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India's Media Boom:
The Good News and the Bad

Edited by James Painter





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Cover images:

Top: A tribal woman sits outside her house in the Maoist-dominated Chinnagellur village, in the eastern Indian state of Chhattisgarh June 24, 2010. REUTERS/Rupak De Chowdhuri

Bottom: Priyanka Gandhi Vadera (C), daughter of India's ruling Congress party Chief Sonia Gandhi, speaks to the media during a stopover at Rae Bareli district as part of her pre-election campaign in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh January 17, 2012. REUTERS/Adnan Abidi



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List of Contributors

Parul Agrawal is a multi-media producer at the BBC World Service. She began her career as a television journalist in 2006, reporting on issues related to human development in states affected by Naxal violence. She later joined Network 18 to produce *The Citizen Journalist Show*, a platform for citizens to report their stories from all across India. She was a journalist fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ) at Oxford University in Trinity term 2012, sponsored by BBC Media Action, formerly the BBC World Service Trust.

Jasodhara Banerjee is a journalist and deputy head of desk at Forbes India. She started her career at the *Indian Express* in the city of Pune, and spent three years at the *Hindustan Times* in Mumbai editing the front page and other sections of the paper. She has an MA in International Relations from the University of Leeds in the UK. She was a journalist fellow at the RISJ in Hilary and Trinity terms 2012, sponsored by the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

John Lloyd is a contributing editor for the *Financial Times*, co-founder and Director of Journalism at the RISJ, chairman of the advisory board of the Moscow School of Political Studies, and an associate fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford. He is also a columnist for *La Repubblica* of Rome and for Reuters.com. His books include *Loss without Limit: The British Miners' Strike* (1986), *Rebirth of a Nation: An Anatomy of Russia* (1997), and *What the Media are Doing to Our Politics* (2004).

James Painter is the Head of the Journalism Fellowship programme at the RISJ. He is the author of several RISJ publications including *Counter-Hegemonic News* (2008), *Summoned by Science* (2010), *Poles Apart: The International Reporting of Climate Scepticism* (2011) and *Climate Change in the Media: Reporting Risk and Uncertainty* (September 2013). He worked at the BBC World Service from 1992 to 2008.

Prannoy Roy is co-chairperson and was co-founder, along with his journalist wife Radhika, of New Delhi Television (NDTV) in 1984. He has won numerous awards for his programmes and was named Television Personality of the Millennium by an *Indian Express* poll. He has been the lead anchor for election specials on India's national television network Doordarshan and lead anchor for BBC World's *Question Time India*. He has been an economic adviser in the Indian Finance Ministry, and an Associate Professor at the Delhi School of Economics.

Arijit Sen is a senior editor for CNN-IBN, reporting from the conflict zones of North-Eastern India and bordering regions since 2007. Previously he has worked at NDTV as an assistant output editor, and joined CNN India Broadcast News as a senior correspondent in New Delhi in 2006. He is the winner of several awards including India's prestigious Ramnath Goenka Award for Excellence in Journalism twice in succession (2008–9 and 2009–10). He was a journalist fellow at the RISJ in Hilary and Trinity terms 2011, sponsored by the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

Supriya Sharma is an assistant editor with the *Times of India*. Since 2010 she has been covering the various conflicts in the state of Chhattisgarh. In 2003 she started work with NDTV, travelling widely to report on social change in both the cities and the rural hinterland. In 2012 she won an award from the International Committee for Red Cross and the Press Institute of India for her reportage on humanitarian issues. She was a journalist fellow at the RISJ in Hilary and Trinity terms 2012, sponsored by the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Introduction

James Painter

This book is a collection of timely essays about the extraordinarily vibrant – but seriously flawed – media landscape in India. Its point of departure is the remarkable boom in print and broadcast media since the early 1990s, a boom that is an alien phenomenon for many in the West accustomed to the constant 'bad news' narrative of declining revenue and circulation for the traditional print media. The figures are remarkable: the number of news channels is expected to reach over 250 by the time of the next general election in 2014; radio has grown from only one government-owned network, All India Radio, 25 years ago to nearly 250 private FM radio stations today; and India boasts the world's biggest-selling English-language newspaper, the *Times of India*, with a circulation of more than 3m, and a readership of at least twice that.

The positive side to this media explosion has been a diverse, muscular, and largely free press, noisily holding power to account and exposing its faults and inadequacies. But in the words of an eminent newspaper editor quoted in one of this book's essays, the present 'is unquestionably the best of times, and also, unfortunately, the worst of times'. Along with the boundless energy of the media come several downsides, and particularly corruption, paid news, and a narrow editorial agenda aimed at the preferences and prejudices of India's largely urban and booming middle class.

In the first essay in this book, Prannoy Roy, India's best known anchor from the country's most respected television channel, NDTV, lays out some of the achievements of the past but strikes a cautionary note about the looming problems of the future. In what was originally the

annual Reuters Institute memorial lecture of November 2012, Roy weaves together a compelling story of the first 25 years of his television channel against the backdrop of the technological and political forces driving the wider changes in the Indian media.

He highlights three major problems: the 'tabloidisation' of the media, which is by no means peculiar to India, but which in its lowest form has one Indian television channel announcing before a commercial break that it will next show its audience a rape; the fiddling of the viewership ratings to attract more advertising; and the practice of newspapers and television channels asking companies or politicians to pay for news, and then, at times, not even making it clear that the 'news' item has been paid for. Roy makes a powerful case that the India media could be at a tipping point, in which they begin to lose their credibility. He argues that 'the media needs to take the lead, to look beyond short-term profits and take action in the interests of our own long-term freedom and credibility'. And in particular, he is in favour of the implementation of defamation laws 'by the judiciary, in consultation with the media, but totally independent of government'.

In his essay, a version of which was originally published in the weekend *Financial Times* in October 2012, John Lloyd recounts a recent personal journey he took through India's media landscape in New Delhi and Mumbai. Like Prannoy Roy, he applauds the ability of the media to hold political power to account in a way that no other Indian institution has the capacity or will to do so. But in a series of interviews with leading editors and media owners, Lloyd too hears of the widespread corruption amongst journalists and the practice of paid news. He points out that the media's concentration on politics, cricket, and celebrity, or 'infotainment' as Professor Daya Thussu has called it, sacrifices coverage of more significant issues like poverty, conflict, and development on the altar of entertainment. These media 'blind spots' are the common theme of the four other essays in this book.

They are all written by young Indian journalists who took time out from the daily demands of deadlines to pause and reflect on the current state and direction of Indian journalism. During their time as fellows on the Thomson Reuters journalist programme, they had time to write long research essays on different aspects of the current state of Indian media, which have been edited down and updated for this volume. They share a common concern that certain stories or themes of central importance to India's current status and future direction are being largely ignored by the mainstream media.

The central state of Chhattisgarh has become something of a test case for both the nature of India's economic growth and the values of Indian journalism. It illustrates how India's high growth path coexists with inequity and social injustice, especially in the mineral-rich central and eastern states like Chhattisgarh, where the land of peasant communities including adivasis or indigenous people is being acquired for mining and energy projects.

The state accounts for nearly one-third of the deaths in the Maoist insurgency over the last decade, and holds nearly one-fifth of India's coal and iron ore reserves. It is also the region from where Supriya Sharma, an assistant editor with the *Times of India* and a former employee of NDTV, has been filing reports since 2010. Sharma eloquently explains how there are two separate conflicts going on in the state – an armed conflict between Maoists and the security forces in the south, and a conflict over resources that is more intense in the northern districts.

Her study of 500 articles from the regional and national press finds that the Maoist conflict in the south attracts far greater media attention than the resource conflict in the north; this result, she argues, is consistent with the universal fault lines of news as documented by media scholars, that violence has high news value, and journalists give more privilege to authority sources and culture. She also points out the leading newspapers in the state now have large mining and power interests behind them and rarely report disputes. But she concludes with a wider implication: when peaceful protestors defending their rights are unable to secure space in the media, not only do they stand weakened, but democratic politics suffers too.

