Original Research Article

Examining Media Education in India

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ABSTRACT

This is conceptual study on the basis of literature reviewed which is cited at the end of article. The article may useful to the knowledge hungers on media education in India, academicians and researchers. This article also provides some insights to educationalists and education policy framers of India.

Key Words: media education, educationalists, researchers.

INTRODUCTION

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 fulfill societal goals, the population needs an 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 4percent 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» those 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 socialized Indian personality-, lacked both the stimulus to problem solving and 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 AOC, UNESCO, EUROPEAN COMMISSION, COMUNICAR made on the conceptions and impressions people receive through the varied media around them. So, media education is about 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 wells 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 Master man (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:

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