India at Leisure: Media, Culture and Consumption in the New Economy-1

The first day of the two day international conference – ‘India at Leisure: Media, Culture and Consumption in the New Economy’ – organized by the Centre for Culture, Media & Governance (CCMG), Jamia Millia Islamia, India, and School of Arts, University of Waikato, New Zealand, touched upon some of the pivotal concerns permeating the media economy and its rapid transformation.

The inaugural session began with Mr Vibodh Parthsarathi, CCMG, extending formal welcome to the dignitaries present – honourable Vice Chancellor of Jamia, Prof Talat Ahmed, H E Ambassador Grahame

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Morton, High Commissioner of New Zealand and Shri Jawhar Sir CEO, Prasar Bharati.

He also extended a warm welcome to the participants. Prof Adrian Athique, Chair, School of Arts, University of Waikato, briefly delineated the vision behind the event and its history.

Prof Biswajit Das, Director, CCMG, Jamia Millia Islamia, who wrapped up the preliminary introductions, pointed out that the present conference was the 3rd international one conducted by Centre for Culture, Media & Governance in the current academic year, 2014-15.
Guest of Honour, H E Ambassador Grahame Morton, expressed his pleasure in being able to witness and be part of a manifestation of academic cooperation between India and New Zealand.

Shri Jawahar Sircar, who delivered the opening address, flagged some of the key concerns regarding the exponential growth of media economy vis-a-vis culture, censorship and consumption. While commenting on changing media patterns, he stressed on how culture called for constant renewability.

The chair, Prof Talat Ahmed, talked about how the conference would enable the collation of useful information from different parts of the world which could, in turn, be used by Indian scholars. He stressed on the necessity of being open to such initiatives and pointed out how the Cosmology and Astrophysics Research Group, Centre for Theoretical Physics, Jamia Millia Islamia, had received the Visitor’s Award for ‘Research’, thus reflecting the University’s commitment to encourage and foster new research and excellence in academia.

The first panel of the day titled ‘Capital Formations’ brought together incisive and exciting work on the political economy of the media industry. The first paper was by Dr Douglas Hill, University of Otago,
New Zealand, on ‘India’s Economy and the Role of Off-shore Finance’. He discussed the trends and logic of off-shore financing within the current media economy while demonstrating how different media sectors could be understood by employing conceptual tools drawn from disciplines such as economy, geography and development studies.

The next paper titled ‘A Den of Networks: Ownership Models in a Cable MSO’ by Alam Srinivas, Senior Journalist, Anushi Agarwal and Devi Leena Bose, Programme Executives at Maraa, a media and arts collective, provided the specific example of Sameer Manchanda’s Den group and its emergence as one of the major MSOs (Multi system operators) in the country. Mr. Srinivas in his presentation carefully mapped out the strategies utilised by the group to ensure its ascendance – in the process demonstrating how a study on media ownership needed to be layered taking into account the varying inorganic growth strategies used by most of the players. Dr. Aswin Punathambedkar, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, ended the session by presenting on the discourse of “corporatization” that has marked the transformation of the Bombay film industry. The transition, Dr Punathambedkar contended, was not the seamless narrative as it was popularly projected to be but one that was often contested and
challenged. While talking about the significance of digging deeper into cultures of capital and the presence of co-existing heterogeneous capitalist practices within Bollywood, he underlined the necessity of a rigorous analysis of smaller data pools.

Dr Ravina Aggarwal, Ford Foundation, who was the chair, wrapped up the session after a brief Q&A, highlighting how the session foregrounded the necessity of comparative research, increased documentation and investigation.

The second session on ‘Industrial Dynamics’, which convened after lunch, was chaired by Dr. Kaushik Bhaumik, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Dr. Shishir Jha, IIT Bombay, while presenting on ‘Examining Digital Competencies within the Entertainment Industry’, talked about the necessity of moving from the traditional resource based framework to one that was more oriented towards ‘dynamic capabilities’, so as to
promote competency around digitalization.

Dr. Arul George Scaria, National Law University, Delhi, elaborated on how piracy interacted with the law, drawing upon his recent book *Piracy in the Indian Film Industry: Copyright and Cultural Consonance*. He focused on the regulatory issues around piracy and the issue of copyright vis-à-vis the powerful film industry.

The third paper by Sonali Sharma, Jamia Millia Islamia, titled ‘Growing Frame by Frame: The Indian Animation Industry in the Value Chain’ provided an extensive picture of the genesis and growth of the Indian animation industry. She talked about the challenges faced by the industry in the contemporary and proposed for a detailed and rigorous evaluation of the same in order to facilitate adequate interventions.

The third and final panel of the day chaired by Dr. Biswajit Das, Director, Centre for Culture, Media & Governance brought questions of consumption and leisure to the fore.

The first paper ‘Beyond Consumption and Technology: Social Class and Children’s Media Use’ touched upon patterns of media ‘use’ or ‘non use’ by children. Dr. Shakuntala Banaji, London School of Economics and Political Science, in her presentation highlighted the important distinction between media-rich and media-deprived children. Drawing on her in-depth qualitative interviews, she argued how media use and...
meaning was significantly inflected by varying parameters with class as the seminal factor.

Prof. Neshat Quaiser from Department of Sociology, Jamia shed light on the theoretical debates around the notion of leisure and its criticality in contemporary times. His paper

‘Consuming Leisure not so Leisurely: New Political Economy of Leisure’ illuminated on how the social location of leisure rendered it fluid while also highlighting how the new political economy of desire definitively marked the understanding of leisure.

Dr. Bindu Menon concluded the day’s sessions with an insightful paper on ‘Islamic Home Films in Kerala and Middle East: Transnational Geographies of Islamic Popular Culture’ – co-authored by her and Dr T.T. Sreekumar, MICA, Ahmedabad. The paper extensively deliberated on the Islamic home-film movement and its location within the re-imagination of the moral geography of the Keralaite Muslim households in the context of contemporary global and local political and social developments restructuring family, gender and conjugal relations.