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## Re-situating the Region: Media Technologies and Media Forms in India

There is an air of deceptive obviousness about the idea of the ‘region’. Inheriting a sense of assurance from long established linguistic, geographical, and historical boundaries and contours, one feels secure in taking a somewhat simplistic cartographic view of the matter even as one acknowledges the overlaps and the blurring margins. But it shouldn’t take long to understand that the very use of the term ‘regional’ may imply that a researcher has probably placed himself/herself squarely at the center, taking recourse to binary contrasts through a construct such as Bollywood or some other imaginary nub or vantage point from where she surveys the cultural margins, the nooks and the by lanes. What if one reverses this view to see things from within the region aiming one’s sights at the distant cultural firmaments? This is not mere wordplay but only an instance of everyday living! The real purpose here is to underline the plurality of stances, perspectives and viewpoints that may be applied for the study of culture. The ‘regional’ thus may mean not simply a location but also a stance and a perspective to be made explicit and to be acknowledged. When you do try to locate a region physically on a map, you may often find your pointing finger hovering around a large mass of territory, peoples, settlements, and cultural milieus in their splendidous plurality, instead of hitting a bull’s eye so to speak!

In the context of the new media backed by digital technology and the internet, it indeed becomes possible to seek and find a comfortable scholarly locus amidst the vast network of pathways that connect Delhi or Chennai to Assam or Kerala, Kolkata to Purulia, Mumbai to Patna and thence to the smaller towns of Chhapra and Ara. And yet, to enter the realm of the regional is to find a world that is distinctive in ways that are relatively easy to describe and characterize. The empirical comfort and concreteness of the regional lies in that it is mostly possible to physically locate the regional through maps, place names as well as people with residential addresses. Paradoxically, those who move their scholarly attention from the secure perch of the ‘centre’ to the region soon find that they are dealing with an empirical reality that seems far more concrete and tangible than constructs around mainstreams like Bollywood, Bangla cinema or the stridently sweeping ideas such as South Indian cinema. A focus on the region may also help us see the variety and pluralities within the larger monolithic constructs such as Bollywood or Tamil cinema, incrementally lending nuances to our broader generalizations and constructs.

The regional also carries some subtler shades of meaning – as entities of secondary importance, as neglected or unknown locales, allowing investigations into the narrow chinks of the wider social fabric and telling tales yet untold. These unintended or overt, existential or parochial biases are indeed real hazards for a researcher wishing for a clear view of the wider landscapes without sacrificing the striking details, the textures and tenors that a closer view may bring. Fortunately, the essays in this volume reflect this

tension throughout, constantly working along viewpoints that shift between the local, the contingent and the wider cultural worlds, at times without using the term 'regional'. In fact, it may be claimed that a robust regional study would invariably combine the many-sided insider views with that of the multiple outsiders, in its insistence on constantly peering at the neighboring and distant cultures. Similar ground rules, instincts, and assumptions apply to both textual based studies as well as empirical surveys based on ethnographic or secondary data.

