Partisanship, Democracy and the Logic of Neoliberal Reforms: Kolkata’s Mainstream Newspapers’ Responses to Anti-Industrialisation Protests

Ms Suruchi Mazumdar
PhD candidate, Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University

Abstract

This presentation explores the relationship between commercially-run newspapers and anti-industrialisation rural protests in the east Indian city of Kolkata, capital of West Bengal. The tradition of leftist political parties and movements and the heightened scope of ideological and partisan contestation in media and political culture tend to complicate the traditional relationship between social movements and commercially-driven news media in case of Kolkata. Anti-industrialisation protests could be expected to be in a disadvantageous position in the light of the profit motif of corporate-run media entities and the general consensus on the necessity of industrialisation and urbanisation in a developing society like Kolkata. However, when there were widespread protests against a left party-led state government’s proposed plans of corporate industrialisation in agricultural lands in West Bengal’s Singur and Nandigram in 2006 and 2007, the commercially-run newspapers’ responses differed in terms of their attitudes to the ruling party, the government and the market. This presentation interrogates how polarisation of the media and the tradition of partisan journalism influence and disrupt the tendency of lending uniform defence to the over-arching logic of neoliberal reforms and how that impacts democracy. It also tries to develop an understanding of the interface of media and politics in the context of the increasing shift to market forces in a highly politicised and partisan milieu like that of Kolkata.

About the Speaker

Suruchi Mazumdar is a doctoral candidate at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her doctoral thesis, tentatively titled Free Market Media, Partisanship and Democracy: A case study of mainstream newspapers’ coverage of anti-industrialisation movements in the east Indian city of Kolkata, addresses how the press deals with tensions of capitalist industrialisation/neoliberal reforms as reflected in the rise and protests of oppositional social groups in developing societies. Her research interests include the political economy of media and journalism, social movements, labour and the globalisation of film industries. She has a Master in Mass Communication from Nanyang Technological University. Prior to her graduate studies in Singapore, she worked as a journalist for five years with India’s national English dailies such as Hindustan Times and The Indian Express in Kolkata and Mumbai.

Event Details

Wednesday, 14 August 2013
3.00pm to 4.30pm
Malay Studies Seminar Room
AS7 #04-13
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