




Book Review: Childscape, Mediascape: Children and Media in India
INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER




About the Journal

Journal DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha
Journal Home	www.rupkatha.com 
Indexed in	Web of Science Core Collection™ Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)
Journal Impact Factor (JIF)™	2022: 0.2 5 year: 0.2 Source:  Journal Citation Reports™ 2023

About the Issue

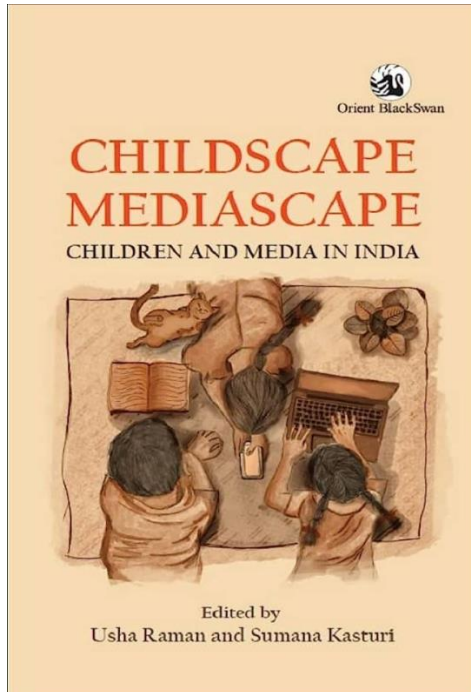
Issue	Volume 15, Number 2, 2023
Issue DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n2
TOC	https://rupkatha.com/v15n2.php 

About the Review

Title	Book Review: <i>Childscape, Mediascape: Children and Media in India</i>	
Author/s	Kanchan Biswas	
Affiliation	Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi	
Review DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n2.17	Pages: 1-6
Full-text	https://rupkatha.com/v15n217 	
Full-text PDF	https://rupkatha.com/V15/n2/v15n217.pdf 	
Copyright	<i>Author/s</i>	
Licensing	Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 	

Book Review: *Childscape, Mediascape: Children and Media in India*

Raman, Usha and Kasturi, Sumana, (Ed.) (2023). ₹1100 (Paper Back). Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan. 349pp. ISBN: 9789354427305.



Reviewed by

Kanchan Biswas

Ph.D Research Scholar, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Email id: kancha48_ssg@jnu.ac.in

Numerous forms of electronic media are intricately woven into the fabric of a child's existence nowadays with television, movies, videos, music, video games, and computers vital to both learning and play. The way youngsters react to interactive technology and instructional content supplied through it has an immediate and long-term impact on them. Corresponding to these benefits of media is an unfortunate reality that young children are more susceptible to the adverse effects of media usage, resulting in problems such as corpulence, aggressive behaviour, nervousness, and insomnia, among others, which have lately become an existential danger.

Media scholars and advocates view children as a special interest group because they are seen as a vulnerable group whose rights must be protected as well as the future of the world, making their education and socialization of particular importance. Existing books, like *Media And Children: Emerging Issues in Today's World*, have attempted to investigate the ubiquitous growth and reach of media in several domains relating to children. It also investigates how the media influences and shapes children's minds, both favourably and catastrophically. The book aims to help youngsters understand and analyse the impact of media on them, and to help them become critical and

informed viewers. It is also an attempt to examine how media literacy plays a part in educating parents and educators about the impact of media and determining what content is beneficial or bad for children. Similarly, *The Handbook of Children, Media, and Development* brings together a wide range of experts from developmental psychology, developmental science, communication, and medicine to provide a competent, thorough examination of the field's empirical research on media and media policies.

