

## Editorial Note, **JMI** 4

This issue of **JMI**, following the convention, springs from the preceding annual conference organized by the Department of Film Studies. The conference held in December, 2004, was titled 'Television in India: Issues in History, Theory and Culture'. It primarily wished to ask whether understanding the nuances of the televisual scenario in India called for any reformulation of the theoretical frameworks that enjoy currency in the field. Responding to the surge in academic interest in television in India in recent years, the conference aspired to address a set of questions going beyond modes of ideological critique and the emphasis on patterns of consumption in the standard discussion of globalization in Cultural Studies. Two questions that figured prominently in our interrogation of television vis-a-vis political and cultural theory are: to what extent inquiry into the specificity of the televisual medium is still an essential task, and whether locating television in the Indian context complicates the standard conceptions of global/local relations. The difficulty of distinguishing a particular 'national' television from the 'global' television form in the same way as it is done in case of other forms of dissemination (for instance, the Indian popular film) was kept in view in the endeavour to theorize Indian television.

Our intention to explore television from diverse perspectives - as a moment in the career of capital and modernity, as representing a certain visual-auditory configuration in the history of representation, as triggering a set of perceptions with specific consequences in the positioning of the subject - was reflected well in the papers and discussions. This was, in the brief history of the only postgraduate department of Film Studies in India, a major occasion that also reflected an effort to redefine the territory of Film Studies by incorporating the inter-disciplinary study of audio-visual cultures, and to make the Department a rendezvous in India for scholars engaged in the critical study of television, as it has already become one for Indian film scholars.

We can say, and as the readers of this collection would hopefully recognize, the papers collected here did not only respond reasonably to the projected themes of the seminar but also expanded them in effective ways. They contribute to a certain understanding of the still vastly unexplored apparatus that is television, and in such ways as to foreground the location from which they are trying to do that. To what extent this is done in the manner of a post-modernist celebration of 'difference', or how much out of a need to inculcate perspectives so far marginalized in a predominantly western discipline of Television Studies, is for the readers to decide. We begin with [Abhijit Roy's](#) essay which broadly lays out a framework of inquiry for India's experience of television, and attempts at exploring a possible connection

between the nation and the televisual form. In order to trace the genealogy of the form of the `flow that characterizes television, especially, the consumer-oriented television all over the world, Roy locates India and broadly the non-West as a crucial site. The specificity of such a historical location, he suggests, issues from the movements of capital and modernity across the globe as well as from histories of indigenous performative traditions that have facilitated the negotiation of modernity in India, for instance, in the popular film. The formal correspondence between the `flow and the Indian popular film helps him investigate the post-liberalization cultural lives of television in India with special reference to the way that television has started imagining the nation. The invocation of the mythic register of fire (or campfire) in the study of television provokes [John Hutnyk](#) into an examination of flames on screen in a set of programmes from Ramayana to the Himalaya series by Michael Palin shown on British television. What this yields is the limitation of the centre-periphery model that Hutnyk believes Television Studies still follows. As an alternative, he draws our attention to the efficacy of recasting Asia as the centre of television, as constituting the major imperatives of the `impoverished global eye that he calls TV. Hutnyk's essay relates to Roy's in its effort to devise a theory of television that becomes inconceivable without the invocation of the South Asian context.

Calling for a revision of Stuart Hall's understanding of the 'medium' and 'channel' functions, [Madhava Prasad](#) investigates the implications of a situation where news channels aspire to be news brands. Suggesting that the current televisual spread is founded on a principle of precedence and primacy of `communication over dissemination, Prasad goes on to probe what he calls the 'Subject Effect' produced by television. His final argument that in India there are at least two subject positions or two ways of enjoying the news, corresponding to news for the dominant and news for the dominated, can be read with a view to the fact that a huge fissure exists in the access to the modern among the Indians, something that news channels in the developed western countries need not possibly consider as much for their 'brand-ization'.

News, and particularly the sensationalizing news-based television, also concerns [Shuddhabrata Sengupta](#), who tries to investigate the material nature of the process of subject-formation that Prasad analyzes. Sengupta's essay on the production of the image of the 'terrorist' by a coalition of various agencies including the state, television and cinema, forces us to consider the viability of representation, and also misrepresentation, as categories in the analysis of news and news-based programmes. In an attempt to respond to what he calls 'an urgent political task that has bearings on the life and death of individuals', Sengupta proposes that this line of theorization demands considering media materials not as isolates but as elements in a networked reality. [Ipsita Chanda's](#) essay takes the reflection on televisual realism to a different plane by turning the gaze on the multiplicity of contexts attending the popular Indian television serials. Analyzing the

reception of serials by women through audience survey, she calls for a new agenda of feminism that will take into account the ways ordinary middle-class women shape their lives and values by intensely engaging with the soaps. This space, where the mediatized para-social acquaintances and `real lives constitute each other, she designates as the terrain of 'telereality'.

[Dipankar Sinha's](#) article looks into a possible method by which Doordarshan can still sustain its project of development in an era of market-driven television. Sinha's emphasis on the inability of the erstwhile form of development communication to generate considerable interest in the rural audience provokes us to look into the other side of the spectrum, investigated here by [Nilanjana Gupta](#). Her fieldwork and analysis reveal a flipside to the contemporary catchword development in an oblique way even as her essay points to the need to consider 'development' also as a language, something to be comprehended by tools borrowed from a wide range of representations and genres. Gupta's effort to relate televisual news to questions of print and audiovisual literacy, and her distinction between oral and print-based skills in the case of television viewing, bring to mind Bela Balazs's theory that insisted on an urban/modern competence for the comprehension of modern filmic narration.

[Manas Ghosh's](#) contribution deals with the semiotics of televised cricket in the era of Global media with special reference to the issues in nationalism, citizenship and gender. Ghosh's conjectural analysis reminds us of the increasing need to explore the relation between live television and the emerging issues in deterritorialized public-ness. One cannot ignore cricket while trying to collect research material on television in India.

[Atticus Narrain's](#) piece on the cultural politics of the Indo-Guyanese not only demonstrates once more the capability of Indian television and film to synthesize identities in diverse locations but also points to a peculiar scenario where television is projected both by the state and the Indian diasporic community as a means for disavowal of public spaces, spaces feared to be inhabited by the other - in this case the Afro-Guyanese. His essay continues the work on the geopolitical implications of identitarian mapping of spaces around locations of viewing - home or film theatres. One remembers the work done on not too different situations in Durban or in the Nigerian city of Kano.

The advantage of intellectual exercise in a field which is yet to be institutionalized in this country, and is still at a stage of scattered exploration, is that one can ask very basic questions about the existing categories that tend to shape the concerns of the field. This anthology is a humble attempt at doing that. We sincerely thank all the contributors, and our collaborators for the seminar, the two 'University with Potential for Excellence' programmes at Jadavpur University, 'Editing as Skill' and `Study of Cultural Processes'. Acknowledgments are due to the postgraduate

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