

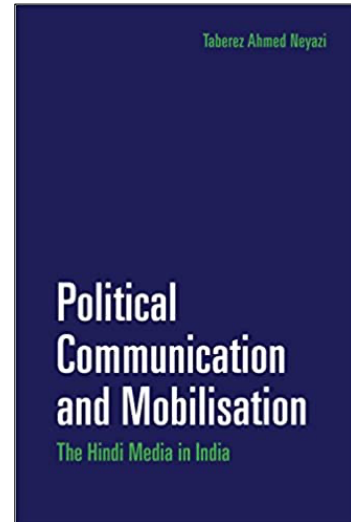
Taberez Ahmed Neyazi, **Political Communication and Mobilisation: The Hindi Media in India**, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 234 pp., \$85.67 (hardcover).

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Since the election of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party government in 2014, India has grappled with regressive forces, which are undermining its foundations as a socialist, secular, democratic republic. Profit-driven Indian media, closely aligned with dominant political and ideological forces, is instrumental in destabilizing and undermining constitutional guarantees to bolster right-wing Hindu majoritarian Hindutva politics. And Hindi cable news media, backed by well-funded social media manipulation machinery, has been particularly vicious in its vilification of the Indian Muslim minority population by pandering to fake news and holding media trials with the intent to drive BJP government's antipoor and antireligious minority agenda. In these contexts rife with generalizations about media's role in bringing about a seismic shift in favor of the ruling BJP party's divisive politics, a scholarly examination of the relationship between media and political mobilization is a much-anticipated intervention.



However, the author's attempt to establish an unequivocal empirical relationship between Hindi media (which he argues is the most important, with largest circulation and readership) and political mobilization entails taking on a task that is well beyond a single positivist investigative approach. The complex processes of how media inflect on political mobilization to shape equally complex realities on the ground, compounded by linguistic, regional, religious, demographic, socioeconomic and other differences, can only be a multifaceted investigation from myriad methodological and disciplinary lenses. Indeed scholars from different disciplines have approached the question by focusing on a single facet of the problem. One of the earliest studies by media ethnographer Arvind Rajagopal (2001) examines a critical juncture in Indian politics in the late 1980s, when Hindi language national television state broadcaster Doordarshan played a decisive role in giving Hindu right-wing politics credibility in India's secular democratic public spheres by promoting the telecast of mythological drama *Ramayana* at a time when India was opening up its statist economy to global competition. According to Rajagopal (2001),

[economic] liberalization and Hindu nationalism shared their technologies of transmission for expanding markets and audiences respectively. If their messages and their adherents overlapped or crossed over, it was not necessarily out of conscious design, although design was not absent. (p. 3)

In a similar vein, Robin Jeffrey (2000) examines the workings of print capitalism, which spurred the expansion of the vernacular press in the decades between 1977 and 1999, to argue how an expanding economy and growing consumer base in Indian hinterlands led to a rise in advertising revenues to support

exponential growth of non-English-language news dailies. Christopher Jaffrelot's (1993, 2010) research builds on investigations of the rise of vernacular press to propose how the new reading public in Indian vernacular languages was essential to the rise of nonnational and state-centered political parties and players who then completely altered the political terrain in India. Given the rich scholarship on the critical connections between media and its role in political mobilization, the important contribution of Neyazi's study would be to enumerate how in the convergent media environment Hindi media inflects on political mobilizations. Indeed, according to Neyazi, his intent is not only to investigate how Hindi media influences political mobilization but also to understand how print, television, and Internet work in tandem to "facilitate social and political mobilization" (p. 23).

After presenting the research questions in the Introduction, the second chapter enumerates how the English and Hindi language press were differently mobilized in the anticolonial nationalist struggle in the period extending from the turn of century until 1947. The third chapter examines how the relationship between the English language media and the state changed in the postindependence period. In the postcolonial era, the Indian English language press came of age as a vocal critic rather than as the voice of the nationalist leaders who were at the helm of the government as opposed to being in the opposition, as during the struggle for independence from British colonial rulers. Chapter 4 then reviews the large body of literature on localization of media in India and proposes that localization strategy of Hindi news media influenced both media revenues and news media content, with localized media content becoming both more trivialized as well as more sensitive to the travails of marginalized and subaltern populations. Chapter 5 examines the political economy of the Hindi press by enumerating infinite details about ownership patterns of Hindi and English press, their different ideological positioning, growth and expansion of rural markets and of media industries into nonmedia related industries, the processes of advertising, and the influence of advertising on media content.