Arijit Sen also has a long history of reporting away from India's urban centres. Since 2007 he has been trying to convince his bosses at CNN-IBN – with some success – that the various conflicts with rebel groups in India's north-eastern states deserve more attention. From 2005 to January 2011, a larger number of civilians were killed in the North-East (1,772) than in Kashmir (1,139), and yet in most media outlets Kashmir is given a lot of coverage whereas the North-East is mentioned only sporadically.

In his essay, Sen charts what he calls 'the veil of selective silence' cast over the region by most of the mainstream, urban-based media. The result, he says, is that, despite the widespread violence and the strategic importance of the region, the North-East has been reduced almost to a footnote in Indian history and has become an invisible part of world. The few times the region is covered, he says, it is subject to misrepresentation and stereotypes. The result is that, in metropolitan India, the dominant image of the North-East remains that of an alien frontier.

A similar tale is told by Jasodhara Banerjee, although this time it is the declining interest of the Indian media in foreign news at a time when India is being touted as a future economic and political superpower with a loud voice in international meetings and organisations. As is well-known, the country is on course to become the world's most populous nation sometime in the next 10–20 years. Banerjee, who currently works for Forbes India, is interested in business and economics and particularly India's growing economic ties with China.

She first lays out the remarkable changes in India's economy and trading relations since the economic reforms of the early 1990s. She uses a case study of the burgeoning trade and economic cooperation between India and China which coexists with an ongoing fraught political relationship over long-standing border disputes. Then she charts the marked decline in foreign coverage between 1979 and 2012 in three English-language newspapers at a time when foreign news should have become more, not less, important. Leading foreign editors tell her that there are a variety of reasons for this: India itself has become a more interesting topic to cover; middle-class readers want more about cricket, cinema, and lifestyle; and many readers are only interested in foreign news coverage if Indians are involved.

In the final essay, we return to the state of Chhattisgarh to conclude the book on a more positive note. It is here that Shubhranshu Choudhary, a former BBC journalist in India, had grown uneasy with a journalism that skimmed the surface of events. Choudhary told John Lloyd that 'journalists would often fly into the state, speak to interviewees then leave'. As Lloyd writes,

> *This may be common media behaviour everywhere, but it pricked Choudhary's conscience. He founded and developed CGNet Swara (swara means 'voice' in several Indian languages), a network that used the internet and mobile phones – which even poor people in the state often own. The Adivasis have historically no written language and no journalists. Choudhary believes his citizens' network to be a bottom-up force, avoiding the traps of celebrity and corruption.*

Parul Agrawal, a journalist with the BBC World Service in India, chooses CGNet Swara in Chhattisgarh as one of her two case studies of successful citizen journalism initiatives in India. The other is a television programme called the *Citizen Journalist* Show which is broadcast on the national English news channel CNN-IBN and its sister channel IBN7, where she

used to work. She argues that citizen journalism has in part filled the gap of 'accountability journalism' left by the most of the mainstream media, which makes local officials and governments more likely to address local grievances. She examines some of the reasons peculiar to India why these two most successful citizen journalism initiatives have evolved as a collaboration – in different ways – between ordinary citizens and professional journalists working in the mainstream media.

The particular strength of this book is that all the essays are written by practising journalists. It is a source of particular pride to the Reuters Institute that four of the essays have been written by young Indian journalists, as it is a priority of the fellowship programme that the journalists who come to Oxford should write serious, well-argued, and well-researched papers that help to bridge the gap between the academic world and the world of practising journalists.

But it is more important that all six journalists featured in this book share a deep concern for the practice and future of Indian journalism. As John Lloyd concludes in his essay, India's journalism is critically important not just to India but to the world's news media in that 'its freedom should be used both to chronicle and to illuminate the growth of the state, and the travails of its people. Its present limitations are obvious: its potential is very large.'

1. More News is Good News: Democracy and Media in India

Prannoy Roy

Two factors seem to have driven the rapid transformation of the media in India: first, the intrinsic force of new technologies that challenge and bypass government control; and second, the unstoppable energy of India's chaotic, anarchic, and creative democracy. The combination has created an empowered, free, and aggressive media. And, in an uncanny parallel with Britain, we too are now in the midst of a debate on how much regulation, if any, the media in India needs.

NDTV has just entered its 25th year. During this period we have seen the electronic media landscape in India change radically. From just one government-owned channel, Doordarshan with its heavily controlled and censored news bulletins, we now have, at last count, 182 news channels, all uncontrolled and uncensored. And by the time of our next general election, scheduled for 2014, we expect the number to rise to well over 250.

In many ways, India's news channels act like broadcast versions of websites all over the world: they are disruptive, challenging, and, most importantly, have no fear of fines or penalties. While the fearlessness of the internet often hides behind the veil of anonymity – after all, you cannot punish the unknown – India's broadcast media also thrives in a punishment-free environment, but with a different fig-leaf: our defamation, libel, and privacy laws are feebly enforced by the courts, and it can take up to 20 years to get justice.

Radio has exploded on a similar scale. From 25 years ago, with only one government-owned network, All India Radio, or AIR, we have today nearly 250 private FM radio stations. They are still not allowed to broadcast news – an indication that, wherever it is able to, the government still clings on to regulation and control.

Twenty-five years ago we got the news, at first by telex and teleprinters, then by fax (when NDTV started, our first technology choice was between a telex machine and a fax machine!), and now, of course, by email, Twitter, and Facebook. The phone too is now a media device where millions get their news, cricket scores, popular music, and even astrological predictions. From 5m phones 25 years ago, today there are 900m. And with 4G about to take off in India, I estimate there will be close to 600m broadband internet users within five years, up from 140m today. Broadband internet is going to be the next mobile revolution.

Despite this growth in the electronic media, India remains one of the few countries where newspapers are still growing, adding 20m readers a year – about the size of a small European country. More significant than the numbers is the change in the nature of India's media. From censorship and government control 25 years ago, today they are free and overwhelmingly in private hands. And, for all their faults, they are vibrant, hard-hitting, and run primarily by younger Indians (who are far more talented than we ever were) and who, with democracy in their DNA, tend to question everything. They make Amartya Sen's 'Argumentative Indian' look like a bit of a wimp!

Moreover, the electronic media are run by a high proportion of female journalists and producers. In NDTV their share is about 66%. Many economists argue that the highest rate of return in any economy comes from investment in female human capital. That has certainly proved to be true in our case.

India's media are unlike media in most other Third World countries. In fact, many believe that, like our IT software sector, it is comparable with media in some of the most advanced nations. But it is not all good news. I believe that in India, as well as globally, the media are at a crossroads and need analysis, debate, and a certain amount of introspection. Never has their role been more important. At the same time, never has it been so confused – and, some would say, misused.

Media, Democracy, and Elections

With virtually no external restraints, India's media run on self-regulation, which gives them enormous 'soft power' to set the agenda. This 'soft power' is now a vital tool of India's democracy. In the first phase of our democracy – the first 30 years since 1947 – 80% of governments were voted back into power. That was our 'docile phase', when the media were at their weakest and literacy at its lowest. The second phase was the opposite. In the 25 years after 1977, 60% of governments were thrown out. This was our 'volatile' or 'angry phase', after the Emergency. The 'anti-incumbency' mood was the result of a maturing electorate, the failure of politicians to deliver, and the beginnings of an aggressive media environment. But they were still essentially print media, and did not reach the number of voters that television does today. Consequently, voters didn't really have enough information to distinguish between different hues of politicians. They just assumed that virtually all politicians were incompetent or corrupt, and threw them out.

In our third phase, the last ten years, half of our governments have been voted out, while half have been voted back. This has been the 'more discerning phase', where relatively good governments are voted back, while poor performers are voted out. The explosion of Indian media over the last ten years has reached so many more voters with a deluge of information – television, mobile phones, and radio – and as a result blind anti-incumbency appears to have been replaced with a more informed vote.

In the first two phases of our democracy, our politicians used to be seen twice in five years: first on the campaign trail, asking to be elected, and the same again next time around, pleading to be re-elected. Now, everywhere our leaders go there are 50 microphones constantly thrust under their noses. The non-stop glare of media attention has, so to speak, let the sunlight in on the magic, and that earlier enormous gap between the voter and politician is narrower now than it ever was. Politicians, too, have come to understand that the reach of the media is no longer confined to the more literate and the privileged voter. Television reaches even those who cannot read or write. It has become an integral part of our democracy.

