



Myriad Mediation: Discourses on Media as a Research Tool with Reference to Tea Narratives

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Abstract

This paper discusses the inclusivity of media as a research tool, its myriad dimensions, and the technicalities involved. Research tools are the basic elements for deciphering the topic under question and guiding the way of thinking towards a tentative conclusion. In this paper, I have attempted to highlight the various possibilities and applications of media as a research tool for higher studies and research. This paper primarily focuses on the applications of media resources in tea narratives. Studies on tea, in recent times, is a rapidly growing field in the academic arena in different ways. This paper tries to establish that the media as a research tool can benefit all its possibilities in various ways. Media can mitigate the space underneath with the greater power dimensions available in academic and higher research.



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In the history of human knowledge, sources of knowledge formation are numerous. In Foucault, it is found that the ideas of “power” and “knowledge” are intertwined and are most of the time “conjoined” (Fruhling, 2011). People down the ages have tried to acquire knowledge empirically. While Socrates and Plato questioned authority, in the case of Aristotle, it was a new mode of teaching, with his students in his ‘Lyceum’ coming close to the subject of his teaching.

For nearly the remainder of his life, it was here that Aristotle lectured, wrote most of his philosophical treatises and dialogues, and systematically collected books for the first library in European history. After Aristotle’s death in 322 BC, the headship of the school passed to Theophrastus, who continued his master’s program of research and teaching in the Lyceum. (Morison, 2022)

Over time, there has been rapid development in the history of research tools. It has become more intensive as well as extensive. Recent observations would speak of particularisation. However, this process of knowledge acquisition is growing continuously and is expanding limitlessly. So, what is necessary today is to redefine it with its meaningfulness, keeping in mind the necessity of the time. Dupré and Somsen (2019) have shown that the historiographical domain has to be reinterpreted and re-evaluated since the present history of knowledge demands new ways of questioning the conditions of the time. It has to be problematized and re-evaluated. Moreover, ancient history shows the plethora of changes in the process of knowledge formation comparing the present status of the time. It was more philosophically enriched, if not shallow. That is why, probably, Aristotle is found on all platforms: Philosophy, Political science, Literature, Theory of Poetry, History, Ethics, and even biological sciences.

It is true that during Renaissance England, Francis Bacon questioned the monopoly of the Aristotelian concept of the theory of poetry and tragedy as described in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. He went on his experiments with the idea of human knowledge and enquiry. Reflections of which can be found in his famous *Essays*. Furthermore, his utopian texts reflect his ideas for aspirations more prominently. From the Renaissance to the present time, the gradual development of human knowledge, research, and enquiry has passed through multifaceted, disturbed, mysterious, and often ambiguous phases. Christopher Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus is one of such characters through whom this journey of the troubled path can partially be felt. Stephen Leacock’s article “Further Progress in Specialization” is an excellent piece that satirizes and questions the process of “specialization” in further studies (De, 2022). Despite the acerbic tone in the narrative, the text tries to contextualize the modern dilemma in the academic field and its unavoidable consequences.

Contextualizing Media

The development of media in the cultural and academic fields no doubt intervenes with a sense of wonder. There is a huge difference between the pre-media and the impression of the media-centric context. Media propels, motivates, instigates, and often confuses, too. However, the contribution of the media can hardly be denied. At a time of the explosion of information, the media controls the whole process of communication and also miscommunication. In the long history of research, a researcher particularizes and investigates the various issues and the elements of data before applying them to the research topic. As in the cases of primary data, secondary data are similarly important. Since the journey of a researcher is always very tentative and hypothetical, like many other sources, he has no choice but to take help from the media and media resources. Media as a research tool is multilayered, diverse, diffusing, and disparate. As a

research tool, media coalesces together and conglomerates the data into a new vista, leaving no option for any mono-layered unit. In the introduction of *Knowledge Worlds: Media, Materiality, and the Making of the Modern University*, Reinhold Martin (2021) writes:

A world is, in this sense, both a knowable thing and a cognitive environment, a sphere of knowledge and of action. Media are socially produced objects and systems that bring worlds into view, admitting and excluding subjects like any entrance exam. (Martin, 2021)

Media is a huge corpus of communication processes or systems. A network unbounded, media has the option to be connected globally, irrespective of culture, class, and national and international boundaries. Media systematizes the information process and places it in front of the target audience methodically. History shows how old universities in England were partial to class sensitivities and gave more importance to the social hierarchies and cultural heritage. As time passed, such class and monetary differences were now mitigated. Education and higher studies through e-resources and taking help from media resources are now proven to be more budget-friendly, keeping in mind the present situation. It also addresses questions about the long history of racism. Globally, the issues of racism, class distinctions, and cultural differences concerning educational platforms are now bearable, if not wiped out.

