

RE-IMAGING AND REIMAGINING COMMUNITY IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

A Study of Small Scale Electronic Media and its Implications for Indian Democracy.

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This study argues that the liberalisation of the Indian media since 1991 has allowed 'peripheral' indigenous communities in North-East India, to represent themselves through television. It is argued that the indigenous peoples have rarely had the opportunity to represent themselves on national Indian channels, and that these channels tend to portray them in stereotypical terms. By contrast, indigenous television producers, equipped with affordable audio-visual technology and with access to a range of programme formats after the satellite 'revolution', are 'talking back' to the centre by redefining middle-class indigenous identity against national stereotypes. In opposition to the arguments of the so-called cultural imperialist school, which holds that local cultures tend to be eroded by Western media, the study argues that media globalisation has equipped historically marginalised communities for cultural survival in a global era.

The study uses a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods to support its arguments. In order to understand the way in which ideas about indigenous identity affect the production and consumption of television, it examines 1) the process by which media texts are produced, 2) the structure of the texts themselves and 3) the nature of the audience's response to the texts. It is argued that although local television uses 'vernacular' languages and reflects local concerns, it nevertheless encourages pluralistic notions of indigenous identity. This is a significant development in a region where the indigenous middle class once showed implicit (if not outright) support for violent political movements against the Indian state. The study concludes by examining how the discourse of local television can be harnessed by the Indian state to achieve effective citizenship in North-East India.