Perhaps even more important, the media also delivers key messages from voters to politicians. In many ways, India's new 'more discerning' democracy is becoming a driving force that pushes development and growth. Gone are the days where leaders could deliver the infamous

'Hindu Rate of Growth' of 3.5% and still be re-elected. Today, with a better informed and more mature electorate, the message is clear: either deliver on 'BSP', Bijli Sadak Pani – Electricity, Roads, Water – or you are out. I may be overstating the case, but it may not be a mere coincidence that the last ten years have seen an average 8% growth rate along with the explosion of the media.

Media and Corruption

This new and aggressive media is also a driving force behind exposing corruption. As scams and scandals emerge with tedious frequency, today's India seems to be more corrupt than ever before. But, in truth, corruption has always been endemic. Only now is it being exposed by the media, and some of the corrupt are actually facing punishment.

With the media's unrelenting focus on corruption, India is perhaps beginning a 'cleansing process'. In the short run, exposing scams and scandals may be harmful for the image of the country, but in the longer term, I firmly believe that this is likely to lead to a better, cleaner India. Though I would not go so far as to say, as Boris Johnson did, that 'To rinse the gutters of public life, you need a gutter press.' Quite the opposite, in fact.

Oddly enough, and contrary to widespread belief, corruption is still *not* a significant election issue. A recent national opinion poll NDTV carried out showed that while corruption tops the list as the most important issue for voters, it is not an issue that determines the choice of which party to vote for. This contradiction is easily explained: our poll shows that voters see all parties as equally corrupt. I remember on one of our shows, the well-known writer Cho Ramaswamy saying that 'In my constituency I have to vote between a thief and a pickpocket!'

As an aside let me say that, along with the changing media, politicians have also changed. When we used to question them 25 years ago they would clear their throats, look at themselves in the studio monitor, launch into a historical perspective – and take three minutes to get to the point. Now they are sharp and make three points in 20 seconds, very well aware that if they take longer they may be edited out. And by having to be on TV so much, our politicians today are better groomed and better looking, a welcome fringe benefit of the permanent lens.

Technology and Elections

Let me tell you how much the technology of elections has changed and impacted not just voter behaviour, but our lives on election night – and how it has ruined our lives too! When David Butler[1] and I started live television coverage of election results 28 years ago in India, the country used the good old ballot paper. Counting votes would take ages: three days and three nights to count 240m ballot papers. In those days we would not sleep for 72 hours at a stretch, remaining virtually always on air, analysing results, hypothesising, predicting as the count inched its way forward – and yes, forecasting was a delight. Our 'revolutionary technology' then was an Apple 2. For the first time India, through Apple 2 graphics, saw and heard the theory of 'the uniform swing' and of 'homogenous swing zones' in a heterogeneous society. The only thing that kept us going during those long hours was adrenalin and another Nuffield College scholar, the late Paul McKee. Since India loves its elections, and since at that time there was only one TV channel, viewership levels couldn't be higher. It was heady stuff. The words 'swing' and 'psephology' became household terms.

India has come a long way technologically. We no longer use ballot papers. Instead we now have the most wonderful Electronic Voting Machines, robust, reliable, and, I believe, substantially tamper-proof. And, since these machines are deliberately kept off-line, hackers can't get at them. These are now used to count more than 400m ballots (that is 13 times the number of votes in British elections, and three times as many as in the American elections). Thus far, the counting of these hundreds of millions of votes, election after election, has been virtually error-free and scandal-free.

So when I heard a BBC reporter at the recent US elections say that in Florida the counting of votes is like a 'Third World country' I couldn't quite get what she meant. In fact, President Obama set a goal for himself during his acceptance speech in Chicago. He thanked everyone who cast her or his ballot, 'whether you voted for the first time or waited in line a very long time', then he quickly added, 'By the way, we have to fix that.' Well, Mr President, all you have to do is come to India, and we'll show you how to fix it.

While these magnificent voting machines have been a huge success, they have also reduced the time taken to announce the results. From what used to take up to 100 hours to count ballot papers, it now takes just 10

[1] Sir David Butler is one of Britain's leading psephologists and an Emeritus Fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford

hours using voting machines. This is of course wonderful for the people of India, but it has ruined our business model. Where we used to be able to guarantee three days and nights to advertisers, we now wrap up in just 10 hours. It's all over in a flash – and, with it, our revenues!

Technology, elections, and media are a heady mix that can also make one do outrageous things. I must make an admission of guilt over an experiment that we will never repeat. We carried it out only because we felt it would pass the 'Butler Test'. David always pointed us to research which shows that opinion polls do not affect actual voting behaviour. So we went ahead with a top-secret exercise in 2007.

This was during the assembly elections in the state of Punjab, when we carried out the world's first and only 'Insta-Poll'. It was a huge exit poll with a difference: we used mobile phones extensively to send in data after asking people whom they had voted for as they emerged from the polling booths. Keys were assigned to individual political parties, and every time one key on a mobile phone was pressed for any party, from each of the hundreds of locations, it would be processed in our central servers and transmitted live on air. From the first vote in the morning to the last vote at night, a graphic was constantly on the screen indicating, in real-time, who's winning and who's losing, throughout voting day. We called it an Insta-Poll for obvious reasons. And in the end our results were dead accurate. This also suggests that it didn't influence voting behaviour. The Election Commission thought otherwise, and sued us in each of the 21 districts of Punjab. It was only a few months ago that they withdrew the cases.

The Story of India's Transforming Media Landscape, through NDTV's Experience

Our own story actually begins 25 years ago. It is the story of a long and unrelenting struggle by India's electronic media against government control. I hope that some of this history can be better understood through the life and times of NDTV.

When my wife, Radhika, who had been a print journalist with the hard-hitting broadsheet newspaper the *Indian Express* and the leading news magazine *India Today*, decided to start a private television news organisation, she recognised that in the prevailing controlled environment it would be impossible to cover hard news on India. This was 1988 when there was, as I said earlier, just one national TV channel – the government-owned terrestrial broadcaster, Doordarshan.

So when I joined Radhika and we began to work together to create NDTV, the first challenge we faced was that we were not allowed to report news on or about our own country. Many journalists in Third World countries face this restriction even today. Although the Indian print press was free, television news, probably because of its greater reach, was a government monopoly. And there was no indication that the government was going to give up this monopoly in the foreseeable future. So, as journalists, what were we supposed to do? We applied for, and got, permission to cover international news. The caveat was clear and ominous: 'No news on India'.

So we launched a weekly programme called *The World This Week*. Fortunately, in comparison with the bland news on Doordarshan, which had virtually no visuals, and was more like radio than TV, it was not difficult to look good. We were lucky because this was also a period when the world was in turmoil. It was probably the newsiest decade in television history. While we were on air the Berlin Wall came down, the USSR disintegrated, Tiananmen Square erupted in protest. *The World This Week* sowed the seeds of private news television. Yet news on or about India remained stubbornly out of bounds.

There were other challenges too: every story we did had to be vetted and cleared by government officials. We faced a choice that many in the media in developing countries still do: should we succumb to this censorship, or refuse and be banned from television? We told the government officials that, yes, we would send them our scripts for all our stories – but if they changed one word of any script, we would drop the entire story, no matter how important, and replace it with a completely different one. It worked. They thought a great deal before suggesting a change in any story. We still had to drop many good stories, but we never telecast a censored one.

Along with *The World This Week*, we did several election shows, but these were live, so the question of censorship didn't arise. Except for one election, when a particularly obnoxious but powerful official in the Prime Minister's office called us, about 12 hours before we were to go on air, and told us we were not to discuss the results of certain constituencies – or else! Even though everything was ready – the sets up, and rehearsals done, reporters in place all across the country, lots of money spent, advertisements about the show already published that morning in several papers – we told the official that either we should be allowed to report without any restriction or else we would call off the entire show. He didn't agree. The show was cancelled and we began to

pack up. Then suddenly, with only an hour before we were scheduled to go live on air, while we were packing up and bringing down the sets, we got another call. Apparently Rajiv Gandhi, who was the Prime Minister at the time, had only just heard about the decision to call off the programme, and was furious. We were told to go ahead.