Addressing Castism and Gender with reference to Media

Casteism and education had a long and chronic relationship in a country like India. India's social and cultural history has witnessed how most Indian people hardly had access to education. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is one of the examples and one of the prime victims. Boldness in spirit enabled him to brave all the evils of society and finally fight against the odds of reaching the destination. The numerous writings of Ambedkar are the testaments of the subalterns and the Dalits who were bereft of education and all other necessary privileges required of a human being. Such discrimination in Indian society was rampant, if not removed or obliterated from the society. Pranjali Kureel's article "Indian Media and Caste: Of Politics, Portrayals and Beyond" also investigates the basic enquires of casteism in India and how media is still being operated by the cultural hegemony (Kureel, 2021). Those who belong to the upper strata of society are still in the helm while the situation of the media gets highlighted. The reflection in society is minimal, and the majority are the victims of cultural supremacy. In the case of education and higher studies, the portraiture of the same is evident.

Gender and education were other significant, unavoidable issues for which early women had limited access to education in Indian society. For those who went for higher studies, the number of such candidates is a handful only. Education was for a select few, not for all. Women were the worst victims. For a long time, women thought that they hardly needed any education. Moreover, they were considered dependent on the males. This picture was not significantly different even in Western countries. Feminist writers in the West have talked a lot about the conditions of women in society in general, particularly on the right to vote, education, and financial dependence; they all have talked about these issues. Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Simone de Beauvoir have tried to connect women's education and financial self-dependence.

Media minimizes several such issues, but it has its shortcomings too. The expanse of media is vast and enormous. According to many scholars, today's media has its own predecessors. For example, the 'cave paintings' should also be considered the early forms of

communication. Human minds have always attempted to expand their knowledge. As for the ways of communication, human beings have devised several plans and techniques. 'Media' is one of the major ones. The audio-visual mode of communication helps to get fixed in the mind for a long time. The media plays that significant role. Retention is certainly the biggest help that 'media' makes during academic platforms and in the case of research works. Media always opens up new windows for the thinking process, broadens the intellectual platform, and enkindles new approaches to discuss and disseminate. The media itself is a package that covers multiple dimensions.

Media as a Research Tool

Media as a research tool comes up the very best during the lockdown period of COVID-19. A tenure that shuts down man-to-man contact, disconnected physical associations, and practised media as the only resource in academic and research fields. Even when people got tired of being entertained and psychologically refreshed through media sources, the biggest hindrance in online classes was that not many could afford the cost of the internet. The internet is, of course, cheaper in India but not free. Hence, it is unexpected that it is not free for all. Only a handful in society can afford the internet. So, here comes the question of the "digital divide." Those who stay in the village have less access to the internet. If scholars, researchers, or students stay in the remote areas of the village, full-length signal or "no-buffering" streaming is often unavailable to them. They are victims of the "digital divide." A stable internet connection is always required for the smooth functioning of Google Meet, Zoom meetings, and online classes. Nevertheless, the "digital divide" could hardly make a balance between the two.

Besides these network and financial issues, media is beneficial in every possible way. Access to a digital gallery, archive, or national or international library database was only possible through media opportunities. During the lockdown of COVID-19, several international Digital platforms were found to come up with helping hands and the opportunities to access digital libraries free of cost. In some cases, they also minimized the cost of the subscription. JSTOR is one such digital archive that offered scholars worldwide during this time the possibility to access research articles with minimum cost or with some other alternatives, in which read-only options were open for all scholars across the globe. "Archive.org" is another big name in the digital archive scenario, where one can access digital texts and documents without any cost. In India, several other platforms cater to these opportunities for scholars in general. The government of India and the Education Department took several such initiatives to provide researchers with relevant information digitally. "Inflibnet" is one such project that catered to this opportunity for college and university teachers, scholars, and researchers across the country.