And by the end of chapter 5, the reader has been inundated with myriad interesting details about how the press operates in India but has been left floundering when searching for the relevance of this information to the research imperative proposed by the author. Because chapters 2 and 3 are important only if the research imperative is to demonstrate the preeminence of Hindi news media to political mobilization, given that India is undoubtedly a large country and media operate in several other regional languages apart from Hindi. And chapter 5 can only substantiate its significance if the question of media ownership and political mobilization is clearly addressed and argued within definite circumstances and contexts—as in presenting a case study rather than diffusely proposing it as a given. Though the author argues that the issue of ownership of media is essential to understanding political economy of media (p. 105), there is little in this chapter that helps us understand how it is central to political mobilization. There is no analysis of how ownership patterns of newspapers in India may have influenced the structuring of political forces or how they may have supported the rise of certain political ideologies. Chapter 4 could have made a valuable contribution by articulating the reason for the tension between trivialization of news content in vernacular news media, and space for voicing concerns of the marginalized population as provided by them, to create a better understanding of how the political economy of media in current media regulatory environment influences political mobilization at a particular juncture. Indeed, the lack of delineation of a time frame of study and marking a particular geographical and temporal frame leads the author in many

directions (as is particularly evident in this chapter) without adding anything new or substantial to extant scholarship.

Finally, chapter 6 focuses on the anticorruption movement steered by Anna Hazare in 2011 to examine political mobilization in a hybrid media environment. It proposes to develop a case study from which to extrapolate how Hindi media inflects political mobilization in the convergent media environment. However, once again, the chapter unduly expends on reviewing existing research on how emergence of the Internet has transformed democratic politics in Western contexts. The author argues that it is now imperative to think of media's influence within a plural framework as opposed to "an all encompassing hegemonic media logic" (Chadwick, 2013, as quoted on p. 142), which is mainly central to media effects research, but without enumerating how the pluralistic media logic is operational or relevant in India at that particular juncture. Instead, the emergence of the anticorruption movement in urban centers of India is tentatively approached by presenting a linear time line of the movement's unfolding along with a parallel timeline of when different media were roped in and the extent to which they were involved at different points of time. The author's rich fieldwork and interviews with different players involved in the movement are presented as mere anecdotes casually juxtaposed to extant arguments about new media's role in political mobilization without elaborating how his findings challenge or elaborate the existing research to present new insights. For example, Neyazi argues on one hand that today media houses extensively use the Right to Information Act to report on corruption (p. 144) only to immediately contradict this by quoting from his interviews with the editor of a Hindi news daily (p. 145) who dismisses the need to focus on corruption as front page news because according to him the audience have lost interest and are suffering from information overload. Neyazi forgoes this important moment (along with many others) to excavate the contradictions and to explain why the opportunity to report on corruption is eschewed by local newspapers by blaming the readers for suffering from corruption fatigue, and how the editors avoid accepting the fact that such reportage might hurt the newspaper's advertising revenues and even political patronage that they might enjoy. It would have been infinitely more rewarding to read such an analysis than being acquainted with quantitative indicators pointing to how often corruption is covered by media. The coverage of the anticorruption movement needed a coherent narrative, as in Alissa Richardson's (2020) examination of how the deployment of new media technologies, including smartphones and social media sites empowered Black Lives Matter activists to "bear witness" to their own truths. Activists used new technologies as mediums of both documentation as well as mobilization to challenge politics of endemic racism. But Neyazi leaves it until chapter 6 to bring up the core issue of political mobilization in age of new media.

The strength of the book is that it extensively reviews literature covering the field of political mobilization, but it is at the expense of foregrounding original research and thinking deeply about how the author's own fieldwork presents an important moment for intersectional analysis of power dynamics in a democratic society riddled with such deep complexities as India is.

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