As almost all the articles in this special volume indicate, there is a need to update and finesse the idea of the 'region' in an era of vigorous cultural production and circulation driven by the new media technologies, production chains and changing audience preferences and profiles. There are regions marked by undisputed distinctness such as Assam, but which nevertheless assert their identity with great force vis a vis the pan-national platforms (see Rajkhowa in this volume) And there are regional productions such as the Manbhum videos (see Mukherjee in this volume) that define themselves or have lately begun to define themselves with reference to a larger regional entity, namely Bangla! Another article in the volume (See Parthasarathi and Alam in this Volume) discusses how even the ownership patterns in the new media industry, Cable TV for instance, are intricately and inseparably layered to represent the local as well as pan-Indian business. Contrast this with the decentralized production chains in Purulia (Manbhum videos), or the Malabar Home videos ('One more Dirham' 4–23], where the production-distribution chains barely connect with the well-known circulatory highways prevalent in the region. Similarly, consider the hasty sojourn of the Bhojpuri music production from Delhi to Patna and Banaras to the numerous small-town hubs like Siwan and Buxar in Bihar through the cassette-CD-internet uploads since the late 1980s to the present ('Bhojpuri Cinema' 145; 'Music Mania in Small-Town Bihar' 60). Just as the home videos from Kerala connect directly with the Gulf countries through the migrants from Kerala, Bhojpuri music recordings find a market in distant Surat or Nashik and lower down the peninsular India. Notably though, if you wish to study the production chain of Bhojpuri films, you should be heading for Mumbai and not a Siwan in Bihar or a Ballia in Uttar Pradesh ('Identities in Ferment' 117–145; 'Mapping the Invisible world of Bhojpuri Cinema' 150–161). But these are only some of the obvious ways how the region acquires an unforeseen fluidity in our time, defining itself through references to its own construct of a 'mainstream'. Bhojpuri cinema looks at Bollywood, the 'main' mainstream, but a Manbhum song-dance must pit itself against or with Kolkata and Bangla. The world of Malayalam home videos may seem like an adjunct to Malayalam cinema if you insist and come wielding the taxonomic license of the outsider but seems to belong to a viewership universe of its own despite the thematic overlaps and memetic leakages.

The articles in this special issue deal with the varied aspects of regional cultures in the context of the new media technologies broadly since the late 1980s. Most of them also confine themselves entirely across the digital watershed of the late 1990s or the new millennium, whereas others also dwell on the preceding phases marked by the peaking of analog productions in TV and musical circulation in India. Positing the 'regional' in an age of affordable and easy replicability as well as near universal accessibility lends an unforeseen fluidity to the very idea of the region. Although as usual we continue to deal with the provenance, origin and limited circulation of cultural products easily seen on

our geographical maps, a seasoned researcher will realize over time that her area of research has slowly transformed from a supposed 'periphery' into an epicenter, becoming a measure for the myriad cultural inputs travelling within and without. In a curious inversion of perception thus, the viewing of a Bhojpuri film in Hajipur near Patna may persuade you to see Bollywood as part of the Bhojpuri universe rather than the other way round. Such experiences have become particularly poignant during a technological driven age that has hastened the processes and production chains of cultural circulation. This is not to deny the relative 'concreteness' of the regional but to emphasize the curious ways of cultural diffusion and consolidation that carry tales of dissemination of ideas, songs, melodies, beats, visual patterns, and stories even when the human bodies emanating or receiving them seem riveted to a given locale. This allows a researcher to begin and end with real human beings instead of getting lost in a thinning cultural stratosphere where the myriad memes, themes, and memories float before landing on a singer's or a storyteller's lips and throats.

This is again not to undermine studies that do not focus on specific regions but to emphasize the centrality of the region, instead of seeing it as culturally peripheral. After all, the very idea of the region is best understood through the commonly available binary contrast of mainstream vs regional, a descriptive given that seems indispensable for any study. For example, the Home Videos from Kerala may be contrasted with Malayalam mainstream cinema, just as Bhojpuri cinema may be contraposed to Bollywood, lending both the given mainstream and the 'regional' a tangible context useful for lay as well as scholarly communication. In brief, it is difficult to conceive of the 'ultimate' mainstream or the utter regional at a purely conceptual level, without a specific reference to the corresponding binaries such as Bollywood, Bangla, or Malayalam cinema, depending on the empirical and analytical context.

