

Book Review

A Comprehensive Insight Into Media Studies

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The cartoon by noted Indian cartoonist R.K. Laxman featuring his ubiquitous protagonist the Common Man is a powerful comment on the media. Media, as we know, involves a systematic communication of ideas, thoughts and information from a sending agency via a medium to a receiving or reading agency, who accepts the information, decodes it, imbibes it, if need be, and disseminates it, thus completing an ideal cycle of media communiqué.

SYNTHESIS: Integral Media Studies
(Volume I, II and III. HB/PB)

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Figure 1: Common Man and the Media. A cartoon by R.K. Laxman to commemorate fifty years of Indian Independence. Cartoon courtesy: The Times of India, 1997.

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The aforementioned cartoon that Laxman composed to commemorate India's fifty years as an independent nation underscores the nuances of media communication by portraying a soporific everyman who is evidently exhausted by the barrage of promises liberally dispensed by political icons, like the ones that grace his wall, via the television and the print media, and has decided to sleep it off. The cartoon, on the one hand, suggests the need for action on the part of the political ideologues; while, on the other hand, it directs attention to the importance of customizing media content based in the active interest of the viewer lest she should be tired of the content.

Laxman's cartoon like numerous other widely available comments on the role of the media in our modern world and problematizes its position as the "Fourth Estate, a part of the power structure alongside government, ... [religious institutions] and the law" (Watson 83). Further, a survey of the definitions of the role of the media in our new technological spectrum leads us toward a need to continually examine the role the media plays in "reality-definition and as agents of social control," (ibid) in our ever-changing social context when the notion of the latent *vox populi* on the receiving end of media information has itself turned volatile. It is with respect to the imperatives put forward by a dynamic socio-cultural and political scenario that media studies, more than an academic discipline, has become an energetic area of research and incisive creative and critical exploration.

Considering the shifting paradigm of media as a genre and media studies as an area of challenging pedagogy, the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (VSJMC), VIPS, GGSIPU, New Delhi, has published *Synthesis: Integral Media Studies* in three volumes edited by Prof. Sidharth Mishra and Prof. Charu Lata Singh. The three volumes in question engage in a thorough research-oriented exploration of the genre of media studies by working on all aspects related to the discipline ranging from theories, techniques, technical jargon to advertising, photojournalism new media, etc. The result is an enriching academic bureau where a myriad of ideas find expression. Here we find a wide range of topics related to media studies effectively dealt with in each volume by the incisive veterans in the field of journalism and mass communication, like the editor Professor Mishra, and the faculty of the VSJMC, who have been debating the politics and the problematics of mass communication as an academic discipline on a daily basis. The resultant effort is an invaluable addition in the category of media studies and journalism. With wide ranging topics underlain with an interdisciplinary focus, *Synthesis: Integral Media Studies* will unequivocally broaden the knowledge base of students and enable them to approach the multifaceted area of academic enquiry methodically. What is especially interesting about the three volumes of *Synthesis: Integral Media Studies* is how different strands of enquiry relating to print media, audio-

visual media, film, media literacy which are often jumbled in our mind are detangled and problematized individually, thus making the book accessible even to the uninitiated.

The first volume begins Prof. Mishra's scrupulous appraisal of the modern Indian media since its inception till 1949. The newspaper as an epitome of print media has always generated the debate among its readers. Since the early days of Addison and Steele's *The Spectator*, to present day publications like *Dawn* and *The Hindustan Times*, the newspaper has remained the embodiment of the public sphere that actively moulds public consciousness, raises awareness on issues of socio-political interest and affectively intervenes in governmental workings. Hence the myriad restrictions on media coverage on issues that are sensitive to a community or may generate violence, etc. Prof. Mishra's take on the journey of Indian media touches on the growth and development of print media especially through the myriad historical events including the Partition and the second World War. That India Media had gained in strength overtime is suggested by Prof. Charu Lata Singh whose essay on scientific temper underscores rationality as the base of knowledge and information. According to her, honing a non-essentialist, liberal yet scientific temper that avoids jettisoning cultural beliefs and spirituality as inconsistencies that should not be considered in a scientific investigation, is the key to continued relevance in our changing social context. Dr Bidyarani Asem's paper on Mass Society Theory offers an interesting take on how the idea of masses as a vulnerable conglomerate of unidentified faces has changed overtime with digital revolution which invites participation from readers in newer ways. Media activism, like the kind we currently see in the Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death case (2020), or for that matter the Nirbhaya movement (2012), underscores media's ability to initiate social change for and on behalf of the people at large. The collective communication practice of media activism by mainstream media undoubtedly calls for restraint and social responsibility on the part of the media and its readers. Dr Anuradha Mishra's paper "Social Responsibility of Media and Media Activism" provides valuable insight into aforementioned topic.

