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NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RISE OF THE INDIAN CITIZEN-PUBLICS: A CRITICAL ENQUIRY

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Abstract

In current times, new communication technologies have permeated the lives of people in multifarious ways and like never before. Foremost in this path now, are social media websites and online blogs. It is such times that have inspired research on the nature of technocratic citizens, technocratic state, and a public sphere mediated by new communication technologies. In this context, understanding the case of India wherein *being digital* has occupied much significance could provide interesting ways of seeing the nature of Indian citizens now. Even though the medium of virtual spaces increasingly tend to be universal in its nature, the way it weaves with socio-political lifeworlds of the local needs deeper engagement.In this endeavour, this paper seeks to explore how one might develop an epistemology that could enable an alternative understanding to the nature of citizenship that has come to mean greater visibility and audibility, in the face of new media spaces that promise a borderless universal world. By adopting a qualitative methodology with theoretical engagement of literature, this paper constitutes an exercise in mapping the idea of being citizens in terms of its digital cultures at this juncture.

Keywords: New communication technologies; Digital; Citizen-publics; India; Alternative epistemology.

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1. Introduction

The discourse of citizenship has occupied scholars since some time now. Although not the most important variable to study and know about social actors, its significance lies in the fact that it comprises "one of the oldest and most ubiquitous political category"[1] deeply embedded and shaped by the practices of a particular society. On many occasions, it has been studied from the purview of a nation-state's fundamental legal-juridical categories of identifying its peoples, as distinguished from others such as "non-citizens"[2], "aliens"[3], "guest workers"[4] , "semi-citizens"[5]et al. One of its other interesting aspect, has been that it has served as one of the important crucibles on which peoples have organised themselves throughout historical times and across the globe. Thus we have seen different categories of peoples and spaces of peoples belonging to the broad rubric of citizenship studies including "urban citizenship"[6], "environmental citizenship"[7], "insurgent citizenship"[8]and the relatively recent area of "sexual citizenship"[9]. In other words, it has constantly occupied the interest of researchers. In addition to this, the proliferation of new communication technologies marked by the onset of satellite television, knowledge social networks, social media websites, blogs, FM radio etc. has provided new grounds whereby citizens have a platform to "don a more public character andengage in collective politics"[10] . It is such developments that have inspired research on the nature of technocratic citizens, technocratic states, and public spheres increasingly mediated by new communication technologies. They not only act as a symbol of the modern publics which every person must aspire for, but transcends to serve as an important social experience for publics now, where information, public opinion and reason, and a vigorous field of varied voices and counter-voices find place.

[1]Elizabeth F. Cohen, *Semi-Citizenship in Democratic Politics*, Cambridge University Press: New York, p. 9, 1991.
[2] Kamal Sadiq, "When States Prefer Non-Citizens Over Citizens: Conflict Over Illegal Immigration into Malaysia" in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 49, Issue. 1, 2005, p. 102.
[3]SeylaBenhabib, *The Rights of Others, Aliens, Residents and Citizens*, Cambridge University Press: New York, 2004.
[4]See SaskiaSassen, *The Global City*, Princeton University Press: New York, 1991.
[5] Cohen, Op. Cit.
[6] Rainer Baubock, "Reinventing Urban Citizenship" in *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2003, p. 139.
[7] Andrew Dobson and Derek Bell, eds., *Environmental Citizenship*, Cambridge: The MIT Press: Cambridge, 2006.
[8] James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship, Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*, Princeton University Press: Oxford, 2008.
[9] Diane Richardson, "Constructing Sexual Citizenship: Theorising Sexual Rights" in *Critical Social Policy*, Vol. 20, Issue. 1, 2000, p. 105.
[10] Cohen, Op. Cit., p.4.

It is these latter aspects that interests this paper and wishes to dwell on the scope of discerning the politics of new publics as they become increasingly informed, agree, disagree and contend online. Do new media spaces change the basic nature of socio-political struggles of various publics? Have boundaries on which states sustain its credibility and authority become less permeable? Are new media spaces a mere field of articulating and sustaining jingoistic appeals? Or do they indicate a close reflection of 'real' politics and 'real' new public spheres? What happens to politics of identities and power relations now? More specifically, has the nature of movements in states that have witnessed long histories of contested identities changed? These are some of the questions and contexts that inspire this paper.