Perhaps the first tectonic shift in India's broadcasting policy came in 1995. We had been badgering the government to allow us to report news about India. Then one day a risk-taking, genuinely enlightened head of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting decided to give us a chance, and allotted us a nightly half-hour slot for national news on the government channel. He added that the government wouldn't pay us a penny for our costs of production. We started our rounds of private companies with the plea: 'Please fund the first-ever private news programme in India. It's the beginning of a new era.' The response was terrific. Mr Ratan Tata was the first to say yes, five others followed – and we were ready to go with three years' funding, editorial independence assured. On 5 February 1995 we aired India's first-ever private news broadcast.

We stumbled right at the start. On the very first night of our news broadcast I was anchoring and decided to show off a little. As we went on air, I looked at my watch and said 'It's 8 o'clock and this news comes to you live.' Someone in the PM's office heard the word 'live' and threw a fit. 'Live' was a four-letter word that, freely translated, meant 'unmitigated danger'. Until that moment nothing had ever gone on air without being previewed. So we were warned that evening: 'Do not go live – or else!' Horrified at the thought of being previewed and censored every night, we had to think out of the box. So we bought a computer with a huge hard disc and started our 8 pm news broadcast at ten minutes to 8 o'clock, and recorded it 'as live'. The video went into the computer disc and was programmed to stay there for exactly 10 minutes and then transmit on air – exactly at 8 pm.

The PM's office could relax, because technically we were not 'live'. In reality of course, nobody could preview or change anything while it sat in the computer's hard disc for those 10 minutes. Still, it served the purpose, ours and theirs, and for a few years, while our news programme remained on air, our studios had two clocks everywhere: one on Indian Standard Time and one on 'NDTV time', which was 10 minutes ahead of India's time. So our news broadcast went 'live' at 8 o'clock sharp NDTV-time, into a hard disc for 10 minutes before being broadcast to the country at 8 pm sharp, Indian Standard Time – untouched by human hand, but technically not 'live'.

We had to use similarly 'creative' devices to overcome other hurdles that kept cropping up. For example, the rules did not allow us to use normal satellite links for video, but we found that stockbrokers were allowed VSat terminals for data transmission. So our team wrote an algorithm that converted video into data, sent that data across VSat terminals via satellite, and then another algorithm reconverted data back to video. That made us the fastest with the news and yet kept us within the up-linking laws.

As an aside, for decades up till this time, BBC radio had virtually dominated India as a reliable and preferred source of news. In fact, the BBC, which is a huge brand in India, held over 60% of the news market. With our public-sector broadcaster as its only competition, the BBC's life was easy. Today, with competition from a slew of private news channels, the BBC's share has dwindled from 60% to less than 6%. Given its once loyal following in India, I feel the BBC missed a trick by not focusing on India. Now I fear it is too late.

The Explosion in Private News Channels: 1989 Onwards

After some years, and lots of time spent convincing the government, 'live' stopped being an uncomfortable four-letter word. (We squeezed the 10-minute delay to five minutes, to three minutes, and eventually to zero.) We became the first to go live – and with it came our next step, which in hindsight started a new direction for news in India. Rupert Murdoch asked us to produce, first the 9 o'clock news on his entertainment channel and later, a 24-hour news channel. He financed the entire operation, but to his credit had no hesitation in giving us total editorial control. One man who worked at Murdoch's Star TV, John O'Loan, one of the finest TV professionals I have known, ensured that we succeeded in launching India's first 24-hour news channel. Few realised at the time that this would be the beginning of a flood – sorry, a tsunami – of news channels in India. Once Mr Murdoch started a 24-hour news channel, everyone seemed eager to start one too, and the explosion followed: in English, Hindi, regional languages – anything. Consequently, perhaps the biggest challenge facing news channels – in fact all of TV in India – is excessive competition and fragmentation.

Many media analysts miss this point, as they focus only on the rapid growth of advertising revenues in India. They are impressed with the advertising market's growth figures of around 14% a year – which is indeed impressive by world standards. But for us on the ground, that is

only half the story. Advertising revenues reflect only the demand side of media. The supply side – i.e. the advertising time available – is growing in India at a rate of 35% to 40% a year. As a result, supply is growing almost three times faster than demand, because of the number of new channels starting every month, and because each channel offers more time per hour for advertisements. India's television sector has become almost as fragmented as the dot.com sector in Britain or America. The problems are similar too: low advertising rates, resulting in losses. Only the top television channel in each genre makes a profit. For the rest, losses are the norm.

There are several reasons why the number of news channels has increased from just one channel in 2004 to 182 today. First, the barriers to entry have come down, both because of liberalisation – it is much easier now to get a licence to start a news channel – and because of the declining capital cost of launching a news channel, which is down by 95% in just eight years. Television's greater reach and its ability to influence public opinion has also become a key motivator for many political parties which have started their own news channels. Finally, the glamour and the perception of power associated with television are powerful motivators.

The following might seem like an apocryphal story but it happens to be true. An editor friend of mine had a knock on his door not so long ago. It turned out to be a well-known builder, desperate to start a news channel. 'Money is not important. I will finance it all', he said. When my friend asked him why, the builder said:

> *I am one of the biggest builders in this country and I put in a bid for a recent tender for a mega-project in Uttar Pradesh. Everyone in the short-list was called to meet the Chief Minister. I went too, but had to wait for eight hours before he called me in. However, anyone who had a news channel walked right in without waiting a minute!*

The growing power of the media suggests that, five years from now, 'soft power' could become as important as hardware in war and conflict zones. For example, after the India–Pakistan war in Kargil in 1999, the Pakistani president is reported to have said, 'India won the war because of its media.' That lesson, and the shock that President Musharraf received at the failed Agra Summit in 2001, when he was constantly surrounded by dozens of Indian TV channels – he had been used to solitary government reporters following him obediently – was a key

factor behind the opening up of the media in Pakistan. From total state control at the time of the Kargil war, Pakistan's media has since 2002 been free and, despite many challenges, threats, and hurdles, is fearless, energetic, and aggressive.

At every stage in the opening up, India's media were in confrontation with the government of the time. No matter which party was in power, the one thing that ran through all their veins was the impulse to keep control. Threats were a weekly occurrence.

For example, there were some in the government who blamed the failure of the Agra Summit on NDTV's telecast of the editors' breakfast meeting with President Musharraf on the last day of the summit. We began receiving threats that we were about to lose our licence. As a first step, the government cut off all our cables and video feeds from Parliament. At times like this, the only thing to do is lie low till the storm passes. This it eventually did, and six months later, our lines to Parliament were restored.

A few months later, in 2002, when the Gujarat riots resulted in the mindless killing of Muslims, NDTV news reports were uncompromising and hard-hitting. I recall getting a phone call from a very senior minister in the PM's office who said, 'You know I am your friend and I always support you against many of my colleagues who want to shut NDTV down. But if you carry on reporting like this from Gujarat, I will not be able to prevent them from shutting you down. So please tell all your reporters and anchors to cool down.' Of course we did no such thing. The reporters continued exactly as they had been doing. A few hours later I got a call from the same minister who said, 'Prannoy, I just wanted to thank you for sending a message to your team. Things are much better now!'

But I must say that since then – and it's been more than ten years – there has been virtually no government interference, certainly no threats or warnings.

As our five-year contract with Murdoch was coming to an end, James Murdoch came to see us to discuss an extension for another five years. This time, however, he said, quite understandably, 'Let's make it a joint venture.' We agreed, but on one condition: that editorial control would remain with NDTV. So far, the Murdochs had never, not once, interfered with our editorial independence. I still remember James Murdoch saying, 'Yes, of course. I want that too, because if any politician complains I can just say it's nothing to do with me – go talk to NDTV!'

Three months later, James Murdoch told me all financial and legal terms were agreed to. But he wanted one change – he must have editorial control. I asked him three times why he had changed his mind – but got no answer. I still don't know why. We parted in 2003, but as friends, and we still work together in some areas.

