

Book Review

Gokulsing, K. and Dissanayake, W. (eds.). 2009: *Popular Culture in a Globalised India*, London: Routledge, ISBN 9780367724917; pp. 312 Pages, 27 B/W Illustrations; Price: Rs. 895 (paperback); HB: £128.00; e-book: £31.99.

The book entitled “Popular Culture in a Globalised India” is an apt account of changing cultural and societal processes of the recent world. The author provides an introduction of economic transformation in Indian society, the changing modes of media, its increasing interactivity and its accentuated effects that accounts for the changing contours of Indian culture. The book provides theoretical debates that are supported by empirical research evidence. The book presents a number of research paradigms that further explore cultural aspects in a very explicit manner. It is an insight of popular culture that is accepted by the public in a very easy way causing its substantial growth. Comprising of 18 chapters and categorized into 7 parts, the book has focused into other current issues as well i.e. film production, television, fashion, print media, religion, gender, sports, tourism and new media or cyber culture. It had also looked upon the dimensions of social media, increasing cyber crime, threats to cultural identity in public and private spheres etc. The book expounds the concept or functions which play in understanding the cultural change especially through media content and its role within the society upon the people who consume it.

The Part I of the book deals with film, television and gender studies. It includes Chapter 1 to Chapter 4 of the book.

The Chapter 1 deals with a comparative study between regional cinema and Bollywood film industry. It takes Bangalore as its study area which is a hub for Kannada film industry. According to the writer, while Bollywood plays as a ‘Pan-Indian’ or deals with national concerns; the regional films are more concerned with the local artifacts and their problems. It takes three Kannadian films ‘Jogi (2005)’, ‘Duniya (2006)’ and ‘Munguru Mule (2006)’ as its case study. All these film evidences a tragic gap between the ‘Kannadiga’ and the ‘Pan-Indian’ in Bangalore depicting cultural gap among the societies.

The Chapter 2 introduces us over the politics, democracy and journalism over Indian television. It tells us about the increasing number of satellite networks and how with its growing interactivity, the common people have become a part of politics and democracy especially over television news channels. With growing two-way interactions now local news are also getting immense commercialism. As a result, the country is facing towards a trend of consumer culture.

The Chapter 3 in the same way shows us the correlation between television and gender problems. According to the author, the television has always carried out an ‘education-entertainment’ model and innovate ideas to show ‘women empowerment. As television has always viewed an increasing number of female viewers, it creates a dualism between the fact that whether TV soaps portrays women as a method of ‘Emancipation’ or ‘Individualism’.

The fourth chapter as well highlights the concept of ‘feminism’ through films. To elaborate the concept, the writer picks up the film ‘fire’ by Nandita Das as a case study. It was the first time

when film on 'lesbian' sexuality has been portrayed over Indian history. It also works upon 'religion' to show the status of women over the orthodox religious notions. Thus, it is a vibrant example of changing female politics and challenges of women movements.

The Part II of the book includes Chapter 5 to Chapter 7. This part explicitly discusses 'Globalization' and 'Religious Movements' over Indian society.

The Chapter 5 is based on 'Bhaviya' tradition of 'Saurashtra' that is the parts of Western Gujarat. It shows the Hindu- Muslim integrity over times and how they perform the rituals of both even during marriages. The author narrates the 'Shakti Maa' play which is acted by Muslim Bhaviyas and is a great instance of communal harmony and multi- religious society. Hence it shows how popular culture can be a significant part of harmonious polity.

The Chapter 6 focuses on the language, literature and film through religious imprints. It suggests us that how the elements of the epics like 'Mahabharata' is used in popular culture and literature to show its simultaneousness with their characters. The author cites three plays i.e. Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel 'Arjun (1971)', Maheshweta Devi's 'Bhishma's Thirst (1979)' and Shyam Benegal's 'Kalyug (1981)' to visualize the local problems and their struggles. All the three play as suggested by their names face the same problems as the similar character of the Mahabharata face. Hence, the chapter discusses that the contemporary Globalized India is still passing through the same obstacles that was passed years before in a new context and its impact on the changing societal processes.

The Chapter 7 argues that how political concepts are being connected with religious nationalism now- a- days. Religion has played as a part and parcel of politics in India. The issues can be seen in the form of Dalit problems, Muslims as minorities, RSS as Hindu nationalist and all such related contexts. It has created a popular culture based on blind faith in different aspects of life and culture especially over the communication technologies. It has covered all the arenas whether it is on film, education, lifestyle or any other field; the communal stereotypes are present all over the spaces. Thus, the chapter is an insight of communalized Indian society and its impact on cultural identities.

The Part III of the book is a review on contemporary music- dance and fashion in the Indian society. This part is contributed into three chapters i.e. from chapter 8 to chapter 10.

The Chapter 8 throws light on the fact that whether music has its own individualism in contemporary India or it is only limited to the sounds of cinema. Indipop has rise as a major element in private music albums and non film music. While the film music is for commercial venture, the private music album is a place where the artist intends to express himself. This part enquires that in spite of being very good content and its dynamic nature does the individual albums get a commercial value or not and to what extent popular music anticipates in the transformation of Indian society.

The chapter 9 chooses 'dance' as a pathway to look upon the social factors like feminism, social exclusion and social justice. It shows the paradoxes of female dancers who works in the bar or is named as 'devadasis'. It questions the fact that whether their status is limited to the mainstream entertainment of the elites or the art they pose can get cultural legitimacy and thus can be globalized as a performing art. The chapter henceforth finds out the various scopes to re-conceptualize it as 'popular culture' rather than 'elite culture'; breaking down the all cultural exclusions and inequalities.