In treading this path, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that when studying internet spaces, it does not assume a "teleological understanding of the internet as possessing any deterministic attributes"[11]. Nonetheless, it recognizes its significance in being a kind of space as understood by Coleman and Blumler, that is "a kind of empty source of power being vulnerable both to the exigencies of state-centric and corporate strategies on the one hand, and but an open source available to publics to express themselves in democratic ways on the other"[12]. How such voices get restrained by actions taken by states on voices that aspire to become too free, on reasoning that becomes too divergent from the prevailing socio-political normativity, stand juxtaposed to the much acclaimed emancipatory potential of new media spaces. These are some aspects that are often seen and argued but require far greater attention to study the very nature of 'new emerging realities'.

Before engaging with the above broad questions it is necessary to foreground the theoretical prisms from which the nature of public as distinguished from new publics, democraticcitizenship as more than the given understanding of citizenship and public spheres that could be different from previous ones can be examined. The succeeding sections as such, would try to both delineate and review the theoretical concerns, besides trying to identify the definitions and contexts within which this paper can be placed.

[11]Stephen Coleman and Jay G. Blumler.*The Internet and Democratic Citizenship, Theory, Practice and Policy*.Cambridge University Press: New York, 2009, p. 9.
[12] Ibid.

2. Tracing the Political Thought on Citizenship

Tracing the political thought on citizenship would take one to its origin in the ancient city-state of Athens wherein the concept was first believed to have taken form, although not in the way as understood today. The most cited early theorist here is Aristotle who dwells on citizenship in terms of moral virtues and regards "being citizens as a kind of completeness and as synonymous to living well as a human being"[13]. The importance of going back to this origin lies in its relevance to the later development of the discourse of citizenship as also understanding the sense of morality embedded within the idea till date. In the context of this paper, rethinking about the idea about a kind of civic community as facilitated by the onset of new communication technologies constitutes the primary objective.

With regard to the discourse on citizenship as discussed in current times, it can be begun by understanding though not limited to, two dominant streams of thought namely, civic-republicanism and liberal individualism. In its broadest sense, civic republican scholars argue about the requisite condition of citizenship as being active engagement and participation in the society's socio-political sphere. The earliest here is Aristotle whose understanding is rooted in the Greek city-state where citizens (males) would actively participate in the public sphere. Liberal individualism meanwhile, emphasizes on the rights of citizens as individuals whose strength lies in the provision of various rights guaranteed by the state. The development of the concept in the course of time and its specific context lies in the creation of the modern nation-state.

In its most fundamental sense, citizenship first implies being a member of a particular nation-state. The emergence of the modern nation-state, not only marked a departure from "the many absolute features of traditional states"[14], as Giddens points out, but also served as the crucible which gave life and consciousness to the idea of citizenship. Thus Brubaker argues that "the nation-state, besides being a territorial organisation, is also amembership organisation, an association of citizens"[15]. Brubaker shows how by "classifying certain peoples as members and

[13] Susan D Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship*, Cambridge University Press: New York, 2006, p. 5.
[14] Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence, Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985, p. 4.
[15] Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, Harvard University Press:

everyone else as either non-citizens or aliens, reserving certain rights and obligations for citizens against resident foreigners and claiming to stand for the needs of a particular citizenzry"[16], the nation-state builds the foundation for the institutionalisation of the idea of citizenship. By examining the institution of citizenship as it has emerged and functions in the nation-states of France and Germany, he argues that "definitions of citizenship have been shaped and is sustained by unique and deeply rooted understandings of nationhood"[17]. And although Brubaker's frame of analysis is based on the experience of the Western nations of France and Germany, it is not entirely insignificant to the context of non-Western nation-states.

Thus for example, in India, the concept of citizenship emerged in the wake of independence from the British colonial power in 1947 and rise of the sovereign nation-state of India. Roy observes a shift in the meaning of citizenship when "at the moment of citizenship's commencement just after partition, migration provided the condition of passage into citizenship, while in 1986 and 2003, migration was explicitly associated with illegality"[18], the latter in the specific context of the state of Assam. Thus, first having emerged from creation of the nation-state, citizenship then unfolds in its many nuanced forms and practices, and diverse experiences of the different states with unique problems and encounters with the concept.