The break with Murdoch transformed NDTV. From being a production house we became an independent broadcaster. We launched two 24-hour channels immediately, one in English and another in Hindi. After a rocky start, both were a reasonable success. But gradually the news channel space started becoming overcrowded.

India's Media Challenges: A Convergence with Global Problems?

India is now at a stage where many of the problems with our news media are almost the same as they are globally. There is undoubtedly an element of truth in what James Murdoch said in his 2009 speech at Edinburgh, that 'the only reliable, durable and perpetual guarantor of independence is profit'. But that is not the entire truth. Similarly, Elizabeth Murdoch may have exaggerated her case when, in her speech last year, also at Edinburgh, she took a contrary view and criticised the making of profits without purpose as 'one of the most dangerous … goals for capitalism and for freedom'.

Before I go on to give you some examples of how this debate is progressing in India, let me explain that we at NDTV operate by what we call, perhaps rather pompously, the 'Heisenberg principle of journalism'. The Heisenberg principle, crudely interpreted, suggests that, as you get closer to a target or object, it changes the nature and essence of the object. Similarly, we hold a revamped 'Heisenberg principle of media' which suggests that, the closer you move towards the sole objective of profits, the more the very nature of the journalism tends to change. (In a parallel, it is well known that the closer a journalist gets to her or his sources, the more the nature of that relationship changes, as well as the news it generates.)

While it seems to us that there is nothing wrong with James Murdoch's goal of trying to make a news channel generate profits, the problem lies in what happens on the *path to profitability.* Almost by definition, the path to making profits for a news channel is littered with compromises that change the nature of its journalistic practice, often so much that it can no longer be recognised as a news channel.

In the quest for profits in the overcrowded market of news channels in India, several choices are possible – and different channels have chosen different routes – but the greater the success with any one of these routes, the more the intrinsic nature of news journalism changes.

'Tabloidisation'

The first and most popular path to profits is to turn to tabloid news to gain eyeballs. Virtually every single Hindi news channel in India today is grotesquely tabloid. It began after Murdoch's Star News split with NDTV. For a few years, Star did not do well. It was a serious news channel, but was making losses as a result of low viewership. Star News decided to go tabloid. Then, seeing the success of tabloid news, virtually every Hindi news channel turned tabloid. I recall what I think is the lowest point so far, when one Hindi channel anchor (not Star News) twirled her hair with her forefinger, looked into the camera and said 'Break *ke baad aapko ek* rape *dikhayenge*' – 'After the break we will show you a rape.'

But why blame Hindi channels? With competition and the rush for eyeballs, 'tabloidisation' is a global trend. Forget the usual suspects, it is disturbing to see even the wonderful National Geographic and Discovery channels going down the slippery slope, with many programmes designed to titillate by using titles suggesting sex and violence – for example: 'Wild Sex', 'Bid and Destroy', 'Caught in the Act', 'Man vs. Monster' and (one of my favourites) 'What's a Wicked Pisser?'.

India has an added problem with tabloid Hindi news channels. The decision-makers – advertisers, buying agencies, CEOs, and marketing heads – do not watch Hindi news but almost without exception watch English news channels. So all decisions on advertising rates and expenditure get to be based solely on the tally of eyeballs – i.e. the quantity, not the quality of the channel. Unlike in the UK, where a serious newspaper gets a much higher advertising rate per eyeball than a tabloid, no such stratification exists in India for Hindi channels.

I don't need to state the obvious, that going tabloid in the quest for profits changes the nature of the beast. I can honestly report that it is widely accepted that the only Hindi news channel in India that is not tabloid is NDTV India – and I must also report that it is making a loss! (We see this changing as the advertising market for Hindi starts attaching greater importance to quality.)

The Big Ratings Fiddle and 'Paid News'

The other option to going tabloid in order to make profits – and they're not mutually exclusive – is to fiddle the viewership ratings. Virtually every city in India has a 'ratings consultant' who, for a relatively small fee, will ensure higher ratings for any channel. The method is simple: the ratings consultant gets to know where the people-meters that measure viewership are located. These locations are meant to be secret, but nothing in India ever is. This ratings consultant visits the people-meter homes, gives the family a brand-new 60-inch plasma TV and tells them 'Watch whatever you like on this lovely big TV, but on the TV attached to the people-meter, you must only watch such-and-such channels.' The family also gets an additional reward at the end of the year if they've done what they were asked to do efficiently. Recently, Nielsen sent out their global head of security to India and, after an elaborate four-month investigation, he said to a gathering of over a dozen people at the Taj Hotel in New Delhi, 'I have never seen as much corruption of the Nielsen system anywhere else in the world as there is in India.'

Apart from going tabloid or fiddling ratings, there are many other methods that channels resort to in order to make profits. Blackmail and extortion are not unknown, an accusation that the media in Britain too has faced. One thing common to all these methods is that so many compromises are made on the *path* to profits that the channels that indulge in these tactics lose their integrity and can no longer be called news channels.

Perhaps the most common method of boosting revenues in India is a new genre that has come to be widely known as 'paid news'. Newspapers or television channels ask companies or politicians to pay for editorial space. Compounding the deception, they do not make it clear to the reader/viewer that the 'news' item has been paid for – that it is at best an advertorial and at worst simply paid fiction.

Some time ago we were visited by a regional editor of a major newspaper chain. She wanted to leave her newspaper to work for NDTV. When we asked her why, she said, 'I don't really mind paid news when it comes to entertainment, I've done that for years. But last week, when I was made to put a positive article about a dodgy medical product on our front page, I decided I had to leave.' I needn't tell you that the newspaper chain she worked for is highly profitable.

The Internet's Impact on the Changing Format of News

Today the immediate source of news for a large number of television viewers is the internet or the mobile phone. Twitter, Facebook, or news apps send you buzzing 'news alerts', wherever you are. Even on television, the scrolling ticker at the bottom of the screen gives you the news in brief before the story appears on air. The consequence is that viewers seem to want more from news shows than the conventional anchor-video format. Debates and discussions that take the news story further tend to have higher viewer interest, and debates are often preferred to video stories that deal with politics or other subjects that are visually poor. Moreover, the traditional news format is seen as dull, while news debates are seen to be lively and stimulating. Unfortunately, many of these are on their way to becoming unwatchable shouting matches rather than debates.

Fox News was perhaps the first to understand this new viewer demand for a changed format, and their viewership grew the fastest. However, in addition to their lively debates they were accused of introducing partisan news – and in the process, many question whether they have compromised the essence of journalism.

Most Indian news channels are discarding the traditional format of the news and experimenting with debates and discussion. Their aim is to provide an added dimension to the news that viewers have already got from their mobile phone or the internet. Fortunately, most of the leading Indian news channels are non-partisan. These channels are energetic (though too many border on being tabloid) but mostly not politically predictable.

Media Regulation

India's media may not be perfect, but on balance both television and print news media have been working *for* democracy. However, we could be reaching a tipping point and, if we ourselves don't take corrective steps now, a downward spiral may soon result, leading to a loss in credibility. In fact, I get a sense that this is already beginning to happen.

After years of experiencing the horrors of government intervention, we obviously do not believe there should be any government-led statutory regulation of any type whatsoever, as that would kill the greatest asset of India's media – its freedom. We have been fighting for 25

years against any form of control by politicians or the government. It is also important to ensure that there is no indirect government intervention, for instance by controlling or influencing the appointment of the head of a statutory body to oversee the media.

However, we do not believe that the other extreme, of no regulation at all, works in our society. Today in India we have no real penalties for defamation or libel, and no effective privacy laws. It is frankly a free-for-all environment. You can say what you like and get away with it, without being fined or penalised in any way. As a result our media is losing its rigour. There is, after all, no need to double-check your facts, no need to do any real research. The lack of punishment for defamation is resulting in the end of good journalism. I know this may go against our own interests in the short term – after all, we ourselves may be fined or punished – but NDTV is fighting hard for the implementation of defamation laws: by the judiciary, in consultation with the media, but totally independent of the government.

We have in India a Press Council that is presently toothless and desperately needs judicial powers. It is important to give the Press Council powers to impose fines, and also to ensure that the appointment of its members be made by the judiciary in consultation with the media, and not by the government. We already have most of the laws in place. They just need to be implemented, swiftly and effectively.

