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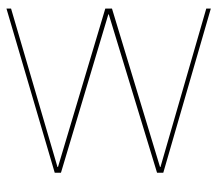
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Changing The Script

Anjali & Jayasankar (<https://femasiamagazine.com/author/anjali-jayasankar/>) • 25 July 2021





When Dylan sang *The Times They are a Changin'* in 1964, a clarion call to generations of rebellious young people, he (and we) would have never imagined just how prophetic his words were. If there is anything constant in our contemporary mediascapes, it is the constancy of change and fluidity. The emergence of the digital domain, the world wide web and social media have profoundly changed the ways in which we perceive, explore and express our relationships with each other and the world around us.

Practitioners of journalism and the media are at the epicentre of these changes, which influence how we study the media and how we think of ourselves as professionals who work with various aspects of the media. Firstly, the emergence of convergent technologies rewrites received notions of specialisation. While the space for certain kinds of specialised skills (e.g. web and graphic design) still exists, with convergent journalism, this is also the age of the multi-tasking generalist who can research, conceptualise, write, shoot and edit.

Secondly, this is also a period where all of us, media professionals included, need to develop a critical perspective on the media and society more than ever. With competing tendencies, where on the one hand, mainstream media is increasingly in the control of vertical conglomerates focused primarily on making profits and, on other, there is the opening up of spaces for comment, dissent and alternative voices on the Internet, this is a time where all of us, as media professionals and human beings, have to make choices about where we stand and what is our vision for a better world.

Social justice and equity, sustainable futures, respect for diversity, and democratic values were never so seriously under threat as in today's globalising, expanding, yet shrinking and hardening world.

So here we are — on a complex cusp of control and proliferation of ideas. An interest in political, economic, social and cultural matters, combined with a critical gaze at our mediatised reality, is the need of the day for those who would like to become media and journalism professionals, and indeed, for all of us. We need to move out of our comfort zones, out of our urban, middle-class bubbles and attempt to dialogue with and understand the lives of those different from us in terms of class, caste, gender, religion, region and lifestyles. At the same time, we need to realise the danger of speaking “on behalf of” others and the relations of patronage that this might involve.

In a TED Global Talk given in 2009, noted author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie points to the danger of having a single story about any group of people, leading to stereotyping and simplifying assumptions about them (https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript). This stereotyping, which could be based on nationality, race, religion, class, caste, gender or sexuality, perpetuates and justifies the violence inflicted on so many minority groups across the world in recent times. The media, including social media, is a powerful agent in propagating singular, simplistic stories. It is up to each one of us to contest and change such narratives that demonise and scapegoat certain “others” and to contribute to a plurality of narratives that bring out the complexities of life and the dignity of all.

Thirdly, the Internet has made possible an explosion of media content that does not necessarily depend on big budgets or institutional support. Indie media producers, be they filmmakers, writers or journalists, can resist the censorship of the state and the market and perhaps even make a living out of doing this. How can we add our voices to this vibrant and exciting space to make a difference? This is also the age of user-generated creativity, of wikis, creative commons and shared knowledge, crowd-funding and crowd-sourcing, and mobilisations in

cyberspace. There is also an underbelly to these immense possibilities: surveillance, cyber-trolling, stalking and the like. And hence, all of us need to be aware of the implications and risks involved in our online behaviour. Perhaps educational institutions, both those who teach media and others, need to take this kind of media education that goes beyond imparting skills more seriously and equip their students to survive in our brave new cyber worlds.

To sum up, new image-making digital technologies and the availability of a whole lot of teaching-learning resources on the web have made the process of media production cheaper, more accessible, and user friendly, and within reach of a wider group of media lovers, many of whom might not have access to formal media education. As a result, every user of content has the potential to become a producer. Given this, the emphasis needs to be not merely on the acquisition of skills but also on perspective building with a focus on making the process of communication relevant and meaningful. To facilitate this, critical media education, which builds on the abilities of young people to ‘read’ the sub-texts of media messages, needs to coexist and, in fact, precede professional media education. Our perceptions about ourselves, others and the world around us are formed, in large measure, through media ecologies that we encounter from a young age. However, there is little or scant attention accorded to developing capabilities among students to deal with the media and the Internet in the general classroom. That has to change. The Times They are a Changin’. Whether formal or self-acquired, our education has to keep pace with these changes to equip us to participate effectively in our mediated realities, as media professionals, as citizens and as human beings.

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