Recently, we have also seen how IIT Kharagpur and several such institutions have prepared digital access to many academic and digitized critical research-oriented texts for the greater benefit of scholars. Such access to the websites and the texts is free and research-friendly. Such media contributions cannot be denied for higher studies and for the sake of research. It comes with a sense of freedom and justice. A Digital library offers the freedom to access research materials on any device, anywhere, and anytime. In a period of globalization, such easy access to the research tool is undoubtedly a great innovation. However, the environment of a physical library can not be denied. A physical library is more of a space that helps to think and write. A physical library enhances getting in touch with the environment and capacity building

while being a part of the academic environment in general. A physical library materialises the process of intellectual development and activates the process of creative faculty.

Media and Tea Narrative

Since this article primarily focuses on tea narratives and how research could be conducted on them, it explores the subtle relationship between media and its role across various aspects of tea narratives. The role and contribution of the media in research work are hard to deny, particularly in the field of tea studies. Research on tea is field-based work. Furthermore, most of it is connected to the library when the approach to the study is scientific. However, from the humanities and social sciences angle, it comes up with diverse and multifaceted possibilities.

Media undoubtedly plays a significant role in tea narratives among all the research tools. While working on the tea narratives, only a handful of tea fiction exists. Regarding the tea poems, there is hardly anything in a consolidated form. Most creative works are poorly arranged, well-documented, and easily accessible. So, a researcher working on the tea narratives must be very difficult. The rest of the materials focus on scientific approaches to tea production, how productivity can be further increased, the problems of labour and workers, labour unrest, male and female workers, and issues related to daily wage earning. When there is a dearth of materials, the media significantly minimizes hindrances while dealing with tea narratives. While working on tea media, the gap or vacuum supplies a handful of documentaries on tea and tea-growing areas in different parts of India. Such documentaries, i.e., media resources, no doubt, are great responses to move through this journey in other ways. Such resources are pictorial, methodical, planned, and well organized, and they systematize the whole process in such a way that consolidates the project of writing in its way. Documentaries on social media, YouTube, and similar platforms help go directly to the topic and subject of the tea narratives. It questions and addresses some of the loopholes connected to the tea narratives. Since such a presentation of the topic would not have been possible merely by reading the texts. What exactly is happening in the tea gardens and how are the persons, owners, and workers involved there connected in nexus and power relations are best exemplified through these documentaries. The lively presentation of the documentaries helps the researchers feel the environment of the tea garden in real life. It also highlights the nuances of the tea garden narratives in general.

Along with documentaries, general videos, interviews, and related media resources are other relevant and significant electronic materials for research and higher studies. Videos prepared unofficially or with personal initiatives also help a researcher visualise the scenario of the tea garden in general. It also helps to go deeper into the pros and cons of the context, raising questions regarding the vulnerabilities of the tea narratives. Such videos help a researcher compare and contrast the various trajectories and loopholes in the case of the tea narratives. Such videos help map and present the threatening conditions faced by workers, braving the inequalities and the uneven distribution of power and authority as seen in the tea estates and gardens. Interviews are a more lively aspect of research materials. The recorded question-and-answer session, available on social media, helps scholars and researchers get in touch with it several times when and if required. In this case, the best aroma that a lively recorded interview can offer is the essence of the garden and the place, without which it would not have been possible.

One of the powerful ways of communication is film. It is also one of the major tea narratives. Media helps connect with films that address tea issues. As a research tool, the film as

a media source is always a strong one. Several films are made based on the intricacies of tea life and its culture. The subaltern reading of the tea workers is always vibrant in the films on tea. The anxiety and the struggle between the owners and the workers are the necessary per dynamics reflected in the tea writings. As a research tool, the tea narrative in film media helps foreground basic indigenous culture and customs through myths, songs, dance, and related practices. Film as a research tool epitomizes society's connections and conflicts across multiple layers and helps relate the whole setup, giving a strong thrust to the mind. It also questions cultural norms and the issues associated with them.

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