In volatile countries like India, where social tensions simmer beneath the surface, the consequences of anonymity can be far greater than stealing, cyber-bullying, or defamation. For example, an organised surge of anonymous messages against a particular community or caste can lead to – and has in fact led to – violence, panic, and death. Recently, tens of thousands of youngsters from the North-East of India living in the southern city of Bangalore were compelled to flee the city because of anonymous threats that they were going to be killed. Those who sent these messages were never caught, because they hid behind the anonymity of the internet. A provocative message on Twitter in a sectarian confrontation can erupt into riots.

While there are many advantages of anonymity – in many ways it is the essence of freedom on the net – it is important to recognise that the inherent dangers (terrorists constantly use the anonymity of the web) might, in certain circumstances, outweigh those very benefits. Maybe it is time to bring the internet a little closer to the responsibilities that all other forms of media face. Surely, one should take responsibility for what one writes. How many lives have to be lost in the name of anonymity?

Let me be clear: we are not arguing for a complete ban on anonymity on the internet. In everyday use, for comments, criticisms, and opinions, anonymity must be allowed to continue. What we need, perhaps, is a law that permits the piercing of the veil of anonymity only when a serious crime is committed - the very last resort. And, once again, it must be the judiciary, not the government, that decides when this can be done – and ensure it is done only in the rarest of rare cases.

Twitter, YouTube, and others are aware of certain hazards that they see as being relevant to their own society, and consequently rightly screen their content before publishing. That is why you will never see pornography on YouTube, or messages on under-age sex on Twitter – thank goodness. But are these same sites as aware of the dangerous consequences that a different kind of image or message has in developing societies? And, just as they pre-screen their sites for themselves, are they ready to invest in similar systems for other societies? Perhaps it is time for Twitter and YouTube to become sensitive to messages that are dangerous or, by taking advantage of democratic freedoms, are actually harmful to democratic societies like India. We have different situations and different flash-points to those in America or other countries of the West, and we have a responsibility to address them before they incite sectarian or communal violence.

In the context of regulations, we believe that any changes in the media environment must be initiated and guided by journalists, in dialogue with the judiciary – not with, of, or by the government. And we in the media need to take some key self-corrective steps soon, before social pressure gives governments the mandate to intervene. To change the rules of the game, the media needs to take the lead, to look beyond short-term profits, and take action in the interests of our own long-term freedom and credibility.

Finally, as India's media has grown over the years, despite all the baggage, more news has been good news. So far we have seen the upside of unfettered journalism. But any strength taken too far becomes a weakness, and our media appears now to be now hurtling towards its own regulatory cliff. It is at critical times such as these that governments try to retake control. As at similar vulnerable moments in the past, the time has come once again to fight any encroachment by the government, but also to introspect and act responsibly ourselves before it is too late. Only then can we ensure that in the future, too, more news will continue to be good news.

2. A Personal Journey through India's Journalism

John Lloyd

India's journalism is one of the fastest growing in the world. Rising literacy and rising incomes mean that all kinds of media are now devoured in much greater quantities than even the recent past: and the news media now claim that they have shouldered the main burden of holding power – especially political power – to account in a way that neither they in earlier forms, nor the political class, nor the judiciary, nor any other institution, had the capacity or will to do.

It's also one of the most important journalistic cultures in the world. Unlike Russia and China, India is not an authoritarian state: all of the media are relatively free from government diktat, and though some restraints (notably on majority foreign ownership of news media) remain, journalism is diverse, lively to the point of hyperactivity, and capable of attracting large talents and large investment.

But it has problems. Most vividly, and most noted by Indian commentators, is its commercialisation, which shades easily into what is generally considered corruption. Journalists are often paid by those about whom they write stories – both business people and politicians. A television channel is considered indispensable for a big business, so that it can put pressure on the government, which wins contracts. Paid-for news is a regular item in newspapers and magazines – sometimes signalled as such usually in very small type, sometimes not.

Narasimhan Ram, the former editor-in-chief of the Chennai-based daily *The Hindu* – to an extent an exception to the hyper-commercialised

press elsewhere – put the issue powerfully in the 2012 James Cameron Memorial Lecture at City University:

> *The fortunes of the news industry and the state of journalism ought not to be conflated. Manipulation of news, analysis, and comment to suit the owners' financial or political interests; the downgrading and devaluing of editorial functions and content in some leading newspaper and news television organizations; systematic dumbing down, led by the nose by certain types of market research; the growing willingness within newspapers and news channels to tailor the editorial product to serve advertising and marketing goals set by owners and senior management personnel; hyper-commercialization; price wars and aggressive practices in the home bases of other newspapers to overwhelm and kill competition; advertorials where the paid-for aspect of the news-like content is not properly disclosed or disclosed at all; private treaties; rogue practices like paid election campaign news and bribe-taking for favourable coverage. If this is what it takes to have thriving newspapers and other news media, then there is something seriously wrong with this growth path.*

In October 2012, I travelled to New Delhi and Mumbai for both the *FT* and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. The two cities are India's main media centres, even if they can hardly reflect the vastness of the country's journalistic culture – or cultures. India, according to the Indian Readership Survey, has more than 82,000 newspapers in many languages, with a total daily circulation of 107m. Taken together, the diverse minority languages account for the most vigorous growth in circulation and revenues (the latter increasing by more than 8% in 2011–12, with readership up by more than 1%). Yet I found, at this apparently optimistic moment in Indian journalism, that there is deep, underlying anxiety about its role – as deep as that in the UK in the era of phone-hacking, but with a much greater social content.

At the *Hindustan Times* in New Delhi, Vir Sanghvi, the paper's former editor and now editorial adviser, tells me that advertising dominates everything – and that journalism rarely offers a corrective.

> *The presenters on the TV channels appear to give a hard time to politicians, but look: at the same time as their status has grown, so has corruption. It's entertainment for the intellectual middle class,*

> *who like to look down on politicians but who, if they themselves try to enter politics, usually lose their deposit.*

Perhaps the most succinct summary is offered by T. N. Ninan, chairman and editorial director of BSL group, publisher of the well-regarded *Business Standard* newspaper. In a talk last year titled 'Indian Media's Dickensian Age', he argued:

> *We have never had such a vast audience or readership, but our credibility has never been so tested … the quality of what we offer to our public has never been better but that same public can see that the ethical foundations of our actions have plumbed new depths. It is unquestionably the best of times and it is also, unfortunately, the worst of times.*

Condé Nast India is a modest operation for a major publishing house in what will soon be the world's most populous country (by 2026, according to the Indian National Population Stabilisation Fund). The journalists who produce its four magazines – *Vogue India, GQ India, Condé Nast Traveller,* and *Architectural Digest* – tap away at their keyboards elbow-to-elbow in cramped, workaday offices in a colonial-era building in Mumbai. Managing director Alex Kuruvilla has a small, spare office that Anna Wintour, fabled editor of *US Vogue*, wouldn't give to her second assistant.

Kuruvilla, 52, is slight, pleasant, and self-deprecating – though not about his titles. He came up with the slogan that Condé Nast – which claims 80% of the luxury consumer magazines market – is 'India's most advanced publishing company'. He thinks other Indian companies that started (and in some cases closed) high-end lifestyle magazines didn't properly understand the concept or how to deliver it. He has, he says, the example of Condé Nast International's leadership: Nicholas Coleridge, the group's president, lists India and Indian art among his main interests.

Nor is there any doubt about the scale of Condé Nast's ambitions in India: to develop and support a cosmopolitan elite. Out of a population of 1.24bn, Kuruvilla reckons this elite – i.e. people who make more than $100,000 a year – numbers about 3m. He says that 300,000 of these people currently read one or more of his magazines. 'We put a lot of investment in to get it right. We might go to New York for a shoot, or fly cosmetics in from New York. Our [advertising] rate card is firm. We don't discount.'

He tells me about a party he recently put on for *Vogue India*'s fifth anniversary, at the luxurious Oberoi Trident Hotel on Marine Drive – one of the Mumbai locations where Islamist terrorists struck in 2008, killing 32 people. He goes on to talk about *Vogue India*'s October issue, which introduced the concept of 'the little black sari' and challenged 50 fashion houses to create versions of one. 'We want to have cross-fertilisation,' he says.