The Chapter 10 illustrates the Royal culture of Indian princely states and its contribution in forming the popular culture through films. It used the term 'Zenana' to describe the insights of Royal courtesans and how it has attracted both locales and outsiders over the ages. The cultures of Royal aesthetics are still a main limelight of Hindi cinema. Alongside, the chapter also draws attention to the fact that how the Royalty has established a centre for tourism in the country and is popular

among both Indian and non- Indian tourists in the form of hotels, cultural concerts and market places etc.

The Part IV of the book emphasizes on Print media like comics, photographs, posters and advertising etc. The part is further divided into three chapters i.e. from chapter 11 to chapter 13.

The Chapter 11 studies about the survival of Indian values and culture among the generations to come. It witnesses that the arrival of new comic books and due to the impact of Globalization, the local and mythological stories of Indian subcontinent are disappearing very fast. The arrival of the Phantom, Superman and other Western heroes are gradually overlapping the Indian comics like Amar Chitra Katha, Vivalok etc. that features our mythological characters, our pluralistic society and our moral values. Thus, the chapter is all about our socio-cultural transformation of Indian society and viability of its cultural elements.

The Chapter 12 depicts the transformation of urban India due to the effects of advertisements. It elaborates how advertisements like 'India Shinning' that contains the visual images of luxurious and world class modern city is attracting the urban population through global living standards. It also creates a sense of 'belong to class' especially among middle class. Thus, the chapter is all about how tagging or advertisements transform society both economically and culturally.

The Chapter 13 unlike the above also studies the impact of advertisement in creation of Globalization. The marketplace is now dominated by foreign advertisement agencies especially after liberalization. It provides ample opportunity to the multinational companies to establish their space in Indian markets. Accordingly, it is also a place for cultural exchange where the growth of Indian market also takes place to the global network. Therefore, this chapter examines the increasing effect of advertisement upon Indian traditional behavior and vice-versa.

The Part V deals with the most dynamic issue of the world: Cyber culture or the Software Industry. This part is comprises of Chapter 14 and chapter 15 of the book.

The Chapter 14 is related to the online blogs that has emerged as an important social space along with social networking sites. It has become a new mode of expression of ideas, sociality and cultural exchange. Blogs have become a part and parcel of popular culture. It is converting the society into an agency which is linking the communities by strengthening the views at both public and private spheres. Through online blogs the mob talks upon various affairs like democracy, information technology and national security etc at a mass level. Therefore the chapter concerns about the role of blogs in creating mass society and reinforcing national identities at a mass level.

Chapter 15 is a chronicle of the rise of Software industries in India, the causes of its evolution and the factors leading to the expansion of this cyber culture. It studies South India especially Bangalore which is a hub for IT industries and describes its role in formation of a culture of 'Knowledge' and 'Innovation' in the new era of digital Indian society. It illustrates the coherence of science and globalization due to which technological fields like enterprises, manufacturing industries, military equipments etc have boosted up rapidly.

The next part of the book i.e. the Part VI dedicates itself towards sports- tourism and contributes Chapter 16 and Chapter 17 in this regard.

The chapter 16 describes the concept of 'Globalization' and 'Leisure' and how sports as an activity of leisure and entertainment can put the world in a single basket. It focuses upon three main sports of Indian society i.e. cricket, football and hockey. It argues wherever cricket has taken the country into a world stage; the other two games have doomed itself drastically from its previous status. Thus, the chapter is precisely a mirror of preference of mass and unprecedented societal change in terms of sports culture.

Apart from, Chapter 17 entitled 'Going Places' is purely based upon travel and tourism as its name suggests. Tourism has always been a favorite cultural aspect of media; whether may be in print media like Sunday papers, TV shows or may be in online blogs. The author denotes Indian tourists in foreign as 'Global Indian' and discusses about their fond and dilemmas in the alien country. It also talks about cultural quest that provokes a traveler towards tourism in search of 'authenticity' or 'originality' of that foreign country. The travelers in the foreign become a composite characters rather than individual personalities and carries blurred identity. The chapter thus confers the notion of cultural convergence in the form of tourism.

The Part VII is especially designed on food culture and includes only Chapter 18 of the book. It thoroughly discusses about the charm of Indian street foods. It not only survives the conventional practices but also is a sign of modernity, due to its nature of deteriorating the caste based concepts of untouchability etc. It takes Calcutta modern day Kolkata as its study area and states that how street food has given rise to 'Youth Culture'; as it is a favorite destination for youths for their fun time and social gatherings. So, the chapter is all about the impact of street foods on expansion of our cultural identity in the form of taste and dematerialization of monopoly capital and markets leading to the rise of informal sector of the society.

Furthermore, the trend of popular culture is a dynamic element that has brought a revolution in the theories of cultural studies. It highlights all the factors that how cultural production, circulation and exchange of ideas can process change in the society. It proves culture both as 'lived' and 'documented' aspect. This book is a seminal writing on media, society and culture. It familiarizes us with key theoretical and research paradigms especially on popular culture in the era of globalization. Another important feature of the book is that it puts up all the theories and arguments in a very easy language that automatically acknowledges it as a reader-friendly book. The book is explorative in nature and deals with ethno-social problems. The author has cited examples and illustrations mostly from Indian subcontinent that describes every cultural issues of the country thoroughly. The only limitation of the book is that it doesn't compares the cultural phenomena's with other part of the world and due to this we are unaware of the countries of contemporary world.

Reviewed by

Debanjana Nag
Research Scholar
Centre for Development Study
Univeristy of Allahabad
Prayagraj-211002
India