

Chapter 19

Structuring the “Expected”: New Social Media Platforms and the Role of Women in Urban Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This paper based on empirical research attempts to deal with the question of media imagination and the marginalization of women migrants in Indian Megapolis. Foregrounding on the emerging social fact regarding the urban settings catering to one-third of country's population as migrants of which more than two-thirds are women categorically from non-urban rural areas. Further, in the backdrop of the internet and the new media penetration of rural population by half of total usage in India by 2020, the functions of the mediated imageries of the sexes need to be re-examined within the rural-urban continuum for a better clarity of media-gender relationship. The popular media imageries many of which disseminate unrealistic, stereotypical, and restrictive perceptions resulting in portrayal of women in stereotypical ways contradicts the general perception of non-urban women-emancipation through consumption of media texts which is highly urban centric. Such contestation of media effects raises a need to investigate how women migrant to the urban setting consider, analyse, internalize and utilize such portrayal of themselves in the media thus reflecting the actual consumption pattern of media texts and gender roles fixations. This paper particularly looks at an unexplored area of new media consumption within the non-urban migrants to Indian metropolis. It is an attempt to locate affordable alternative communication technology to understand the renewed social interactions of women migrants via virtual social networks in urban centres and how it infers and shape their social identity formation.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding urban space in India in the context of providing home to one-third of country's population as 'migrants' of which more than two-thirds are women categorically from rural areas indicates two annotations. First, that the spaces and essence of contemporary megacities in the global-south like that of Delhi, for example, have developed into a different urban meaning with reference to classical theories

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of urbanism and second, as much as the city has changed, so have the imageries engulfing the urban dwellers especially women migrants. In other words, the transforming media conceptualize, construct and finally deliver these images to the migrants. The broad argument I wish to present is that the valency of voluminous media sources processed by informal accessibility via unrestricted virtual portability leads to an increase in spontaneous dissemination of corresponding mediated messages within an urban space has become a constitutive frame for a distinctive mode of social experience for non-native city dwellers such as rural women migrants. However within this system of creating an urban experience, the media watchful of not disturbing the market forces and the state, and generates a coverage that simultaneously propagates existing power relations and confines alternatives to the dominant social system. I argue that rather than perceiving media as something separate from the city, the medium which ‘represents’ urbanity by transforming it into an image, the spatial experience of contemporary social life in urban setting arises over a complex course of co-constitution between urban structures, social practices and media feedback. Thus, for having a holistic understanding of women migrants’ social experience in the city and the corresponding construction of her social identity formation, an investigation covering mediated imageries and its relationship with rural women migrants is a must.

Migrants: The Backbone of Megapolis

In India, the urban and semi urban areas consisting megapolis, metropolis and other major urban setting absorbs most of the secondary and tertiary sector’s activities. Such urban concentrated process of economic development has initiated one of the biggest internal migration in the country in recent years. As per the UNESCO report of Social Inclusion of Internal Migrants in India 2013 at least two-thirds of city-dwellers are migrants. Most of these migrants to the major urban settings are from the rural areas or the regions with less developed status of their economy, directing increased out-migrants than receiving, hence rural areas are net loser of their population. Such a trend of declining rural population due to migration to urban areas is currently a fact with 27 Indian states are likely to begin seeing shrinking rural populations in the current decade (Rajadhyaksha, 2013). Such a monumental demographic change suggests that the alternative income opportunities have been substantially more effective in bringing a voluminous pattern of mobility to cities. (Rao 2011 ; De Haan and Rogaly 2002; Mitra 2003). This trend of declining rural population can be accorded with an increase in the proportion of the urban population, and subsequently, an increase in the proportion of the unorganized workforce. Post initiation phase of the liberalization of economic policies in India, the urban centres especially metropolitan cities saw a huge influx of urban infrastructural development, in-city industrial growth, commercial diversification, affordable alternative communication technologies, increased transportation development and even in social development activities. All of such institutional and allied developments increased migrants’ flow to the Delhi NCR region for capping the related jobs which were mostly located in the informal sector of economy, thus marking a progression in the sector. Over the period since economic liberation, the pattern of involvement of workers in the economy has transformed particularly in the primary sector. The involvement of workers in the primary sector who were mainly farmers or related agriculture activities has reduced from 66.0 percent in 1983-1984 to 53.2 percent in 2009-2010 (RBI 2011). This decline of workforce associated with the primary sector has accompanied with the rise of secondary and tertiary sector employment. The expectations of alternative employment with higher remunerations availability in secondary and tertiary activities have led to the migration of rural workers towards towns and cities. This trend could be associated with the increasing levels of urbanization in the country having an

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