The pervasive critique is that the elite is soaring while the masses stagnate: and that the media cater for the former while serving pap to the latter. The cosmopolitan elite, so prized by Kuruvilla, is mostly fluent in English – spoken far less widely than Hindi but still the second language. In addition, the most politically engaged sections of society tend to read the influential English-language press. The *Times of India*, with an audited circulation of 3.14m and a readership of some 7.6m, is the world's biggest-selling English-language paper (though only the sixth largest-selling paper in India, after mainly Hindi dailies).

English-language TV news channels also cater to this class. The largest, Times Now, is a division of Bennett, Coleman & Company, owner of the *Times of India*. Times Now is my next stop, after a jarring, klaxon-blaring journey across Mumbai, where jerry-built reeking poverty abuts on sheer walls of glass-fronted office blocks.

The office of Arnab Goswami, the channel's editor-in-chief and main anchor, is another modest space: India's media lords do not, for the most part, go in for conspicuous displays of power in their workplace space or furnishings. In person, Goswami, 39, exerts a great charm that apparently coexists with his often brutal interviewer persona: 'The people of India want to know' is a familiar Goswami refrain, delivered in a hectoring shout. He agrees to give me background on the media scene but won't be quoted: he does not, he says, do interviews, preferring to focus on his own formidable reputation for interrogation.

Times Now, launched in 2006, was built round Goswami and his vision of hard news and hard interviews. He was lured from rival channel NDTV, founded in 1988 by Prannoy and Radhika Roy and a template for much of India's news journalism. Tough interviewers proliferate across India's news channels. On the CNN-IBN network there is Karan Thapar's award-winning *The Devil's Advocate*; on NDTV, Barkha Dutt, one of the few female TV stars, has won plaudits for her reporting from Kashmir. Rajdeep Sardesai, editor-in-chief and main presenter on CNN-IBN, is described by his fans as the conscience of India. With the rise of TV news channels, these presenters have become part of a new media

establishment, fiercely competitive but united in their intellectual prominence and their wealth. All have helped bring 'hard talk' techniques to Indian TV news.

Yet over the decade in which such channels have grown in power, corruption is also judged to have increased to unprecedented levels. In Transparency International's Global Corruption index last December, India fell to 95th. China comes 75th, and Pakistan 134th (out of 183), where the no. 1 position indicates the lowest level of corruption. Given its size, India presents the greatest challenge to the view that diverse and often critical media will hold power to account.

Money has poured into the media: though many of the news channels are not profitable, they are thought by their owners to be valuable in exerting influence over politicians – who, in turn, are often essential to obtain permits or to nod through development. With this have come allegations of corruption. These touched several prominent journalists when, in 2010, transcripts of phone conversations between political lobbyist Nira Radia and, among others, Barkha Dutt and Vir Sanghvi, were leaked. The transcripts appeared to show the journalists willing to use their influence to broker deals between politicians and business leaders on the awarding of parts of the second-generation (2G) mobile phone spectrum. Both journalists strongly deny impropriety. Sardesai, then president of the Editors' Guild, defended his colleagues, blaming reports for publishing 'raw data' and not seeking a response from the journalists named: they were guilty, he said, only of misjudgement, not of misconduct.

During my time in New Delhi, Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, an investigative journalist who has made documentaries on the exploitation of India's miners, ran a seminar on 'Crony Journalism'. Here, an audience of journalists and students heard the panel discuss how – in the words of panelist T. K. Arun, opinion page editor of the *Economic Times* – 'corruption pays for Indian politics'.

In 2010, Thakurta, an intense and dedicated 57 year old who works from a spartan office in the city, co-authored a report titled *Paid News: How Corruption in India's Media is Undermining Democracy*, for the Press Council of India (PCI).[1] The report argued that corruption had gone 'way beyond' the corruption of individual journalists and media organisations:

[1] http://presscouncil.nic.in/sub-committeereport.pdf.

> *from 'planting' information and views in lieu of favours received in cash or kind, to more institutionalised and organised forms of corruption, wherein newspapers and television channels receive funds for publishing or broadcasting information in favour of particular individuals, corporate entities, representatives of political parties and candidates contesting elections, that is sought to be disguised as 'news'.*

The PCI, which has a powerful publishers' lobby within it, agreed the report only when it was watered down. But the government's Central Information Commission demanded that it publish the unexpurgated report, which has now been available for the past year.

The family that owns India's biggest English-language newspaper is frank about its desire to run the paper for profit: in a piece earlier this month in the *New Yorker*, Vineet Jain, who, with his brother Samir runs the *Times of India*, said: 'We are not in the newspaper business … if 90 per cent of your revenues comes from advertising, you're in the advertising business.' Jain said he realised that carrying news items about Bollywood film and other promotions was giving away valuable space: henceforth, he decreed, such material would be 'advertorial' – paid-for news. The fact that it is advertorial (and written by staff reporters) is announced – but only in tiny print.

The media's concentration on politics, cricket, and celebrity, along with its perceived corruption, attracts fury and cynicism. Justice Markandey Katju, the stern 66 year old appointed chairman of the Press Council of India last year, has thundered against a press that he sees as indifferent to poverty, feeding its audience a diet of entertainment and superstition.

In the study of his Lutyens-designed official bungalow near the prime minister's residence, he spoke of a culture of writing about 'non-issues' and of dividing the population on religious or caste grounds. He cited a recent Mumbai fashion show, saying that the cotton on the dresses on display was grown by farmers so desperate that thousands had committed suicide; yet, while an army of journalists attended the show, it was a rare writer who publicised the farmers' desperation (the epidemic of rural suicides, and the media's hyped up response to it, are well satirised in Anusha Rizvi's 2010 tragi-comic film *Peepli Live*).

Sociologist Dipankar Gupta, a neighbour of presenter Karan Thapar in New Delhi, proposes 'a division … between those who do fashion and

gossip and those who try to inform. But the standards are going down, and they are taking the market down.'

It's a common view now: but it isn't fate. Very good journalism is done in India, in every medium; new magazines attempting long-form narrative and analytical journalism have recently begun; and debate on the problem deepens. India's journalism's critical importance to the world's news media is that its freedom should be used both to chronicle and to illuminate the growth of the state, and the travails of its people. Its present limitations are obvious: its potential is very large.

3. Guns and Protests: Media Priorities in Chhattisgarh

Supriya Sharma

Introduction

On the morning of 6 April 2010, Maoist rebels killed 76 government soldiers, nearly wiping out a paramilitary company in the jungles of Chhattisgarh, a newly formed resource-rich state at the centre of a Maoist insurgency raging across eastern India. The guerrilla strike was spectacular and unparalleled – India had never lost as many soldiers in a single strike even during conventional war with its neighbours, China and Pakistan. But next morning, the national newspapers did not feature a single report from the spot. The largest selling English-language daily, the *Times of India*, did not have a correspondent posted in Chhattisgarh. Another leading daily, *The Hindu*, had posted one at the start of 2010 after a vacuum that lasted six years in which 1,595 people were killed – a third of the overall casualties in the Maoist insurgency nationwide.

The neglect of Chhattisgarh would not surprise observers of Indian media. Existing scholarship has shown that the media boom in India has come with a narrowing of the news agenda to the perceived interests of the urban middle class, which represents a slim slice of a populous subcontinental-sized country but the bulk of its consumer market. With an increasing appetite for news on lifestyle, cinema, and cricket, this class wields disproportionate influence over the advertising driven commercial media.[1] This has pushed impoverished states like

[1] Daya Kishan Thussu, *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment* (Los Angeles and London: SAGE, 2007).

Chhattisgarh even further to the periphery of the national media's gaze.