The liberal individual approach to citizenship is basically seen as a legal concept that entails rights and responsibilities. Foremost amongst the scholars in this stream include Marshal[19], Turner[20], Kymlicka[21], and Young[22]amongst others. The limitations in realizing the rights in practice and also the way it has been applied arbitrarily to different groups in society led to alternative ways of thinking about it as a sense of identity and belongingness. Scholars with this

Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992, p. xi.
[16] Brubaker, Op. Cit., p.x.
[17] Ibid.
[18]Anupama Roy, *Mapping Citizenship in India*, Oxford: New Delhi, 2010, pp. 27-28.
[19] See T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, Pluto Press: London, 1950.
[20] See Bryan S. Turner, and Engin, F. Isin, *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*, Sage Publications: London and New Delhi, 2002.
[21] See Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Clarendon Press: New York, 1991.
[22] See Iris Marion Young, 'Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship' in *Ethics*, Vol.99, No.2, Jan 1989.

line of thought include Soysal[23], Castells[24], Benhabib[25], and Jayal[26]et al. In short, citizenship as a concept pervades the lives of modern citizens both in its everyday meanings, as well as in the form of meanings embedded in complex structural and institutional sites of society.

While any discussion on citizenship invariably begins with questions of status, scholars have pointed out how even possession of citizen status in itself, does not guarantee its realization in a substantive sense. Bosniak[27], Carens[28] and Brubaker[29] are the most prominent scholars who have dealt elaborately on this front. For instance, Brubaker observes that the mere possession of "citizenship status is not what matters most in the economic and social sphere"[30]. It is "their weak position in the labour market, the housing market, and the educational system" which determines their general status and which being a condition of "economic and social marginalization, reveals that is independent of formal citizenship status"[31]. This is a much significant observation which points to the fact that even though the understanding of citizenship in modern nation-states is first and foremost in terms of formal legal status, implying a single identity, there are also other factors which weave its understanding in practice in other ways simultaneously.

3. Being Citizens-publics

An aspect inherent to the idea of democratic citizenship is that it implies an active space where citizens discuss and deliberate. This becomes especially important in current times when citizens are seen to increasingly and visibly voicing their opinions and concerns on social media platforms making what may be called a new category of citizen- public. What is the nature of this new kind of citizens? And what implications does it have on the nature of the public sphere?

[23] See Y.N Soysal, "Citizenship and Identity: living in diasporas in post-war Europe" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2000.
[24] See Stephen Castells and Alastair Davidson, *Citizenship and Migration, Globalisation and the Politics of Belonging*, Routledge: New York, 2000.
[25] See Benhabib, Op. Cit.
[26]NirajaGopalJayal, *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History*, Permanent Black: New Delhi, 2013.
[27]See Linda Bosniak, "The Citizenship of Aliens' in *Social Text*, No. 56, 1998.
[28] See Joseph H. Carens, *Culture, Citizenship, and Community: A Contextual Exploration of Justice as Evenhandedness*, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 2000.
[29] William Rogers Brubaker, 'Membership Without Citizenship: The Economic and Social Rights of Noncitizens' in Brubaker (ed.), *Immigration and the Politics of Citizenship in Europe and North America*, New York, 1989.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

How different are the existing publics from the previous ones?These are some critical questions that need greater attention but first necessitate understanding the concept of a public sphere itself.

While one can trace the idea of public sphere in the works of early scholars like Kant and Hegel, most contemporary research on any aspect of public sphere, draws heavily from the work of Habermas. This is perhaps with regard to the critical importance Habermas provides, to the understanding of the public sphere as a distinct space of democratic articulation, as well as his delineation of its historical emergence and transformation under specific historical circumstances that has occupied the interest of researchers. Defining the meaning of a public sphere, Habermas says

By "the public sphere" we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion—that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions-about matters of general interest[32].

To follow his definition then, a public sphere implies a space where citizens can debate and reach consensus about any matter which they regard to be of public importance. Also critical to the formation of a public sphere is the aligning of private individuals to form this body which is unconstrained by private, legal or bureaucratic concerns. Here, freedom of expression, assembly and association occupies foremost consideration, giving way to formation of an opinion. And by 'public opinion', Habermas implies the "mechanisms of criticism and control which a public body of citizens engages with, both formally as well as informally, against the ruling structure of

[32]JurgenHabermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)" in *New German Critique*, No.3, 1974, p. 49.

