

Maitrayee Chaudhuri talks to *Shreesh Ghosh* about her book, everyday advertisements, everyday details in the English-language print media and the communicative abundance of television

INDIA, THROUGH HER EYES

Through her book, *Refashioning India: Gender, Media, and a Transformed Public Discourse*, Maitrayee Chaudhuri, a Sociology professor at JNU, provides a chronicle of contemporary India. The book offers detailed studies of advertisements, everyday details in the English-language print media, the communicative abundance of television and a lot more. We spoke to the author to find out more about the themes presented in the book. Excerpts from a politically-sound conversation:

1 What would you say are the most dominant themes in your book?

Gender Images. I began with the spectacular but discrete study of gender images in nationalist rhetoric in general and the media in particular. I did begin with a study of women's representation in print media advertisements. Changes in gender images have to be linked to the reworking of state and market relationships; changing nature of capitalism and nationalism. Then I went on to talk about the rise of the PR Industry, brand building and managerial discourse.

2 What shifts have taken place historically in the representation of women in the media, that accompany transformations in the political scene today?

The focus of this book is on the changes that took place after the new economic policies of 1991. I argue that it 'was a new beginning in the history of contemporary India, evident in its new economic policies, political visions and cultural imaginings'. Talking of changing the representation of women after 1991, the most obvious is the shift from public deference to austerity to the spread in the idea of shopping and spending as pleasure. Advertisements earlier were about the prudent woman who managed a limited household budget. Today, the two trends — gloss and vulgarity — work together. My argument in the book is that all these ideas play up in the changing representation of women in the media. These three trends, I argue, remain central in contemporary India. What has shifted is the relative weighting of the three. Socialist ideas are now considered 'passe' so even as we continue to have great inequalities; large



Illustration: Amit Bandre



Take any of the major issues of social reform of the 19th century and it would be obvious that it is difficult to find one, that is not about women
Maitrayee Chaudhuri

sections of women who are poor, workers, unemployed — they do not get represented in India media. They don't exist.

3 How relevant is media manipulation of popular opinion currently?

Yes. Media is manipulating popular opinion. Media is setting agendas and narratives. But obviously, media is not a standalone entity. My book tries to examine the links between the commercial imperatives of the media, growing dependence on adverts — very evident in the chapters in the first half of the book.

4 In your book, you speak about the big boom that the Indian media has experienced. Has that kind of expansion given a voice or created avenues for the marginalised sections to make themselves heard?

There has been opening up of new avenues for marginal voices. But at the same time, there are a couple of things that have happened to mainstream media. It has been put on mute mode. Paradoxically, it is very loud. I use the term over-communicative abundance.


SCAN
THIS CODE
TO READ
THE WHOLE
STORY