As the thematic spread of the articles in this volume would indicate, the phrase 'regional culture' thus no longer evokes the image of a multicolored map with neat dividing lines or distances. In fact, for each given empirical case, the salience of both cultural continuities and gulfs remains inherently debatable and any attempt at broader theorizing must take this into account. What may instead emerge from a compilation such as this is a sense of cultural dynamic in our time by way of answering the question – 'what is happening to culture in our time' in a most inclusive sense. Although the eternal matter of cultural creation/diffusion is what lies at the heart of the discussion, the contribution of the authors here lies mainly in how they delineate their differing contexts in terms of historical backdrops, social changes, cultural growth as well as the well-known media technologies and platforms that lend a distinctness to all discussions focusing on the present. Indeed, all our analytical adventures on the terrains of text or 'fieldwork' seem addressed to the broader question of 'where do we stand' or 'where are we heading'. Since any exercise in assessment or cultural evaluation of a higher order must be based on a sufficiently deep understanding of the cultural dynamics at work in a specific case, of the tensions and the resolutions thrown up through cultural production in everyday life, these articles should help us form a provisional view on the state of cultural production, diffusion, and reception in its many commonalties as well as distinctness.

An investigation into the regional cultures despite its changing orientation and emphases continues to focus on the relatively inaccessible, remote, or neglected from a vantage point located in the metropolitan centres of learning. Even as we move away from the cultural ambience around us, often labelling it as 'mainstream' towards the uncharted terrains, the remotest of cultural entities are being drawn into platforms like YouTube with an unrestricted embrace. To illustrate the point, this is a dynamic that can be gauged through a relatively simple experiment – select a small region/cultural entity such as Spiti in Himachal Pradesh or a genre like Chaiti from Bihar and quantify its presence on YouTube over a period of a single month – despite the imprecision of such measurement, you will see a surprising growth of numbers. But this seemingly stark data when interpreted along with the cultural content would seem to carry multi-layered messages typical of cultural change. A simultaneous drive towards uniqueness and originality as well as voluntary or inadvertent cultural absorption may turn a simple statistical task into a complex hermeneutic exercise.

This special issue of SAPC is an attempt to address the cultural continuum as well as breaches that lie 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 thus not the same as 'peripheral' if one were to follow the mainstream vs margins discourse. The attempt here is to map the forms of cultural expressions of communities both as processes of storytelling and dialogue within as well as their linkages with the wider communities without. We take the term 'Region' as inherently 'unsteady', 'diffuse' and are constantly reformulated by linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical communities.

More empirically, the context for this special issue is 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 special issue 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.

This special issue thus carries 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. The porosity and instability of the category of region that we established and its malleability to work simultaneously at linguistic, sociological, and historical registers pushes us towards further asking whether the region can be a legible method in analysing media cultures.

### **Unsettling the region: Relationalities and contingencies**

The 'region' sometimes overlaps with the nation but is distinct from it if it doesn't make claims about being a sovereign domain. The 'region' is also different from 'place', since it includes localities beyond a 'place' or contains multiple 'places' outside of personal experience, the location of living etc. The 'region', we can establish is enabled through multiple connections of language as politics, ethnicity, administrative units and so on, thus forming an entity. Between the new political units like Telangana, Andhra and Uttarakhand and the regional movements that willed them into existence, the new inflections of the region in 'South India' and 'North East' against authoritarian tendencies of the nation-state, the linguistic persistence and syncretic cosmopolitan references conjured up by regions like Deccan ('[Where lies the Deccan](#)'), the development aspirations and return flows of capital in reimagining the coastal Andhra region ([Upadhyay 177–202](#)) – the region seems to be a more slippery and challenging terrain than ever.

Newer regions and regional identities are formed as legal political units in the last decade ([Koskimaki and Carol 89–111](#)). It is also, important to observe that the geometrical abstraction of exclusive territoriality has an important influence on the way in which politics has been conceived and executed in India parliamentary democracy. Yet, as Poduval ('[Where lies the Deccan](#)') shows, the non-geographic regional capabilities and the multiple locations of the region ('[Constituting a diffuse region](#)') represent the crucial sites for the working of the contemporary region. They also register the instability of the category of the region which do not always assume a territorial correlate. Aside from its geographical, political, and juridical dimensions, the concept of the region has an important symbolic dimension, which is reinscribed today with the multiplication of tensions around the concept. An important way to move out of the static correlates of 'linguistic- territorial' lies in approaching the 'region' through its relationality. Attempts to foreground regional relationalities by extending interest to the materialities of geography and the imaginaries of the 'region' needs to be broken down to its elements. What do the shifting stakes of the field of media studies mean for how we think through relationality and regions?