We know that aesthetics and the prosthetics of media collectively act toward generating meaningful content. In *Synthesis: Integral Media Studies Volume 2*, the faculty members of VSJMC, VIPS, has concentrated on the various media artifacts of the audio-visual kind. The essays in the second volume formulate an exclusive collection of original research work done by the members of the VSJMC that deal with the technical aspects related to audio visual medium in all its complexity. The volume starts with Dr Amit Channa's paper titled "Radio Drama from Idea to Production: An Insight" and brings to the mind various BBC and AIR programmes dramatizing major literary works into entertaining

sequences. Dr Channa's paper touches on the various back stage intricacies including the deft use of sound and silence, music and isolated sound that trigger reader imagination and allow in Coleridge's words, a temporary "willing suspension of disbelief" as the reader engages with the radio drama. The use of light as an important tool in television production and the usage of camera lens filters are two essential technical topics that are discussed in the volume. Further, editing, or more particularly video and film editing that lends continuity to a narrative and impacts its overall movement and structure is dealt with extensively in two essays by Abhibav Arohi and Asish Verma respectively. Web radio or digital audio service that can be streamed through internet is a new sensation allowing high reach of media content with better connectivity, audience participation and easy access. Dr Chetna Bhatia's essay "Forms and Trends of Web Radio in India" talks about the various aspects of web radio and makes for an interesting read.

Media as a social institution and New Media, which includes the interactive and innovative vertices of digital communication, together influence our socio-cultural scenario now more than ever. The third and final volume of *Synthesis: Integrated Media Studies* strives to problematize the troika of media, new media and the reader/audience/participant. The chapters in this volume are scholarly articles by media faculty at VSJMC, VIPS, and adds to the knowledge base of the previous volumes of the scholarly enterprise. The first chapter "New Media and Culture in Indian Society" by Dr Debarati Dhar initiates the debate on new media in an interesting and engaging way. Dr Dhar in her chapter talks about the paradigm shift in media culture brought about by the advent of the internet driven new media. Taking the debate further Iffat in the chapter "Digital Divide in India" talks about internet and new media accessibility in India and the factors like affordability, gender, literacy, relevance and language that affect usage. He also points out how new governmental policies have great online presence and that previously non-digital platforms are also transforming their status in the face of new media. Further, despite the digital divide, it is unequivocally true that India has seen a steady rise in its new media users. With smartphones now slowing becoming part of our ever-dynamic socio-cultural set-up, more and more people from rural and urban areas are using social media. With largescale user participation comes the contingency of jeopardized news content and fake news is one such problem that we all face now. As culpability is diluted with large-scale user participation in new media, garnering and spreading fake news for propagandist, communal and other purposes has become an important issue which entails readers/viewers to be critical and conscious when imbibing and disseminating information. Bhumika Chandola's chapter titled "The Dissemination of Fake News through New Media: Seeking a Solution in Media Literacy" deftly debates the topic. A discussion on media can never be complete without a

discourse on films and the aesthetics of cinema. In the third volume too, like in the previous two volumes of *Syntheses: Integral New Media Studies*, we find detailed discussion on cinema. Tahzeeb Fatma's chapter on "Development Aesthetics and Contemporary Cinema" explores the creation of development aesthetics beyond the Indian New Wave of neo-realistic ventures like Satyajit Ray's oeuvre in contemporary cinema. She talks about the unique characteristics of developmental aesthetics with its exclusive narrative and visual strain.

In conclusion, the three volumes of *Synthesis: Integral Media Studies* will undoubtedly make a meaningful impact in enabling students to broaden their knowledge base, contextualize their learning and embark in meaning debates and discussion. The research performed by the faculty which has garnered a mine of thirty scholarly chapters skilfully divided according to the central idea that debate in three well edited volumes is praiseworthy. The chapters which debate media studies and journalistic trends from a myriad of angles will together form a cornerstone of new academic research that is not esoteric but fluid. The articles in *Synthesis: Integral Media Studies* are easily accessible and do not draw from established international pedagogies, but together endeavour to establish their own academic attributes based on the needs of the students. Herein lies the uniqueness of the project that the sheer variety of articles debating a numerous media related topic suggests the efficacy of the scheme.
