

## **"NEW MEDIA CONFIGURATIONS - CHANGING SOCIETIES? CURRENT RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA"**

### **Keynote lecture**

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**"Media and Gender in India: What is Old? What is New?"**

### **Abstract**

An initial contention of the Indian women's movement in the 1970s was the stark invisibility of the women's question in public discourse. Four decades later gender is hyper-visible in a fast growing and technologically sophisticated Indian media. This hyper-visibility of women, gender and sexuality in contemporary Indian media has to be understood in the context of three linked but disparate developments: a women's movement which has made far reaching impact on state and non-state policies; neo-liberal restructuring which has spawned a widespread consumer culture – one which the media has actively promoted and one within which gender plays a pivotal role; and a media industry that looms large in public life by its sheer scale, convergence and technological prowess. This intersection is new and important to address.

What however is old, and which also needs to be taken into account is the centrality of the women's question in modern Indian public discourse from the early 19th century social reform movement, through the early 20th century nationalist and women's movement, it has been the central site within which public debates on nationalism, culture, tradition, modernity, religion, individual rights and cultural identity were fought upon. There was a retreat of the women's question from public discourse after independence and resurgence with the Indian women's movement in the 1970s. The Shah Bano Case and the Deorala Sati case in mid 1980s once again brought back many of the old contestations such as cultural rights versus gender rights centre stage. The media was implicated within this. Important to my argument is however that the nature of the media during this entire period was different. It had neither the broader political economy set up by neo-liberalism, nor the technological sophistication of an interactive media, nor a publicity driven culture which is constitutive of the media today. It is this transformed media which was both an actor and a central site for representing the public outcry against the gruesome case of rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi in December 2012. The wide range of responses in the aftermath of the incident primarily in the English language media, both electronic and print brought forth many new issues which I argue is reflective of both the changes that Indian society on one hand and the Indian media on the other have undergone. A central question that underpins the paper is whether greater visibility in media means greater democratization and gender justice?