In the field of Indian Film studies, where the medial properties of the film object lead the discussion on region, we acknowledge that the analytical potential and critical purchase of 'region' and 'regional' has long been problematised (Srinivas vii–ix). The coeval relationship between cinema and the Indian nation that framed narratives of nationalism continued framing debates on analogue film, its exhibition contexts, viewing conditions and circulation patterns. The isomorphous relations linking language cinemas to linguistic regions (Velayutham 15) reminds us of what Stephen Hughes describes, the 'self-contained units' (214) which presupposes rigid bonds between territorial unity, linguistic identity, and cultural forms, needs to be further examined. In film history, the relationship between the 'regional' and the 'national' in post-independence Indian cinema seem to be variously theorised as one of friction (Wani 291–293), as the site of assembling populations into the body politic of the nation and the national as a compendium of regional forms (Vasudevan 94–117). A major problematising of national cinema frameworks emerge from the intersection of urban studies and cinema studies, where the most modern of cultural form meet the most prominent social organisation of contemporary world. By focusing on urban centres of film production in such Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, the histories of film industries and film cultures unsettled the easy resonances between nation and cinema (Mazumdar 4–10; Pillai 21–29; Nag and Spandan 3–7). The framing of the post-independence region through language, geography and colonial administrative affiliations is problematised in film scholarship ('Thiruvithamkoor, Malabar, Kerala'; Ingle 119–218).

The turn to portable and easily reproducible formats like the audio cassettes, VHS, Compact Discs and Digital Video Discs but have made the film and media object ever more open to wider audiences, mutable in format and allowed the dense presence of popular culture across geographically discontinuous locations. For example, in the Bhojpuri media cultures spread across the trails of migration we find intimations of long durée histories of indenture and contemporary labour migration to Indian cities and the Middle East, indicating regions that are diffuse such as Bhojpuri media cultures ('Mediating Bhojpuriya'), Manbhum Videos (Mukherjee 46–65) recalibrated from former administrative units as in the Malabar Home Films ('One More Dirrham' 4–23; Karinkurayil 30–51) or older persisting regions as in 'Mewati Videos' (Mukherjee and Abhigyan Singh 133–157) signal towards popular imaginaries in language media that refer neither to 'regions' that are territorially sealed and administratively secured but through a network of market places, trade and media practices.

Indeed the 'regional' seems to be an unstable and slippery enough to persuade scholars to provisionally enlist it as a category 'best kept under erasure' ('Region/Regional Cinema' 164). Insofar as these categories crystallize and mark the epistemology that orients research, they effectively reproduce the marginality (or the peripheral status) of the histories, spaces, and subjects of the vexed relationships between the 'nation' and its 'regions' and between the many 'regions'. The historically sedimented relationship between the nation and the region in social sciences is often mapped without disturbing the category of the nation and privileging a methodological nationalism. Much of the theorisations and problematisations in the cinematic region evokes this same paradigm, where the other part of the dyad, the nation, is left unscrutinised. A particularly illuminating set of relations is mapped out by Walia (238–252), where the micro site of Malegaon video film industry and culture is not determined by the desire to imitate and

replicate larger film industries but demands to be located in a materiality of networks made by trade routes, river systems, farming seasons and continuing forms of residual performance cultures.