the state"[33]. Tracing the sites of public sphere in its historical emergence, Habermas points to the eighteenth century medieval Europe where, feudal lords, who were the epitomes of "power and possession, presented himself publicly as a form of symbol higher power"[34]. The later equivalent of this can be identified in the form of "political power as symbolised by the head of a state"[35]. In tracing this history, Habermasshows how this representative public sphere "of feudal authorities eventually disintegrated and separated the institutions of public authority such as the military and bureaucracy asindependent from the princely courts"[36]. The institutions apart, private individuals who had by then "formed diverse organisations such as urban corporations and territorial organisations together constituted what he terms, a bourgeoisie public sphere"[37] . Unlike the bourgeoisie publics of the Middle Ages, the unique feature of this form was that private individuals, who until then were passive actors of the state, transformed into "an active public body that belonged to the realm of society and stood in opposition to the state"[38]. The advent of print in the form of newspapers, critical journalism et al, as mediums of public communication, constituted also, a medium of this public sphere and various organs like political clubs, public rallies, to coffee houses became the physical spaces that gave a material form to the otherwise abstract idea of the public sphere. Thus, "private individuals adopted it to critique the ways of the public authority that adversely impacted their relevant spheres of labour and commodity exchange"[39]. In short, it marked the onset of a vigorous field where importance of things public, occupied crucial attention like never before.

However, with the onset of welfare state mass democracy, argues Habermas, the ambit of the public sphere widened to form many "competitive groups which sought to mediate their demands, resulting in a shrinking of coherence and high education which had marked the bourgeoisie public body"[40]. This has resulted in an undermining of its "crucial function of public discussion of the rationalisation of power to special interests"[41] only. The repercussions of this

[33]Habermas, Op.Cit.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36]Ibid., p.51.
[37] Ibid.
[38]Ibid., p.52.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41]Ibid., p.55.

transformed process has been that concerns which until now, had belonged to the private sphere, began to be increasingly debated in the public discourse. This became possible either through "the agency of political parties or directly with public administration"[42] leading to what he calls, "a re-feudalisation of the public sphere"[43]. Thus the very objective of the public sphere fears Habermas, is exposed to disintegrate with any radical transformation in its structure and the only way in which it can be sustained at this juncture, is as a space of "reorganised social and political power by competitive organisations are committed to the public sphere both in its internal structure as well as with the state and each other"[44].Habermas' understanding is indeed crucial inanalysing the modes of deliberation which heralds democratic participation of citizens against authoritarian powers of the state. Empirical manifestations of the public sphere as it has evolved in different parts of the globe could provide interesting ways of exploring different nuances.

To follow Habermas, what specific issues do qualify for debate in the public sphere? Also, how can one situate this frame of analysis in the context of religious, ethnic or other identity-specific issues which permeate the public discourse of many societies? The substantive ways of realizing the benefits of citizenship, at different times, calls for organising and challenging existing public discourses and finding a place for one's alternative discourse at times, resulting in contestation and conflict. Does it then signify a tension between an aspired public sphere and the realities posed by the practice of democratic citizenship?

We can find some nuances posed by democratic underpinnings in a public sphere in the work of Benhabib. She persuades us to "imagine new forms of political agency and subjectivity which heralds the emergence of new modalities of political citizenship through the concept of 'democratic iterations"[45]. Benhabib defines the concept of "democratic iterations" as

By democratic iterations I mean complex processes of public argument, deliberation, and exchange through which universalist rights claims and principles are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked, posited and positioned, throughout legal and political

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45]SeylaBenhabib, *The Rights of Others, Aliens, Residents and Citizens*, Cambridge University Press: New York, 2004, p. 179.

institutions, as well as in the associations of civil society. These can take place in the "strong" public bodies of legislatives, the judiciary, and the executive, as well as in the informal and "weak" publics of civil society associations and the media[46].

Though the concept of democratic iterations does not explicitly talk about a public sphere, its implications are evident in the nature of processes that it enjoins. Through an emphasis on the controversy of prohibition of wearing of headscarf in schools and public offices in France and Germany; and the case of challenging of citizenship laws pertaining to long-term resident non-citizens, Benhabib foregrounds the ways in which "democratic iterations have been realized"[47]. In the context of the act of prohibition of donning the headscarf in school and its defiance by some female students, Benhabib sees "a repositioning and re-articulation of rights in the public spheres of liberal democracies"[48].

Thus if we analyse a case from India, regarding the act of refusal of singing the national song *VandeMataram*in some schools in Kerala as a part of independence day celebrations on account of conflict with certain ideals of their religion, it would be seen that it symbolised a significant counter-voice to the mainstream discourse that obligates singing of the song.

