Book Review

Many Voices, Many Worlds

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Faiz Ullah, Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar, Foreword by P. V. Satheesh (2021), India: *Critical Perspectives on Community Media in India*, Sage Publications, Pages: 365, ISBN: 9391138462, ₹1,146.00.

The Sage publication titled *Many Voices, Many Worlds: Critical Perspectives on Community Media* is an edited volume of diverse mediums used by communities especially the marginalised and subaltern to *voice* and *speak* their experiences. The dedication by the authors to subaltern scholars reflects the alternative media that authors engage with, through this book. The fifteen chapters authored by eighteen diverse practitioners, researchers, and scholars highlight the emergence, need, development, and endurance of these media that was always perceived as an alternative to the popular media.

The book's title is akin to the MacBride Report *Many Voices, One World* compiled by the United Nation's Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The report called for the nationalisation of media to augment communication. It was drafted by the commission including 16 members, headed by Sean MacBride was critiqued by several western countries for its policy against the free market and regulation of private media. *Many Voices, Many Worlds: Critical Perspectives on Community Media* on the contrary explores a plethora of alternative media and channels in India to an extent that was never done before by wisely choosing to address the world as *Many*.

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The book's three overarching features are, firstly the consensus that community media has the immense potential to perforate deep into the grassroots collective-conscious to impact, mobilise and organise the masses. Secondly, the inclusion of diverse constituencies such as the Dalits, nomadic tribes, women, indigenous communities, and Persons with Disabilities (hereafter PwDs). Lastly, the extensive use of case studies to explicate the first and second characteristics.

The introductory chapter titled, '*The Other Worlds are Breathing*' by the authors is an inspiration from Arundhati Roy's insistence on the alternative reality. The authors link this possibility to the ongoing need for the subaltern to have a voice and smudge the distinction between the mainstream and alternative media. It is important to demystify the belief that the subaltern must use appropriate media so that the majoritarian can hear them speak because the onus is not on the former *to be heard* but on the majority to listen.

The First Section begins with a critical perspective of community radio by the authors Vinod Pavarala and Kanchan K. Malik connecting several dimensions of state-democracy, civil society, and justice to accentuate the need for alternative media, this they present at the backdrop of the anti- Citizenship Amendment Act (henceforth anti-CAA protests) and the pandemic in the first chapter. The second chapter in this section is an ethnographic account by Bidu Bhushan Dash of the Dalit political upsurge through community radio in the semi-arid region of Bundelkhand. The last in this section include gender politics and expression by Shweta Radhakrishnan, where she paints the picture of participation and restructuring of space to ensure women get appropriate media to voice themselves. The sections listed various challenges encountered in creating, maintaining and enhancing the outreach of the alternative media. The core of the narrative is that the subaltern has been speaking but whether there were listeners is questionable.

The Second Section dwells on the moving image and practices related to community video. Shweta Ghosh presents the participatory video making with PwD and guides the readers in identifying the barriers to film making for this group. Nina Sabnani, Madhavi Manchi, and Raees Mohammad in the same

section zoom the lens to the Dalit expressions and media ecosystem using cooperative movie making.

The animation and depiction of lived reality through the mythical lens capturing the indigenous art forms of communities such as the Bhils of Madhya Pradesh is documented comprehensively by Sabnani. The failure of the mainstream media in documenting these realities is well problematised and resolved through illustrations of participatory video making in this section through various chapters.

The Third Section is a transition towards the latest politico-social movements such as *Black Lives Matter*, anti-CAA demonstrations, racial discrimination, etc. Nikhil Titus's chapter in this context highlights the movements during the 1990s in Mumbai in India and critiques the orientalist fixation with Mumbai's urban conglomerations at the backdrop of movements such as *Girangao Bachon Andolan* which was well captured by parallel cinema. Titus's chapter condemns the reductionist lens of the slums in Mumbai.

Mahtab Alam's chapter in this space illustrates the reincarnation of *Milli Gazette* as a media for the Muslim community and the emergence of TwoCircles.net virtual media on the same lines. Alam presents the two media as a copper-bottomed vessel of the community to contain the unheard grievances. Madhura Dutta's case study of civil society in West Bengal using critical media for facilitating rural development schemes, education, and community organisation is for community scholars and partitioners. The Budhan theatre's existential epistemological account by Dakxinkumar Bajrange himself is crucial in understanding the use of theatre by the most marginalised communities in India, the De-notified Tribes (DNTs). While Dutta discusses the aspect of the citizenry, Bajrange's analogy of the *Theatre of the Oppressed* is intriguing.

The Fourth and Last section is an interaction of technology and communities to construct a space of optimism and hope by using media and technology for organising, preserving, mobilising, and developing the culture. The chapter by Monteiro and Jayasankar employs documentary filming as a tool for reporting, assimilating, and projecting a Kuchchh community's culture to the audience.

Faiz Ullah trusts the community's self-organization and re-inventing capacity in the chapter titled '*Notes on the Political Economy of the Community Media- The Self Organizing power of communities*'. *The process of* reclaiming the virtual space for feminist discourse is explained through the chapter by Shilpa Phadke and Nithila Kanagasabai. The last chapter by Hemant Babu deals with the most emergent narrative of digital technology and its exploration for being an equitable space for *speaking*.

Returning to the introductory chapter by the authors '*Other Worlds are Breathing*', they inadvertently draw from Gayatri Spivak's 'In Other Worlds', this could be reckoned with the assertions of the book that the subaltern has been speaking, but their mediums are diverse and unknown to populism. Although the narrative is 'alternative', 'parallel' and 'covert', the last section titled Trajectory of Hope entrusts technology for achieving the goal of Freireian *Pedagogy of Hope*.

The edited volume by Faiz Ullah, Anjali Monteiro, and K. P. Jaysankar is a compilation by different scholars and partitioners originating differently in space and time. The common discourse is of subscription to alternative media, the imperative need to facilitate social justice to diverse constituencies by studying vignettes. The writing style subscribed by authors is diverse owing to the heterogeneity of contexts. Such a spectrum of conceptualisation places the book in the company of essential reading for scholars and practitioners of Social Work, Sociology, Media Studies, Political Science, Social Policy, exclusion, and development.