Invoking Paul Willemen, whose persistent radicalism urges us to think of cinema as a radical possibility, and ‘of history both in the past and in the making’ (Willemen 55), helps us think of film and media as practice making history. Film and Media studies, thus offers the potential to lead this enquiry through the properties of the medium, what it engenders, mediates, and displaces in its most recognisable forms. The enquiries around the region need to be further populated and explored through these new archives. By querying deeper about the lives of media in specific locations, the contributions of this volume try to shift our attention to the persistence and malleability of the region by co-locating it with the popular. More specifically, we approach the region not as a category to be kept under erasure, but as ephemeral, heterogenising and mutating along different forcefields of migration, language, space, geography, trade and media mobility. Thinking about regions in terms of multiple, unfolding temporalities and the richness of the popular enables to extend the query to the relationality of the region through more textured analysis of the contours, shifts and recalibrations that take place both spatially and temporally.

Thus approached, media texts, resonates the granular structure of lives in society, are ever open towards wider audiences through techniques of dubbing, amplification, new methods of exhibition and circulation and in general the porous legalities (Liang 6–17) of networked infrastructures. The fast movement of media goods and texts across new networks and de-centring of production as evident in the Bhojpuri, Malegaon, Manbhum, Mewat and Malabar video cultures and media defy the tethering to the term ‘regional’ media. Can we add texture to this impasse brought by new production and circulation practices by reading their simultaneous persistence and malleability as a re-inscription of the recalibrated ‘regional’? As ephemeral and unstable as the term ‘regional’ appear, it refers to a host of materialities. Much as we share the cautionary positions regarding the risks of a naturalization of a specific image of the region as a territorially bound category that can explain and encompass all media forms and narratives emerging in the Indian languages, we do not read these as merely the disaggregation of the region. Instead, we also pose the question whether these are instances of the heterogenization of the region. The project of this volume then is to resituate the category of the ‘regional’ for the contemporary, when the regional – especially its relation to language, culture and geography – can no longer be understood apart from the media practices that make it – in ways already intimated. The task ahead in this fractious landscape is to attend to the processes that appear to be ‘regional’, its fragmentations and recalibrations and desire for constant re-inscription. These wide-ranging formations cannot be limited to disciplinary frameworks and demands drawing upon conceptual resources of other disciplines, methodologies, practices, and fields of research.

Popular culture and media technologies, we believe help us to return to the granular aspects of the region and its connections with the life worlds they signify. We do so by building on the anthropologist Tim Ingold’s description of the ‘region’ as a network of interlaced movements, a network of ‘coming and going’ (235) emerging alongside other ‘pathways of observation’ (229). What this makes visible for us are the primacy of

engagements with immediate surroundings, and the social labour involved in establishing connections and equivalences across places. Regions thus are forged through the passage from place to place and the histories of movement. Anthropology foregrounds acts such as walking, everyday market visits, pilgrimages, processions, and a host of other activities as practices that forge places. These mundane, often unintentional acts acquire the potential to effects through their repetition and cumulative potential. In somewhat similar methods, media is increasingly invested with the potential of movement and mobility. Engaging with these insights about practice and its potential in making the world in the field of media studies, then opens questions for us. Can media practices constitute place making acts? What aspects of media practice enables to cumulatively create such acts? As goods, media objects move both physically and virtually. The shift towards research on transnational migration and diaspora in the 1990s, showed how media afford relationships between multiple locations and over long distances (225–249; [Mini](#) 81–111). These assemblages of meaning, deterritorialized and reterritorialized globally, suggest that just as movements came to bear meanings in the form of mobility, so too has meaning gained the ability to move in new ways through media ([Nilsson and Salazar](#) 445–461).

