

International Seminar on 'Regional Cultures and New Media Technologies'. (26-28 April 2017)

Concept Note:

The National Seminar on 'Regional Cultures and New Media Technologies' was an attempt to address the cultural continuum that lies between the local/immediate, the national capital or cultural production hubs and the many linkages in the vast web that connects them. The term 'regional' used here is not the same as 'peripheral' if one were to follow the mainstream vs margins discourse. We take the term 'Region' as inherently 'unsteady', 'diffuse' and are constantly reformulated by linguistic, cultural and geo political communities.

More empirically, the context for this conference was the remarkable growth in the regional or local forms of cultural expressions since the rise of new technologies in the last four decades. This marks not only a shift from the analog format to the digital, but also the rise of the global web through the internet. For example, the growth of Bhojpuri cinema and music among several other languages and dialects in the Hindi heartland and other regions such as the distant Ladakh, Manipur, Mizoram or Malappuram in Kerala are surely evidences of the new opportunities of empowerment that the digital media has provided. This could only have been achieved through technologies - cell phones, thumb drive – laptop/notebook and even live concerts where the gigantic video projections allow large audiences to enjoy the proximity of the performer in ways akin to small and exclusive cultural gatherings.

The story of growth among the regional languages and cultures is however not linear – much is being lost even as much is gained. Empirical evidence from the field suggests that the regional languages and cultures are also going through a process of reorientation and modification or are altogether shedding old forms and canons. The regional languages and cultures are also absorbing influences from the 'mainstream' as well as the adjacent cultures but also those that are culled from inconceivably distant sources made easily available anywhere through the internet. This process and its outcomes are themselves puzzling enough and deserve extensive research and analysis. But the unavoidable question remains – what exactly is the meaning of such growth in a wider social-political context?

These are questions that warrant engagement at both the empirical level and theoretical/philosophical levels. How these industries/ markets/practices come into being and are mobilized provides valuable lessons about the hybrid geographies of conflict and cooperation that shape our democracy. The conference is thus an occasion to bring in perspectives, perceptions and factual reports from different parts of the country and attempt at achieving a broader and comparative perspective. These digital cultures provide valuable and previously inaccessible insights on the local, regional, and global forces shaping and sustaining linguistic and subaltern communities.

The conference thus had place for intellectual contributions on the structure of the new cultural industries and markets, the sociology-anthropology of the cultures seen through the producing as well as the audience communities, the technology-culture linkages, the implicit or explicit politics of the new genres and the industries, the aesthetic assessments and the recent shifts in public taste as well as the contribution of these cultures to the wider processes of democratization in its most overt as well as tacit sense.

An International Seminar on 'Regional Cultures and New Media Technologies' was organised at IIAS during 26-28 April 2017. Dr. Bindu Menon, Fellow, IIAS and Dr. Ratanakar Tripathy, Fellow, IIAS were the Conveners of the seminar. The welcome address was given by Professor Vijaya Shankar Varma, National Fellow, IIAS. Dr. Ratanakar Tripathy and Dr. Bindu Menon, Conveners of the seminar gave introductory remarks.

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