All such instances, and processes in democratic settings, share a certain extent of qualities that give it a general frame of interpretation vis-a-vis certain basic conceptual underpinnings while proving different in many other empirical contexts. Nevertheless, the idea of the public sphere and its changing nature is evident in most societies around the world. As such, Somers argues that "the public sphere stands as a contested participatory site in which actors with overlapping identities such as legal subjects, citizens, economic actors, family et al come together"[49]. This space then enables these varied publics to "engage in negotiations and contestations over political and social life"[50]. This underlines the significance of studying citizenship practices by transcending the traditional way of analyzing "the relationship between the state and capitalism

[46]Ibid., p.181.
[47] Ibid.
[48]Ibid., p.184.
[49] Margaret R. Somers, "Citizenship and the Place of the Public Sphere: Law, Community, and Political Culture in the Transition to Democracy" in *American Sociological Review*, Vol.58, No.5, 1993, p.589.
[50] Ibid.

to include a sociology of public spheres and their relationships to the associational practices of civil societies"[51].

4. New Media Spaces and the Emergence of Varied Citizen- Publics

In contemporary times, a much ubiquitous phenomenon is that of new media marked by the wide usage of platforms like Facebook, Wassup, Twitter and Youtube etc. which has provided a new and unforetold space to citizens to voice their opinion and assume a virtual visible presence. Whether seen as a mode that can bridge distances, bring about equality between varied publics or aspiring for a cosmopolitan ethos, the onset of this new simultaneous private and public space appears to stay. This has brought in changes in the way these new media spaces have come to determine human engagement with one another, besides increased levels of interaction online, ability to connect with the happenings around thus democratising the foundations of the practice of citizenship in certain ways while keeping it intact in many other contexts.

This new technocratic phase has taken on an inverse relationship where unlike before, communicating has become increasingly fast-paced and diffuses easily to many different classes of people enhancing the possibility of building "networks between the local and the global"[52]. As argued by Drache, "new forms of communication and political activism causes one to rethink the dynamics of power and the way that digital technology enables power and authority to diffuse from the elite few towards the many"[53]. He cites the example of how "traditional clubs and organisations as well as political parties have witnessed a fall in memberships, yet more people are active than ever before in signing petitions, holding boycotts, and joining online communities"[54]. Studies from different countries of the world show how the apparently disinterested citizens are only "shifting their loyalties and not switching off their interests"[55].
Although Drache speaks in the context of a different set of background in a developed country like Canada, his analysis is hardly alien to the Indian scenario even if different in certain ways. This is evident from the online debates, protest and resistance against many issues in India which

[51]Ibid., pp.589- 590.
[52]Anita Gurumurthy, "Promoting Gender Equality?Some development-related uses of ICTs by women" in *Development in Practice*, Vol.16, No.6, 2006, p. 611.
[53] Daniel Drache, Defiant Publics, *The Unprecedented Reach of the Global Citizen*, Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 2008, p. 7.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

quickly disseminates.Besides resistance, the call for a 'digital India' is seen by the recent wave of wide support for the increasing need for digital India as propounded by Prime Minister NarendraModi. This had particularly appealed to the young and old publics alike and thus one could see the adoption of the graphic symbol of 'digital India' in the Facebook profiles of the much varied young publics. Also, a simultaneous voice, if it may be called a counter-public on this online platform, was the critique and questioning of this new phase that was in contrast to the many basic needs and demands that the government should be looking into rather than seeking the solution to every problem through digitalisation. Another recent example includes the pre-election campaign of NarendraModi which focussed on development and the modern appeals to technological changes which brought him the support of young and old alike signifying the importance attached to this latest drive in the history of the country when other aspects of communal violence and sectarianism get postponed. Though a small example, it is significant in itself showing how when it comes to the question of modern technological India, the other issues of democratic importance of the pertinent caste, communal and religious get postponed. This is one part of the story. Another important aspect which cannot be overlooked is the appropriation of ICTs by many marginalised citizens in the improvement of their live circumstances or even providing a platform to alternative publics such as the sexual minorities who through their queer public events have been able to mobilise increasing sensitivity to their predicaments.

A question to be pondered upon here is the kind of role that new communication technologies play in the processes of the public sphere as delineated in the preceding sections. Also what is the nature of citizenship practice that increased access to and participation in a technologically mediated public sphere brings forth? How different is this new/ or are these new public spaces from previous ones? Does it imply a widening of democratic spaces for previously disadvantaged publics? Does increased adoption of new communication technologies in any way enhance or undermine democratic citizenship rights of citizens?