In the long *durée* of such practices of media forms and narratives, we discern the ‘critical ways in which places that may be separately named and recalled are connected to one another and form a unified whole’ ([Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga](#) 18). In our reckoning, media practices are an important practice – the aural, the visual and the graphic elements of such practices-connect its shifting components. Speaking thus to media practices as a constitutive practice of the region, as both a spatial and temporal category, enables papers in this volume to move away from frameworks that limit the ‘regional’ to the ‘linguistic-territorial’. Just as the category stops offering an analytical possibility in some of this scholarship, contemporary scholarship in sound studies, demonstrate how the region and sound inform each other ([‘Keynote to the Punjab Sounds Conference’](#) 1–21). Re-ordering the relationship between region and media forms, they argue that vectors that allow for the region to function as a verb (or process). More specifically, the argument leads us to think whether media forms are mere conduits of the region or practices that enable ‘region-ing’ ([‘Keynote to the Punjab Sounds Conference’](#) 1–21). This shift from an entity that is fully formed and static whole, the reading of the region as a process opens multiple possibilities. By linking media mobility with media forms and practices of media making, we have argued that media practices and the granular presence in everyday lives make the contemporary regions, in their most open, relational heterogeneity.

At the centre of our analysis are specific landscapes, practices, media forms, linguistic registers, and media technologies. The method we pursue emerges from a continual confrontation with the materiality of these tensions that constitute the nation-region as a macro narrative and the contestations around media practices, forms, and aesthetics. Even in moments of confronting the most abstract of forms, such as the ‘sonotopes’ of sleazy music in urban landscapes (see [Silpa Mukherjee](#) in this volume) we keep this materiality present. These affective investments, mis recognitions and polysemy are the essential elements of such confabulations of practices and forms that are opened for enquiry.

This focus on the granular and the phenomenological also ensures the relationality of region as a method that informs us not only in the selection of the relevant empirical settings for our investigations but also in the very construction of the ‘objects’ that are analysed. The critiques towards nation as a category (Chatterjee 5–17; Aloysius 3–25) and its unity provides a crucial reference point in developing our method and helps in questioning the use of such categories within media studies. In other words, the essays in this volume are engaged in the act of deciphering the very discourse that constitutes the region as a peripheral narrative.

## Contributions

Our contributors take up this task in divergent locations, linguistic registers, various media formats and forms. This includes media formats such as video, calendar art, posters, sound objects, print, radio, and television. The essays taken together, temporally stretch from the British Colonial period to the contemporary. Spatially, a range of essays bring into the fold, contingent spatial practices from Assam, Delhi, Punjab, Kashmir, Tamil Nadu and Manbhum regions. The methodology of these papers encompasses the archival, the ethnographic and textual – analytic data. Thus, in one loop the contributions to this volume present the scope of the intersecting landscape of technology, narratives, the visual and the sonic to bear upon the fine grain of region.

Lakshmi Subhramaniam’s essay dwells on broadcast technologies and how it informs categories of classical and popular, region and nation in Southern India. Examining Tamil and English language periodicals and archival materials, the essay draws our attention to the distinct elements of music reproduction and broadcast technology amplification, recording and transmission as central to enabling new and perceptibly measured ways of appreciating the classical and the popular in the region. As Subhramaniam shows, the cultural institutions of the post-independence Indian state and broadcast media, seem to have given way to a new set of claims and aspirations within the region. These new music practices drew widely from new acoustic practices and genres and socio-musical exchanges and effected new registers of affect and sensibility. The region very clearly is not just a framing device for Subhramaniam, but a device to record and analyse the diversity of music experience in Southern India. The richness of the archival material and the fine reading of the popular and classical as they appear in these narratives, allows Subhramaniam’s contribution to render many hitherto insular categories such as the popular and the classical, and the region and nation as porous.

Gaurav Rajkhowa’s work on the renowned musician/singer Assamese cultural icon Bhupen Hazarika reveals both the gulfs and ambivalences within the Assamese identity as well as its linkages with the Bombay film world and the broader Indian cultural assemblage. The backdrop to Rajkhowa’s study is formed by both the Assam agitation of the 1980s as well as disparate factors of technology, the cassette-CD, which illustrate most vividly the unique circumstances that go into the consolidation of regional cultures. This seems striking when juxtaposed to the glaring commonalities such as technology operating across wider cultural terrains. Any account of a regional culture thus would tend to include tensions and ferments at extremely localized level as well as the wider cultural arenas, ensuring invariably that we end up with a narrative of a dynamic

interrelationships difficult to reduce to static or frozen descriptions. It is almost as if every fresh glance at the cultural landscape reveals something new and unseen in an ever-ending tale of swirling transformations.

