

**Mrinal Pande (Ed.), *The Journey of Hindi Language Journalism in India: From ‘Raj, to Swaraj and Beyond’*. Orient BlackSwan Private Limited, 28 August 2022, 188 pp., ₹ 1435 (Hardbook), ₹ 359.23 (ebook), ISBN-10: 9354422861, ISBN-13: 978-9354422867.**

In the neat glossary at the end of Mrinal Pande’s book, ‘*The Journey of Hindi Language Journalism*’ is the word ‘*satyagraha*’, ‘the policy of standing up for the truth; from Hindi, ‘*satya*’ (truth) and ‘*agraha*’ (insistence). In the race for audience and influence, journalism is mired in the complex legacy of truth-telling. Yet, truthfulness, objectivity and inclusion remain central to journalistic ethics in post-truth democracies. Journalistic productions globally are struggling with the melting boundaries between facts and opinions, in competition with digital media where virality, voice, dissent and manipulation reign free and news aggregators appear as the key source of news. But in Mrinal Pande’s book, the contradictions between the call of traditional journalism and the force of digital media present a bitter-sweet story that makes for a compelling account for policy makers and development practitioners interested in issues of press freedom, democracies and voice. Hindi language journalism, long neglected by government, policy makers and businesses, due to the English language bias of influential media in India and how it experienced resurgence and disruption, with the rise of internet-mediated communication in the present are described.

Mrinal Pande dates the revival of vernacular media to the 1980s and its rising fortunes to the 1990s. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the modern history of vernacular press, especially the interconnections between Hindi and other Indian languages through the rising readership of Hindi print media reflecting social and economic mobility of rich farmers and middle classes in the North Indian farming belt and mediated by political ideologies and business imperatives. Chapters 3–5 examine two distinct phases of growth in vernacular media in the present century. The early twenty-first century is described as a time of ‘unfettered growth’ for Hindi journalism when Hindi language programming in broadcast media received a great boost. Issues and concerns uncovered by Hindi language reporting featured in parliamentary debates, government advertising revenues rose and political actors realised the electoral benefits of communicating directly with the masses. Caste and gender concerns form a steady undercurrent enriched by the author’s experience as an editor at some of the largest media houses in India. Hindi

language journalism was deeply embedded in a North Indian milieu of graded hierarchy that permeated print media culture. In the early post-independence period, the rare senior women journalists in the vernacular press faced routine non-cooperation from male colleagues. Later, when, women found space in the new media systems, prestigious sections sought and featured male experts. The absence of representation of women meant that the coverage of issues and concerns in news related to women would be slanted in particular ways. Yet, there are also touching discussions of solidarity from male staff and readers of vernacular press that mediated the author's personal growth as a Hindi journalist in an environment saturated by English language news. Newsrooms and publications, since then, have attempted to become more inclusive.

Chapters 7–9 cover the entanglements of vernacular journalism with the rising tide of new media. On page 138, the author phrases a key challenge faced by the Hindi language media, shaped by the inroads and influence of digital news feeds and platforms. Should they use this opportunity to simply gather 'revenue and audience'? Global media giants, the technology companies according to the author are the 'biggest beneficiaries of the technological revolution.' Mobile telephony and the Internet have on the one hand transformed the way in which people communicate and stay informed, but on the other have failed to level the informational hierarchies based on language, community, caste and gender. Instantaneity, the endowment of new media platforms has provided new opportunities for vernacular language content. Earlier, as the author mentions through an anecdote, during press conferences in New Delhi, vernacular journalists would have to shout to get noticed and were labelled as 'trouble' makers, but the present resurgence comes with concerns around the dilution of journalistic standard 'in the race for hits and eyeballs'. Women, minorities, Dalits and tribals, as the author argues, being the main users of vernacular news, would be particularly vulnerable to data monetisation, loss of privacy and algorithmic herding. Users dependent on search engines for information and news are not necessarily equipped to tell the difference between 'real' and manipulated content. This book is a must-read for all policy makers and development practitioners interested in the shifting shades and contours of truth, voice and account-giving enabled by the vernacular revolution in journalism.

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