However, in India, there has not been much critical research on children's media habits despite there being global research on this subject. Until the 1980s, understanding children's lived experiences of everyday life and their own viewpoints on various parts of society was not a focus of social scientific study. As a result, the 'new' social studies of childhood not only established conceptual frameworks for understanding children's place in society but also engaged directly with children, utilising their own words and narratives to make sense of their experiences. This has prompted scholars to pay special attention to how children think and act in specific settings, as well as to grasp the concept of children's agency. Unfortunately, studies on Indian children and their daily life have been scarce. Those that have recently been published are largely on schools and education, delinquency, cognitive development, or topics such as street children, child abuse, pedophilia or child labour. As vital as these areas are for understanding Indian society, the use, interpretation, and depiction of Indian children in media garner inadequate scrutiny. First among such endeavour is Shakuntala Banaji's book, *Children and Media in India: Narratives of Class, Agency and Social Change*, extensive longitudinal fieldwork in India with children offers provides a rich and detailed account of the role of media in the lives of children from both the middle and working classes. Often, studies on childhood and media focus solely on class in terms of purchasing power and media availability. However, in her research, class intersects with caste, religion, and location to involve children's intersectional identities.

Extensively citing Banaji, and building upon newer scopes of study, the volume editors Raman and Kasturi have brought together a range of viewpoints from media researchers, practitioners, and those involved in secondary school teaching with an emphasis on children and media, *Childscape, Mediascape* addresses this gap. This collection investigates a range of topics pertaining to children and the media environment while confronting the question of what it means to "grow up digital" in India in the twenty-first century. The edited volume by Raman and Kasturi contains twelve essays on important issues like, children's use of new media and digital media literacy, mediated childhood and children's rights, children as social media users and creators, digitality and education, children's recreational and cultural activities, and issues of sense of self, representation, and individuals in a mediated world.

In the first chapter titled "Coming of Age" reviewing research on children and media in India, Pathak-Shelat extensively discussed the magnitude of literature in this particular domain. Her critical take from the north failed to acknowledge children belonging to intersectional identities bearing on caste, gender, class, religion and so forth. Most studies of the global north have largely focused on the class aspects which determine children's engagement with media. She hopes for an 'upward and onward' (p.56) direction of research that would engage with a fresh examination of domains like 'consent, vulnerability, adult-centricity' (p.52).

In the second chapter titled "What's the story here?", Sarwatay focused on the transformative aspect of digital media. Drawing upon the discourse, she used the archival method and attempted to look into how youngsters interact with media. She analyses how children use media, what effects they have, and further, how the effects could be managed through policy and practice. Her findings focus on issues like cyber-bullying, stalking, media addiction, digital detox, helicopter parenting etc (p.71-6). She aims to encourage media literacy initiatives and address technopanics (p.64). She uses the concept of Mass self-consumption (p.63) to analyse and orient the discourse towards a 'rights-based approach for children's digital and social media lives' (p.80).

The second section of the book consisting of three essays is premised around the idea of Representations, where the focus is to emphasize the need for inclusion and diversity. In chapter three titled "Transgressing 'Innocence'" Sreenivas problematizes the idea of representation in popular children's book publishers like Tara and Tulika. She argues that children's narratives are routinely and decidedly middle-class privileged background in nature. She calls for the disruption of middle-class gaze and questions, what kind of mediation would be required to call for such disruption? She concludes her chapter by arguing "...children's literature can look into biographies and other narratives emerging from Dalit and other marginalised groups for a productive and radical imagination of the field. This would not entail the abandonment of enjoyment, but perhaps new pleasures will emerge" (p.109).

In chapter four titled "Juxtapositions and Transformations", Deshbandhu examines the manner in which media conducts children's news narratives. Further pointing out that popular understanding places children as subjects that are vulnerable, fragile and without agency (p.26). To counter this popular claim, he draws upon children's characters in video games where they are active and exhibit agency. However, he points out that such agency is only at the disposal of a particular class and such infrastructure does not challenge the status quo. He writes, "What is the rest of the children in the country challenges of class, caste and gender will continue to persist" (p.133)

In chapter five titled "Reflections and Re-presentations", Siddiqui extends her description of Children in media, where they are co-opted to produce narratives that trigger politics. She argues that media portray systematic biases, where, children's images are appropriated as passive symbols in war/conflict zone; at the same time, children are depicted as central actors in relief fundraising. She mentioned "even a cursory review of news in India will reveal a general repeated pattern of children being consistently underrepresented... however, news, media trials on sensationalist stories, particularly in today's ever competitive media sphere, and children often get co-opted within this" (p.147).