As shown by Gurumurthy, "the internet has brought about a new public sphere which enables different categories of marginal citizens to assert their identities and voice for their human rights

including women, the disabled and the sexual minorities"[56]. This is indeed a much positive development given that such groups have historically been rather under-represented. An associated feature that is noticed however, is the relatively urban leaning of this phenomenon. How do we then locate the many other marginal categories of Indian citizens who still remain out of the league? Does it then take one to the now much clichéd story of 'digital divide'? As shown by different studies, adoption of information and communication technologies may hold a different set of objectives and significance for different citizens in the rural and hinterlands of India.

As different studies have shown, new communication appropriation in many interior areas goes beyond the digital divide story, as, even if not internet, the penetration of mobile phones, radios and satellite television marks the onset of new forms of knowledge and networking for citizens, in many instances related to the very questions of livelihood and existence. For instance, Shreekumar, in one of his studies in Kerala, shows how "the adoption and domestication of cell phones by fish workers has played a significant role in their cultural and ecological life"[57]. Through his studies, Shreekumar proposes that "the mobile phone's sociological landscape in the rural setting has begun a new human-technology relationship which is socially and culturally rooted and that redefines the community's ecology of survival"[58]. This study underscores the significance of approaching the story of ICTs from the very macro cases to a more grassroots level which may have different links to connect to the technological phase.

Does technological appropriation in the case of much marginalised citizens then imply significance only in terms of its instrumentality for survival? Or are there other ways of exploring it too such as thepursuit of aspirations for the more substantive fulfilment of democratic practices, given that ICTs now permeates most remote corners of the country that can be imagined of? These questions can provide impetus to delve deeper into the socio-political and cultural lifeworlds of different citizens, placed in varied local public spheres.

[56] Anita Gurumurthy, "Political Economy of the Information Society, A Southern View" in WSISPapers.Choike.org. 2005, p. 2.
[57] T.T Shreekumar, "Mobile Phones and the Cultural Ecology of Fishing in Kerala" in *The Information Society*, 27, 2011, p. 173.
[58] Ibid., p.178.

Another study on the appropriation of ICTs by marginalised communities is provided by Pavarala. He in his study "analyses the functioning of a community radio initiative called *ChalaHoGaon Mein* in the Palamau district of Jharkhand"[59]. Through a detailed field study, of local programmes, discussion and debates from nearby villages in the community radio, he found its significance from the denizens themselves. He concludes that using new media technologies such as this "in marginal rural areas holds much significance particularly in the case of economically deprived areas such as Palamau marked by widespread illiteracy, apathy of the state and mainstream media"[60]. To extend this to more "classical questions such as representation, democracy, citizenship etc"[61], one can fairly say that ICTs with its nature of disseminating and enabling communication and knowledge, does also relate to the very ideas of democratic citizenship if citizenship in its most substantive sense implies "creating a more egalitarian society"[62].

5. Conclusion

As new media spaces have led to new realities for people to communicate through, publics and counter public to be formed, the question may be to ask, whether it marks the onset of a new kind of democratic situation. While the internet and its appropriation may be more elite driven, the most common means of information and communication technologies especially mobile phones seem the most accessible of all, to all and sundry. It is here that one can engage with how it influences the democratic impulse of citizenship in an age where besides the traditional tenets of rights, duties etc, information has also emerged as one of the significant signposts of determining who has and does not have access to it, its euphemism being the 'digital divide'. Following from the theoretical engagement in this paper, it can be argued that while new communication technologies are often seen as global in nature, the way it enmeshes with the local contexts of various countries engenders diverse nuances of technologies that bring forth interesting and novel ways of understanding epistemologies of new media and the nature of

[59]VinodPavarala, "Building Solidarities: A Case of Community Radio in Jharkhand" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.38, No.22, 2003, p. 2188.
[60]Ibid., p.2196.
[61] Charles D Raab and Christine Bellamy, "Electronic Democracy and the Mixed Polity" in Rachel K Gibson, Andrea Rommele and Stephen J Ward (eds), *Electronic Democracy, Mobilisation, Organisation and Participation via New ICTs*, Routledge: London and New York, 2003, p. 18.
[62]NirajaGopalJayal, "The Challenge of Human Development: inclusion or Democratic Citizenship" in *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, Vol.10, No.3, 2009, pp. 361-362.

citizenship practices. Citizens in their varied ways have innovated ways to be a part of this new public era where being public materialises in different forms for citizens located differently in socio-political contexts, yet with an aspiration to bring out their public selves as they decipher it in their everyday.

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