

Reviews

***Children and Media in India: Narratives of Class, Agency and Social Change* Routledge Advances in Internationalizing Media Studies)
by Shakuntala Banaji (2016) Routledge: London ISBN-13: 978-1138929470**

This review was possible, thanks to two people. Dr. Becky Parry with whom I worked during my short stint in England this summer as a visiting scholar supported by a Charles Wallace fellowship and Dr John Potter, who after one very short meeting at BFI offered to hand over this book to me, in order to help my ongoing research on children and cinema in India. I couldn't have agreed more in terms of its resourcefulness.

In *Children and Media in India: Narratives of Class, Agency and Social Change*, Shakuntala Banaji raises some very pertinent questions regarding both childhood studies and media studies within the Indian context. In what ways do the historical accounts of childhood in relation to development, media and communication represent children's diverse and changing realities? (2016: 1). Drawing on an extensive literature from both the fields of sociology of childhood and current media studies, Banaji in this recent book seems to direct our attention towards the emergent relationship between technological change, social class identities, and orientations towards children.

The first two chapters cover a range of theoretical underpinnings that deal with understanding childhood and conceptualizing agency of children in relation to the socio-economic factors of class, caste and gender. Her focus on class and caste in the everyday context of children's lives in India critiques the propagation of and the homogenization of digital experience in contemporary society. Just like any universalization of childhood is unfair and not true, similarly the digital revolution in the lives of children across the globe and within India is quite distinct from each other, both in terms of access and experience. The book examines patterns of media use and non-use by children in India through in-depth qualitative interviews which highlight the important distinction between media rich and media deprived children and how media use and meaning is inflected by various factors. In Banaji's words,

Both children and media use should be located within the historically and geographically specific intersectional matrix that takes account of gender, age, caste and class. (2016: 88)

These observations are followed by a critical content analysis of media representation of children in films and television in India that begs to question the manner in which media

producers are conceptualizing childhood and how it reflects on the larger context of children and media relating to the country. The last two chapters are detailed accounts of extensive ethnographical research, mainly in depth qualitative interviews spread across a decade (2005-2015). These narratives illuminate the everyday lives of children in India, in terms of their routines, access or non-access to media tools, and understanding the leisure and pleasure of children from diverse backgrounds. An exposition that challenges many widely held concepts related to childhood and media in the current global scenario. As also stated in the introduction to the book by Routledge, this kind of close analysis of the underrepresented contexts of everyday lives of children in India, paves way for a reconsideration of 'subaltern children's agency' in a new light.

In terms of resourcefulness, this book offers a new method of interdisciplinary approach to look at the subject of childhood studies and media studies using a single thread. Scholars from both these fields can gain enough theoretical concepts as well as ethnographical methods to dwell into questions concerning both media use as well as media representation of children in India. After reading this book, one would realise that these two axes seem to be more related than it is widely understood and Banaji in this thoroughly engaging work, bridges this gap very effectively.

Reviewer – Sonia Ghalian, PhD Scholar, India