whether viewed in terms of family dynamics, citizen rights, or as a consumer market.

Children are not simply passing through a developmental phase on the way to adulthood. In fact, children are a distinct, heterogeneous cultural group. They are also a sizeable market segment. They interact with adults within households with ICT situated in the midst of these cross-generation negotiations. Livingstone writes that a technologically deterministic media centric approach (that attributes social change to technological innovation) or a cultural deterministic approach (that asserts a romantic view of childhood in which media are shaped by their contexts of use) are based on an implicit view of childhood and youth. Rather she proposes a culturalist and constructivist framework for the sociology of childhood that lays the stress on the

child-as-agent. To recognize the interdependence facilitates theoretical and empirical linkages between research on children and youth and also an understanding of the fact that children's lives are «thoroughly mediated» (Livingstone, 2001: 308-310).

Buckingham also asserts that the notion of the vulnerable child in need of protection from the dangers of the media, an assumption on which media education is frequently based, is steadily giving way to the notion of the child as a sovereign consumer. Children are being much more intensively targeted by commercial interests and yet contemporary media culture also appears to offer enormous diversity, interactivity and control. The media increasingly offer children an experience of autonomy and freedom and also a sense that they, and not adults, are in charge. Buckingham writes that the development of a heterogeneous children's media environment is also related to broader changes in their social status, in the increasing institutionalization of childhood itself and in issues of identity formation. He argues that these developments represent a fundamental challenge to the modernist project of media education. It is effectively premised on the cultivation of rational thinking, the possibility of well-regulated public communication, and the production of «critical consumers» which would enable children to function as autonomous, rational social agents. Buckingham adopts a more «postmodern» pedagogical approach in his evaluation of the «playful approach» to media education. He applies this reference to forms of knowledge and learning that move beyond the confines of traditional, rationalist, academic modes (Buckingham, 2003a: 309-328).

To summarize, a common understanding among media education scholars is the recognition of the prevalence of media culture and the need for an interrogation of the various issues of media representations that impinge upon people's understanding of the world. The underlying implicit suggestion is for the need to educate citizens to these media implications. In developing countries, it implies an education that takes into consideration the issue of multicultural differences and also that raises awareness about the existence of inequalities in terms of gender, ethnic, caste and class difference, etc. In recent years, there has been some studies in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America that have critically examined the role of mainstream media in perpetuating some of these inequalities; they also have analyzed how alternative media can challenge these issues in a culturally diverse, democratic society. Some of the writings also address how media education has effectively contributed in bringing about various changes in these societies. Though some of the experiments were confined outside the school system, in Asia, the Philippines was the first country to integrate media education into the formal school curriculum (Kumar, 1999: 245).

4. Exploring Media Education in India

When dealing with media education, the issue is not about how to apply media but on how to apply critical learning about the media to issues of democracy, civic participation, etc. It is particularly important in the case of democratic countries like India where vast inequalities exist alongside opportunities. In a fast changing media environment as the one in India, to fulfil societal goals, the population needs an

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understanding of the nature of information and media technologies that produce them.

Since the liberalization of the economy in the 1990s, there has not only been an increasing trend towards deregulation and privatization of telecommunications, commercialization of communication services, and the entry of global media in India but also a wide reaching change in the media scenario itself. Despite the growth of media technologies, the globalization of media markets and the development of ICT technologies in India, one still finds that a significant sector of the population cannot avail itself of any of these opportunities and hence faces exclusion. Yet, there are significant changes in the rural areas too. For instance, by 2000, nearly half of all Indian villages were connected by telephone, a huge difference compared to the 4 percent in 1988 (Singhal & Rogers, 2001).

However, Indian society seems to be caught in a paradox, as the mostly urban media are churning out popular representations of the rural or the traditional world (according to their choice and perspective). They are also caught in socio-economic inequalities in society and reproduce them. Poor adherence to democratic practices, along with widespread inequality, is coupled with the many problems that the minority and marginalized communities face. The cultural and religious issues in India also require citizens to interrogate responsibly some of the many «realities» that are marketed as media products. The media are in the midst of different actors –the state, organizations in civil society, representatives of global capital, domestic capital, economic institutions and so on–, which creates immense possibilities and risks. This environment provides an opportunity to make thoughtful, critical uses of the wide array of information available, so as to meet individual as well as community needs.