The porosity of place and the fluidity of sound and music meets in Silpa Mukherjee's essay on the aural scapes of item numbers in Delhi; urban mohallas. Through an ethnography during the Indian general elections of 2014–15, Mukherjee pays attention to the phenomenology of music consumption; voice, noise, loudness and listening, the essay forwards an analysis of the regional-popular and its presence as loudness in urban geographies. Building on an audio-visual theory of cinema and reading her ethnographic material, Mukherjee sees the 'item number' as a site of intersection of political prowess with sexuality, the affective aspect of songs, and the techno-materiality of loudspeakers, election posters, vehicles, and bodies. Further, the item number works as a sonic bridge that fractures the upmarket neighbourhoods with the cultural density of urban Mohalla characterised as heat, dust and noise. The sonic bridging and digital territory crossing and what it enables in Mukherjee's essay is an important formulation of the fluidity of the region and its relational positioning among divergent sound and music experiences in urban locations.

Britta Ohm shifts our attention to the complex structuring discourses of Indian Television through the analysis of *Kashmeer*, an aborted television soap opera in Star Plus channel, reads the 'televisual' imaginaries as constitutive elements of a rising Hindutva politics. Ohm maps in detail related developments on Indian screen imaginaries – an unfolding ecology of hinduised tales on television screens through the daily soap operas, rising Hindutva politics, Islamophobia and the simultaneous emergence of a sizeable Muslim audience. The region of Kashmir and the screen imaginaries of Kashmir, as Ohm argues meet in significant ways. The long history of post-independence Indian screen imagination often relegates Kashmir to a scenic background to play out nationalist fantasies of developmentalism and integration. Kashmir, in all its vexed structuring through market logic, presented some challenging freedoms to its audience, allowing for an exposure to the 'knowledge of ignorance' as a precondition of emancipated spectatorship. The subsequent withdrawal of *Kashmeer* from air by the channel, citing reasons of poor ratings and hate mails, Ohm argues is another machination of the invisible censorship regime. Through uncovering, production details of the serial and positioning it against the backdrop of screen imaginaries, market logics and a history of political censorship, Ohm has visibilised media regimes that constantly engage in acts of erasing 'feral regions' from collective imaginaries.

The next three essays in the volume examine the converging worlds of various digital technologies in resituating the regional public sphere. Focussing on Manbhum, a 'sub-regional' entity, Madhuja Mukherjee relativizes the very idea of the mainstream by positing two graded mainstreams – the Bengali cinema as well as Bollywood in order to contextualize a local culture. In her own words, her study of the video production from the region focuses not simply on 'the industrial contexts and proliferation of video industries across Global South in the era of the digital' but significantly 'considers subjects of language, community, culture, geography, politics and the problem of Jhumur (songs) transfiguring into a so-called "vulgar" form'. Clearly, Mukherjee is compelled to look not simply the industrial-cultural-linguistic processes but also the churnings in the local aesthetic, all of which seem closely interlinked.