The next section of the book Interactions, consists of a set of three essays that explores Children's engagement with old and new media. Children's involvement with media has traditionally been viewed as one-directional, with children functioning as passive recipients of signals that may shape them into ideal individuals or have negative consequences. However, this section breaks away from such cliched understanding, and provides fresh evidence on media interactions. The following chapters in this section use evidence-based approach (empirical) and suggest 'media literacy' to make interactions healthy and meaningful (p.29).

In chapter six titled "To be or not to be ...with technology", Mukunda offers its readers an insight into the debates and policy decisions around smartphones in the school curriculum, using Focus

group discussion among senior students in schools. While some people believe that children should be protected from modern forms of media such as television and the Internet, others recognise that what is important is interaction that allows children to explore their engagement with media entities. Upon analysing the pros the cons of technology in education, Mukunda suggests that banning technology would not keep harm at bay, rather healthier means of using devices could be a possible solution. He flagged concerns regarding the addictive nature of smartphone use and also the reasons for most smartphone policy in schools. He concludes by pointing out "so quiet observation and open dialogue, we can together learn how to be aware of certain movements in ourselves that make us vulnerable to emotional ill-being. Such awareness is perhaps the best way to prepare for the future life of digital immersion" (p.180).

In Chapter seven titled *"Everyday use of digital technologies by adolescent girls"*, Parihar uses action research approach and focused group discussion, to promote discussions around cyberbullying and risky behaviour among adolescents online. She suggests that adolescents are more aware of such instances than anticipated, thus their outlook and opinions must be incorporated in developing policies. She elaborately discussed the Indian scenario of changing media context, becoming and being digital, which also entails malicious communication, perceptions, practices and peers as perceived by adolescent girls. She concludes, "we must make the youth more alert and discerning about dedicatedly and damaging media content and to raise public awareness about media among teenagers their parents and other adults in their milieu... event, specially organised and undertaken by all the stakeholders. We can support democratic and just societies (pp. 206-7).

In chapter eight titled "Adolescents and social media", Kumari used in-depth interviews among a study cohort of children of 13-17 years of age in urban and peri-urban surroundings to understand their issues of accessibility, expectations and control from new media. So out she questions, 'whether the use of social media by adolescents can be characterised as a traction addiction impression or necessity?' (p. 209). Her finding yes, that social media discs include cyberbullying, online harassment, sex, sting depression, social comparison and privacy concerns (p.215). Further, she contends "since social media has spread rapidly with little regulation, self-regulation appears to be one of the ways for users to protect themselves from its possible harms..." (ibid.). She noticed in her study that the perception of social media among the urban youth and the rural youth differed considerably in terms of objective, apprehension and attitude.

The next section of the book titled "Constructions" consists of two chapters where the scholars have described content-making processes among children using media. Through their ethnography and participatory approaches, they analysed the changing world of media which also had an impact on how the arts are consumed and practised. There is an increased recognition for creative work. In the past, children used to be told to put away their painting instruments and focus on "studies," today parental figures frequently serve as patrons who post their children's artistic strives on social media, hoping for encouragement and validation.