Yet, despite such needs, media education in India remains an almost unexplored field of research with a few exceptional workshops by NGOs and religious groups like WACC (World Association for Christian Communication) or UNDA-OCIC, two international Catholic Organizations for electronic and cinematic media (Kumar, 1999: 244). Some communication education research looks at media and communication education needs in terms of the effectiveness of media training, that is the skill efficiency required to meet market expectations (Sanjay, 2002).

However, media education is more than a mere focus on media skill efficiency. A survey of media training institutions revealed that almost 80% of them stressed that media education must focus on the goals of advancing society. Explaining the nature of the media industry and organization was seen as an equally important goal, rather than just meeting manpower needs (Sanjay, 2002: 38). This takes on all the more significance as India has a large amount of young people. So media education must not only be embedded in the needs of children in society but also in the local community, with the larger goal of benefiting the country as a whole. However, media education, in India, is only undertaken by individual persons, a few NGOs as well as some religious bodies who deal with certain specific issues, especially the moral implications of some kind of media.

Childhood in India has not received as serious scholarly attention as womanhood. Although a few scholars (Sarkar, 2001; Nandy, 1992: 61) have highlighted the perspective of «modern conjugal couple» as the core of the modern family, such studies are European-centred and an attempt to extend and universalise Aries's (1962) construction of modern childhood, as rightly pointed out by Gupta (2002). Viruru (2001) makes an attempt to capture the history of childhood through the schooling system. But his analysis paints a gloomy picture whereby childhood is a victim of modern education system undergoing the process of self-alienation imposed by colonialism and perpetuated through the post-colonial education system. As Oberoi (2006) summarises, Indian modes of child socialisation produce individuals who are inappropriately socialised for their role as agents of the developmental agenda of the modern nation state.

But the patterns of Indian child socialisation are bound to change as processes of modernisation and lately globalisation, proceed apace. As Murphy (1953) points out, Indian children are friendly, responsible, artistic, cheerful and spontaneous –a result she believes of the acceptance of children in the everyday pattern of family living, the easy participation of people of any age in the activities of the rest. But she adds that Indian children over the age of eight or nine –anticipating the fully socialised Indian personality–, lacked both the stimulus to problem solving or the practice in cooperative thinking and planning that would match the spontaneity and capacity for relationships. Murphy (1953), through her ethnography, suggests that expansion of schooling, any particular type of schooling, might lead to qualitative transformation at the cost of losses in the development process.

Several scholars (Narain, 1957; Nandy, 1980; Carstairs, 1957; Kakar, 1981; Seymour, 1999), following Murphy's work, have explored child-rearing practices in India and comment on over-indulgence childhood, maternal enthrallment and a very different cultural model of upbringing in comparison with the West. Although there are very few studies on childhood per se, hardly any scholarly study exists on children's participation in media, except research done in a roundabout way, for instance, on the impact of media violence on children, on viewing habits and their effects on studies, and so on. Most of these constructions are adult-centric; children's views are rarely expressed and respected. How children use media and participate in media are rare prerogatives within academia, except for a few child rights groups that raise the issue and bring it to the limelight. But such voices do not cause much stir because of the vulnerability and dependence of the child on the adults in India.

There have been many examples elsewhere in the world that demonstrate how children's participation in media brings about greater social justice and civic engagement. In fact, many of the goals of media education are realised through children's participation in the media: a «real» media participation in the community strengthens the children's ability and curiosity, gives them a critical understanding of the media, increases their knowledge of the local community and inspires social action (Feilitzen, 1999: 27). Media education is also about a struggle for information, a striving for social justice and critical citizenship. In a democratic society, decisions are

made on the conceptions and impressions people receive through the varied media around them. So media education is about a retribution of political and social power, an opening up for creative and critical dialogue, participation and action. When included in a process of learning and practice, it gives all groups and individuals in society the right to self expression, to development and liberation, independent of age, gender, socio-economic conditions, culture, religion and language (Feilitzen, 1999: 25).

