

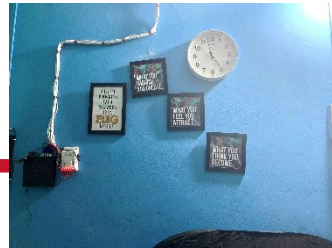
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Privatising hope: YouTube motivational speakers, affective regional subjectivities and the making of the “creative” entrepreneur class in India

Motivational speakers, personal development gurus—these performative identities, have become key figures of the contemporary neoliberal state. In India, the current right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People’s Party, BJP) government introduced and popularised the phrase *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* (Self-Reliant India Mission) during 2020 in the wake of the fragile economic situation post-Covid insisting on self-reliance at the state as well the individual level. In short, individuals were increasingly held liable for their employment and entrepreneurs became coveted representatives. My presentation, with an ethnography of such local motivational speakers on Youtubers, examines them within the context of aspirational labour (Duffy 2015) to question how the platform facilitates the creation of a new class of creative entrepreneurs by mining affective regional subjectivities. This research contends that the emergence of the creative entrepreneurs unearths the challenges the merging of formal and informal labour as well as the aspirational and the entrepreneurial results in within an authoritarian framework. In the shroud of self-improvement, an ascending authoritarian state ends up reiterating the belief that we are the problem, the system is not. Digital platforms such as YouTube furthered the growth of the gig economy and hustle culture by accommodating these motivating messiahs. To drive this point home, I analyse the YouTuber Krishna Kanta Sinha (KKS) and his channel [KKSinha Motivational Speaker](#). Created in 2017, initially as a channel to promote direct-selling products, the channel currently has over 370K subscribers (until September 2024). KKS recognises the distributive power of platforms such as YouTube in delivering information in an increasingly precarious, neoliberal economy, since “information” figures as an integral aspirational currency in this [techno feudalist state](#). In India characters such as [KKS emerge from the small towns](#), from more local constituents far more frequently. They are subset of the horde of motivational speakers that YouTube has attracted from all over the world in the last decade, more so from non-English speaking pockets. Neoliberalism is legitimised through characters such as KKS emerging from the local, configuring the aspirational currency firmly as a survival strategy.

Motivational quotes framed at the office of YouTuber Krishna. Photo: Sagorika Singha, Silchar 2023

Sagorika Singha is an IRGAC-RLS Postdoctoral Fellow at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main and at The Sarai Programme, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi. She completed her doctoral studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University (2020). Her research focuses on digital cultures, celebrity studies, new media forms, and subcultural politics. Her current work looks at the Indian YouTubers’ impact on local creative industries, media materialities and transnational/national geographies. Previously, she was a Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Internet Studies (CAIS), Bochum.

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