In chapter nine titled "Kids make art", Mishra points out the importance of creative art in the lives of children, such that they can meaningfully create content. Such an enterprise would make them creative, resilient and promote empathy. This is also linked to the drive for self-promotion that characterises the contemporary work environment, which requires the individual to continuously

demonstrate herself as a valuable professional. The onus is increasingly on the person to illustrate the worth of her work rather than the frameworks of the artistic sector, and social networking operates as a medium to do so. His concluding remarks point out that “so many of the young people display, fragile, inner resources. Often, they come to creative practice because they have not been able to find a way to express themselves elsewhere... clearly children not taking on the role of creative practitioners. In a variety of ways. They are finding their own way to some of these strengths” (pp. 253-4)

In Chapter ten titled “Redefining the political by visual narratives of Sangwadi Khabaria in central India”, Belavadi recounts instances from Sangwari khabariya community, where media literacy among children of underprivileged backgrounds has been beneficial in developing agency, projecting marginal voices and most importantly, helped them making critical political observations. He described how the students chosen for the project were originally apprehensive to participate because the majority of them had not been exposed to the world outside their village. The first challenge was convincing them to trust our organisation and how it worked. Peer learning, as well as vernacular vocabulary, were employed to instruct students in video editing. By the end of the programme, all of the youngsters could edit videos on their own, though not with professional finesse. These videos were streamed in community gatherings, intended to inform people about their rights and privileges. He argues that, in order to build a paradigm for financial sustainability, alternative or community media must be embedded in political and democratic interactions (pp.265-8).

The final section of the book, “Negotiations” offers insights from margins, where media acts as an escape route as well as survival strategy among young people belonging to the margins of society. In chapter eleven titled “Romance in the times of Facebook”, Rangaswamy used face-to-face in-depth interviews with 31 teenagers, adopting participative, observational and formal methods of study to reflect upon their Facebook usage in everyday life in urban slums of Chennai and Hyderabad. She explored online social relationships and digital etiquettes, where youngsters learn through trial and error. The idea of the digital self and its allied practices are empowering for teens. She noted, “multimedia-rich, interactive interfaces like Facebook timelines, seem to provide a part of self-empowerment through reciprocal acknowledgement, admiration, and even self-expressions of passionate fandom” (p.284). Her findings imply that the availability of unfiltered digital products among adolescents and teens helps in articulating, a sensation of being lesser-marginalised, particularly in the use of digital media. She also stated that an excess of digital self-profiling on Facebook resulted in a surplus-self, which is a combination of both beneficial and detrimental interactions encountered by users on the margins of digital society. While she further questions, the academic audience that, “rather than technology, injecting, social norms and behaviours into users. This study exemplifies how young people can knead technologies to support social norms. Even social norms are usually thought of as deeply embedded in social systems where technology is least expected to bring dramatic sometimes impactful change” (p.295).

In chapter twelve, titled “Religious Socialization of Children”, Bhatia's essay criticises how the media promotes religion as the main reason for regulating children's activities and behaviours. Her findings imply that media has the capacity to plunge youngsters into religious fantasies by determining the ways in which they speak, act, and behave in connection to the religious self and

the other. In her ethnographic research on Hindu and Muslim young children in Gujarat, she demonstrates how media discourse includes representational tactics and promotes the normalised code of behaviour in religious communities, resulting in the appearance of microaggression (p.317). She concluded by expressing hope that the goal of unlearning religious biases will necessitate research by scholars and educators in order to conceptualise projects in critical media literacy (p.323-4).

These detailed engaging empirical and theoretical chapters in this volume suggest that the creative arts and media landscapes are inextricably linked. In this surrounding environment, children, particularly urban children, begin acquiring media skills at a young age, outside of mandatory education. Children today have an inherent comprehension of the language of imagery. This is apparent in how kids utilise social media sites such as Instagram and Snapchat, combining image and text to create narratives from their day-to-day. This book will be valuable to academia in media and communication studies, cultural studies, and research, in addition to the field of psychology and broadcasting readership. The chapters give crucial information for parents, teacher training programmes, child-oriented NGOs, and other parties involved in children's issues. The book is a thorough synthesis of several theoretical traditions and research practices, and it is one of the few publications on the subject that covers both critical and empirical approaches to the topic. It combines developmental psychology, cultural studies, childhood sociology, and health studies, among other disciplines, to provide knowledge of the roles media play in the changing nature of childhood in India.