Koonal Duggal's study of the debates and conflicts thrown up by the popular Sikh *deras* refers to images and sounds proliferating through the new media technologies. He demonstrates how the standardized and established iconographies of Sikhism were stirred and roiled by the Dera Sacha Sauda controversy in 2007, bringing to the fore matters relating to both caste inequalities and appropriate religious practices in the region. In his own words, the crisis around the Dera seemed to be 'questioning the egalitarian ethos of caste equality upheld by the Sikh religion, and second, with regard to authenticity of religious practice – of what is deemed Sikh and non/un-Sikh practices'. Clearly, the matters of song and dance may go far beyond the mundane, questioning and revealing the seminal schisms within the deeper beliefs and daily practices followed by the millions of devotees. The article unravels a ferment affecting matters of faith as well as concrete social practices that seem inseparable from the 'abstruse' iconographic disputes

Concerned more with the networked world of contemporary world of print publics, in this case the Malayalam language media, Jenson Joseph, returns the question of politics to its foundational premising on the divide between public and private. Although, the question of the region looks tangential at first glance, the essay in fact re-orient us towards the question of networked publics in its contingent locations. He does so by analysing the controversial cover image of a woman breast feeding in the popular Malayalam Woman's magazine, *Grihalakshmi*., Joseph's analysis scaffolds the public and private dichotomy in the history of the region and pries it open through the structuring relationships of old and media. What is and has been the role of the internet and digital media technologies in navigating the contours of a changing notions of the public and the private? By focusing on the image and the templates of neo liberalising economy that enables it, Joseph draws out attention to the messy relationship between the 'Home' and the 'world'. In doing so, he makes visible the limitations of older paradigms that are premised in the nationalist and reform narratives in theorising foundational aspects of modernity such as public and private. Following media theorist, Wendy hui Kyong Chun, Joseph excavates a networked regional subject, grounded in a perverse epistemology of outing- 'the revelation of mostly open secrets to secure a form of privacy that offers no privacy' (Chun 95) In contrast to the classical scene of the public-private, Joseph argues, where publicity's light coming in from the outside constitutes the interiority of the subject, in the case of the networked subject, subjectivity is presupposed.

Although it is not uncommon to look at the 'regional' as relatively unseen or inconspicuous, the underlying economics of the regional media is made exceedingly opaque through a complex network of subsidiaries, interlocking directorships, and web of professional labour that now characterizes the ownership templates prevalent on the ground. Parthasarathi and Alam (see this volume) through their pioneering study aiming to study 'the modes of expansion of leading cable distribution companies across various regions of India', unravel a business strategy aimed at 'first, pursuing commercial growth by capturing, rather than developing, pre-existing regional markets; and second, flexibly engaging with, rather than uniformly steamrolling, incumbent regional actors', both of which would seem to undermine the regional in its substance and content. The study of course confirms and explains why the 'anxieties of consolidation and concentration have been central to the study of the media business across the world. Debates on media ownership have either pointed at business models and regulatory conditions leading to

market concentration, or the increasing accumulation of interests by political actors in the media businesses'. The matter of the centralizing pull in the industry of course raises some basic questions over the very meaning of the 'regional' as such.

## In conclusion

In sum, the contribution of this volume arises from the many conjunctions we have mapped – everyday media and infrastructural pathways, formal and informal, classical, and popular. The essays place many of these categories in a comparative framework and offer refreshing ideas around each of them. This multitude of terms and experiences has then helped us shed some further light on the often intractable 'problem' of the 'region' that promises to shrink into smaller entities as more and more studies are carried out. What seems to broadly emerge from the essays are two ways of thinking about the 'regional' as a category in framing our analysis. Firstly, drawing from the insights and rich material from the essays grounded in debates around the very idea of regional delineations, it would seem that the differentiated media practices may themselves be seen as constitutive of a region. The dense presence of the media, connecting loops of labour and culture, mobility, and infrastructure may be seen as much defined as defining in the specific regional contexts. Secondly, the region should be understood as a relational entity, not fully formed and in relation to wider processes that have incorporated local media practices into global circuits of accumulation. This is not to deny their close links to their contingent localities through ties of caste, class and gender. As the essays presented here clearly indicate, a regional focus does not mean a deep one-way journey into an ever-shrinking locale with no return. The research journey may instead include itineraries for recurrent returns to wider contexts, to neighbourhoods whether proximal or remote and to ever-widening comparison of different media profiles and terrains at a global scale.

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