In India, there is a clear distinction between the terms «media education», «educational technology» and «professional education in media». The term «educational technology» includes all teaching techniques as well as the use of media in school lessons; the term «professional education in media» refers to a mixture between schools of journalism and film. «Media education» considers learning about media while educational technology is learning by using media. Educational technology is integrated into the curriculum of the Indian teacher training institutes to enable teachers to make use of media in their lessons whereas media education is not part of training.

There are only a couple of educational institutions including universities that look into media education, and offer projects and conferences. According to Kumar, media education should lead to democratic communication. He defines media education as a teaching method that uses formal, non-formal, and informal approaches to impart a critical understanding of various media in order to lead to greater responsibility, greater participation in the production of media as well as to a greater interest in the sales and reception of media. Kumar identifies some of the difficulties that media education faces in India: the exam-oriented curriculum, the dependence of media education on government policy, and a problem within the subject of media education itself: focusing on it as a subject would lead to overvaluing the media and separating them from their social context (and so a cross-curricular approach would be best suited, but more difficult to implement).

As Thomas writes, media education in India is still in an experimental stage with very little feedback. Besides the concepts of media education are rather geared to the Western hemisphere and India being a developing country has very different concerns about development. These kinds of changes in the Asian context demand an alternative definition and approach to media education to the one outlined by Masterman (1985). This new and different paradigm can be examined in the context of research and theories of the «popular» developed in Latin American countries as well as in relation to new social movements, around the struggle for the right to information and to communication.

The definition from the Toulouse Conference in 1991 reads that, «Media education is an educational process / practice that seeks to enable members of a community creatively and critically to participate (at all levels of production, distribution and exhibition) in the use of the technological and traditional media for the development and liberation of themselves and the community, as well as for the democratization of communication». This approach places the «development» and «liberation» of the community as a whole rather than on the production of critically autonomous individuals and the «democratization of communication» which entails participation

by all members of a community at levels of planning, production, distribution and exhibition too. An alternative approach to media education, especially for developing countries, needs to lay the emphasis on principles of social justice, pluralism in culture, language and religion and on the fundamental right to communicate (Kumar, 1999: 247).

5. In Lieu of a Conclusion

Media education as an area of studies can address and enlighten many issues and concerns. The purpose of this analysis was to consider some of the features that mark media education in general and also to attempt to locate them within the Indian context, in relation to other development perspectives. Despite disparities in theories and scientific approaches, an overall evaluation of media education concepts point out a common agreement over the understanding that communication is a cultural endeavour and that it has a basic underlying purpose which is constructed by the political, economic and social situations in different societies.

The media strongly influence people's conceptions and perceptions of the social environment. While providing entertainment, they also impart information, cultural knowledge and values that in turn influence how people come to view themselves, certain social groups, gender roles, etc. Thus, the media not only aid in socialization, but by providing symbolic resources, they also exercise a form of pedagogy. This is the basis of media education as researchers in this field argue that a media literate person can not only take on a critical, analytical and evaluative perspective but can also use media to contribute to the production and communication of knowledge. The important question is how does one further develop the pedagogy of media education in India? How can one harness the wide possibilities of media education for a larger democratic goal of strengthening governance, democratizing communication, civic participation and especially participation of all individuals equally in all matters that concern them? The challenge of this field is not only in exploring further intellectual possibilities in this area of studies but also in devising some empirical ways of engaging with media education.

Thus, studies ought to engage with not only assessing evolving policy frameworks, but the institutional fulcrums of such frameworks and the capacity of these institutions to involve stakeholders –often with conflicting interests– to create workable environments. This also necessitates examining the inter-relationship between changes in media technology, national governance processes and in organisations playing a role in policy advocacy. These dimensions constitute a novel way of engagement with the field of media education in India and worldwide.

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