

Studies in South Asian Film & Media  
Volume 12 Number 1

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**REFASHIONING INDIA: GENDER, MEDIA, AND A TRANSFORMED PUBLIC DISCOURSE, MAITRAYEE CHAUDHURI (2017)**

New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan Pvt. Ltd, 325 pp.,  
ISBN 9386689006, h/bk, INR 895

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Maitrayee Chaudhuri's *Refashioning India: Gender, Media, and a Transformed Public Discourse* joins a steadily growing body of scholarship on the ways in which the new economic policies implemented by the state in 1991 led to a reorganization of the public sphere in India. Mapping the rise of a majoritarian Hindutva politics, which was concomitant with the market reforms, Chaudhuri's intervention highlights the transformation that Indian public discourse has undergone, with a particular emphasis on the gendered dimension of these changes. Central to this work is the role that the media, in this case, primarily English-language print and televisual media, plays in this 'refashioning'. Tracing the makeover of the media, the book highlights the impact of privatization on the industry and also examines the sociological implications of these changes. While the transformation of gender discourse and the media during the past three decades remain the book's main objective, Chaudhuri's analysis also sheds light on how globalizing neoliberal capitalism and populist rhetoric-heavy cultural nationalism are inextricably linked. In pursuing this line of inquiry, the book raises a range of theoretical concerns including, freedom, choice, consumerism and representation. It goes beyond empirical analysis of textual sources, including print media advertisements, social media posts, corporate and state documents, and situates these texts historically. As the author points out, the analysis is informed by a historical perspective and an ethnographic sensibility from a middle-class vantage point. The book will be of interest to sociologists and scholars of gender and media.

What distinguishes Chaudhuri's intervention is the time that has gone into the writing of the book – eleven of the twelve chapters of the book are previously published articles written over a period of nearly 25 years. The only previously unpublished chapter is Chapter 12, 'The 2014 General Elections and afterwards: A churning public discourse and the new hegemony'. The final chapter focuses on the electoral successes of the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party and maps the emergence of a heavily mediated majoritarian ideological regime during the first three years of the Modi government. The chapter also provides a provisional conclusion to the book's inquiry into the new relationship between Indian media and politics. Arguing that Indian public discourse is increasingly mediated and corporatized, Chaudhuri highlights how these emergent discursive practices led to the refashioning of Indian national identity and image. This final chapter, where Chaudhuri marshals a wide range of media sources, ends on a cautionary note

about state-led ideological hegemony and its implications for citizenship. This chapter, which the author notes also double tasks as an epilogue, is a well-researched history of the present that catalogues in great detail the ascriptive politics of the Hindu Right. The book, significantly, concludes by pointing out the growing disenchantment with neo-liberal globalization.

The historical remit of the book surpasses the three decades of neoliberal India. Chaudhuri's account does not begin with the economic restructuring in the early 1990s, but with the first plan document on gender published in 1947 by the National Planning Commission. While Chapter 2 might, at first glance, seem out of place in a book that focuses on the implementation of neo-liberal policies in the early 1990s and its effects on media and public life, it serves an important purpose in the book's organization. It provides the book's post-neoliberalism account a historical frame of reference as it maps the ideological conflicts at work in the first planning document. It chronicles how the liberal nationalist world-view of the yet-to-be nation state was sometimes at odds and sometimes in dialogue with ones that espoused cultural revivalism and ones that leaned towards socialist utopias. It argues that Indian national identity was the site of struggle and contestation even during the period of postcolonial emergence. The chapter, through a close examination of the NPC sub-committee report, *Woman's Role in Planned Economy*, illuminates how the nation envisioned the status and function of women, especially with regard to class, family and religion, in a planned economy. The chapter, in this manner, helps to historicize the new debates on gender that emerge after the implementation of the market reforms.

The second and the final chapters serve as bookends – while the former gives the book's argument about Indian national identity its historical orientation, the latter illuminates the emergence of majoritarian Hindu identity and the role played by the media in this makeover of the public sphere. The rest of the book focuses on gender – examining how the role of women has been imagined by the Indian state in the first four decades after independence and constellating that image to that of the 'new' Indian woman that began to circulate in popular media representations after the implementation of the new economic policy. Chapter 4 explores the shift to a more consumption-oriented media representation of both men and women in a sharp deviation from the emphasis on the thrift of the earlier era. Similarly, Chapter 5 argues that the image of the ideal Indian woman as the mother and homemaker was, after the restructuring of the economy, supplemented by the image of a successful female entrepreneur. And in the following chapter, Chaudhuri points out that these two images correspond to the two divergent formulations of feminism that one encounters in the print media of the period. The first is a post-liberalized post-feminism that equates choice with monetary success and consumerist aspirations. Choice, here, refers to the freedom to consume global commodities and lifestyles and is not a political category. The second, a tendency which Chaudhuri locates in magazines meant for a middle-class female readership, espouses a traditional image of the Indian woman. Although these two images of the Indian woman might seem at odds with each other, Chaudhuri notes they are united in their opposition to women's organizations and political action. On the one hand, women's rights movements are dismissed as anti-pleasure and anti-choice by post-feminists. On the other hand, for traditional middle-class women, this emphasis on women's rights and issues comes at the cost of 'real' issues like poverty. Chaudhuri points out that state policies in the neo-liberal era are unquestionably market-friendly

even as the state continues to employ a rhetorical strategy that gestures towards a socialist impulse.

Advertisements play a central role in Chaudhuri's analysis. However, her argument goes beyond pointing out the push towards greater consumption and changing middle-class aspirations. Instead, she identifies in this shift, characterized by the erasure of any substantive difference between news and advertisements, an attack on democratic values by 'new' capital. Similarly, in Chapter 8, she examines the challenges faced by democratic movements in India, particularly women's movements. She argues that the impact of globalization on India has been two-fold. Drawing on Kancha Illiah and Gail Omvedt, Chaudhuri points out that while there is economic globalization that leads to unequal development and social privation, globalization also has a cultural dimension that allows hitherto marginalized groups to demand political and social rights. However, Chaudhuri does not pursue this line of thought any further, and the rest of the chapter focuses on the new language of nationalism employed in the public discourse.

If Chapter 8 briefly focused on globalization and unequal development, in Chapter 11 Chaudhuri explores the emergence of a global information society and the sociological implications of instant but unequal access. Focusing on the national and international media coverage of the 2012 Delhi gang-rape and murder of 'Nirbhaya', the chapter traces the rise of what Chaudhuri calls the 'interactive' public, made possible by the emergence of new media, extensive coverage, and growing disenchantment with the then central government. Pointing out the rise in acts of sexual violence despite heavy media scrutiny and public outrage, she argues that media visibility does not guarantee gender justice.

*Refashioning India* is a notable contribution to scholarship on Indian media after liberalization. Chaudhuri's research is extensive and inter-medial – covering advertisements, print and television journalism, cinema, social media, and political rhetoric. However, the book's strength – articles written over a period of 25 years – also becomes something of an impediment as certain ideas and arguments, for example, feminism and the public sphere, are repeated but not expanded on various occasions throughout the book. The book also remains a study of the urban English-speaking middle class as Chaudhuri almost exclusively examines English-language media. A discussion or a comparative analysis of regional language media and the changes it has undergone in the same period would have added greater nuance to Chaudhuri's exploration of the new public sphere after liberalization.

## CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Koel Banerjee is a visiting postdoctoral fellow of English at Carnegie Mellon University. Her current research focuses on South Asian film and popular culture, postcolonial studies, consumer culture and critical theory. Her writing has appeared in *Studies in South Asian Film and Media* and *Cultural Critique*. She has also contributed chapters to several forthcoming edited anthologies, including *Third Cinema, World Cinema and Marxism*; *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Film*; *Bollywood's New Woman: Liberalization, Liberation, and Contested Bodies*; and *The Cold War in South Asia*.

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