Chhattisgarh is significant to the national discourse not just because it is the main battleground for Maoist rebels.[2] Carved out of the large central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh in 2001, the state encloses some of the key fault lines of contemporary India. One-third of its people are adivasis – indigenous communities officially termed 'Scheduled Tribes'[3] that have remained on the margins of Indian society and politics.[4] Forests cover 44% of its area – the largest forest cover outside India's North-East. The state holds rich mineral reserves – about one-fifth of India's iron ore and 16% of its coal. In the last decade, as the Indian economy has expanded, and the mining sector has opened up to the private sector, companies have rushed to acquire land in the state. This has created a sharp resource conflict, pitting forest- and farm-dependent communities against corporations that often come with the backing of governments.

Many conflate the resource conflict in eastern states like Chhattisgarh with the Maoist conflict, which is seen as nothing but rebellion by indigenous people fighting dispossession[5] (see Map 3.1: Maoist conflict in eastern India). But a closer view of Chhattisgarh shows that the

[2] The Maoists are communist revolutionaries who see India as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial state and aim to overthrow existing state institutions through a 'protracted people's war'. The rebellion has waxed and waned for more than four decades in the rural hinterland of central and eastern India. For an overview, see Alpa Shah, 'India Burning: The Maoist Revolution', in Isabelle Clark-Decès (ed.), *A Companion to the Anthropology of India* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[3] Although the term 'tribe' is an artefact of colonial anthropology, it has come to stay as a postcolonial marker of identity in India. The Indian constitution has a schedule or list of more than 600 communities identified as 'tribes' and hence the official term 'Scheduled Tribes'. However, in both scholarly and common usage, it has been replaced to a large extent by the term 'adivasi', a Hindi word that means 'original dweller'.

[4] India's constitution reserves seats in legislatures for two historically disadvantaged social groups – 'Scheduled Castes' or low caste groups and 'Scheduled Tribes' or adivasis. While this policy has given dividends in the case of low-caste groups who have managed to gain political power in several Indian states, adivasis have not been able to assert themselves electorally. Some believe the failure of democracy to include adivasis has created a space for Maoist revolutionaries in central and eastern India. See Ramachandra Guha, 'Adivasis, Naxalites and Indian Democracy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42/32 (2007), 3305–33.

[5] The most influential advocate of this view is writer and activist Arundhati Roy who sees the Maoist insurgency as heroic resistance by indigenous people forced to take up arms to save their land and forests from greedy mining corporations aided by corrupt neo-liberal governments. See Arundhati Roy, *Broken Republic: Three Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011). But Roy's merging of Maoist and adivasi resistance is contested by many. For a critique, see Alpa Shah, 'Eco-Incarceration? "Walking with the Comrades"', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47/21 (26 May 2012).

Map 3.1





Map 3.2

Map 3.3



geographical areas of the conflicts do not neatly overlap[6] (see Maps 3.2 and 3.3: Maoist areas superimposed on the mining and industry map of Chhattisgarh). The Maoist conflict is unfolding in the south of Chhattisgarh while the resource conflict is more intense in the north. The south has significant iron ore deposits in the districts of Dantewada, Kanker, and Narayanpur, which are on the radar of large steel corporations. Many argue the *underlying* resource conflict and the future threat of dispossession contribute to creating and sustaining conditions of armed conflict here, but at the moment, the mega projects are on hold and there are no major sites of displacement in the south. In contrast, large numbers of people are being actively displaced in the north in the districts of Raigarh, Sarguja, Korba, Janjgir Champa, where energy corporations are rapidly acquiring large tracts of land to mine coal and produce thermal power. The Maoists do not have a presence in these areas of *active* resource conflict. Here, local communities are offering resistance to corporations by staging non-violent protests and filing petitions in the law courts.

Journalists often use the term 'conflict' to mean an exchange of violent hostilities but social scientists employ it in the wider sense of confrontation between two groups. Employing the term in that sense, this study attempts to find out which of the two conflicts in Chhattisgarh – the violent Maoist conflict and non-violent resource conflict – gets more media attention. This question is important for the answer holds clues to the state of Indian democracy. Media academic Simon Cottle puts it well:

> *It is in and through mediatized conflicts, the array of views and voices that surround them and the public spaces they manage to secure to define and defend their claims and aims, that the state of democracy in today's societies becomes revealed, and, in important respects, constituted and open to evaluation.*[7]

[6] On the subject of overlap, looking beyond Chhattisgarh to the rest of eastern India, while the common view connects the spread of Maoist influence to the intensification of mining activity, an empirical study at Norway's Peace Research Institute shows only a weak correlation between the two. Studying data from 150 districts in six Indian states, the researchers found that Maoist violence strongly correlates with the presence of poor adivasi and lower-caste communities, validating the long-held view that this is a movement of the poorest of the poor. The study also found that the insurgency had a higher incidence in districts that offered the guerrillas operational advantages of forest cover and cross-border mobility but a low incidence in areas of mining activity. This is significant since it suggests that where resource extraction is radically altering livelihoods and creating social unrest, resistance might not be coming from armed revolutionaries, as many tend to believe, but from other forms of social activism. See Kristian Hoelscher, Jason Miklian, and Krishna Chaitanya Vadlamannati, 'Hearts and Mines: A District-Level Analysis of the Maoist Conflict in India', *International Area Studies Review*, 15/2 (1 June 2012), 141–60.

[7] Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict: Developments in Media and Conflict Studies* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006).

Riding on an economic boom, India is being heralded by some as a future global superpower, but this view glosses over the fact that growth in India exists in tension with equity and social justice,[8] especially in less developed states like Chhattisgarh. Such tensions manifest themselves both in armed insurgency and peaceful mobilisations. Do the media report non-violent protests with as much vigour as violent rebellion? If not, are the media complicit in pushing adivasis towards violent resistance to get their voice heard?

This study explores such questions through a comprehensive content analysis of more than 500 news articles published in four newspapers – two national English-language dailies and two regional Hindi dailies – in 2011. But first I offer a brief overview of media trends in Chhattisgarh and India.

The Media in Chhattisgarh

Newspapers are still going strong in India. Both readership[9] and revenues[10] are growing. However, India's newspaper market is fragmented, reflecting the country's regional and linguistic diversity. Traditionally, as the language of the national government and the elites, English has dominated the national public sphere. In recent years, scholars have argued that the resurgence of Hindi media is challenging this dominance.[11] The two most-read papers in India are both Hindi dailies – *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Bhaskar* with readership figures in 2012 of 16.4m and 14.5m.[12]Among the top ten newspapers in India, five are Hindi dailies and just one is an English-language newspaper, the *Times of India*. Hindi newspapers are growing fast by launching newer, more localised editions.

With a large Hindi-speaking population, Chhattisgarh is part of the expanding empire of the Hindi press. The second largest Hindi newspaper in India, *Dainik Bhaskar*, is the most widely circulated and read paper in the state. In less than a decade, it has nearly doubled its circulation, selling on an average 200,000 copies a month.

[8] For a summary of the key economic debates surrounding growth and equality, see Thomas E. Weisskopf, 'Why Worry about Inequality in the Booming Indian Economy?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46/47 (19 Nov. 2011).

[9] Readership increased by 1.3% in the first quarter of 2012. See Indian Readership Survey 2012 Q1 Topline Findings (published quarterly by Media Research Users Council: http://mruc.net).

[10] Print revenues grew by 8.3% in 2011–12. See FICCI-KPMG, *Hitting the High Notes: Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report*, 2011: www.kpmg.com/IN.

[11] Sevanti Ninan, *Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere* (New Delhi and London: SAGE, 2007).

[12] Indian Readership Survey 2012 Q1 Topline Findings.

But there are significant inter-district differences in newspaper density in Chhattisgarh (see Table 3.1). At the top of the circulation charts are Raipur, Durg, and Bilaspur, relatively prosperous districts in paddy-growing plains that have a large population of migrant communities from Hindi-speaking northern India. These migrant communities have come to dominate the state's economy and politics. At the bottom of the charts are forest-dense districts of Sarguja, Koriya, and Dantewada inhabited by impoverished adivasi communities. There is no major publishing in adivasi languages yet. In far-flung adivasi villages, it is more common to find a transistor tuned to BBC broadcasts than a newspaper.

Districts	Circulation of Dainik Bhaskar
Raipur	67,976
Durg	52,909
Bilaspur	30,459
Sarguja	8,139
Koriya	3,894
Dantewada	3,465

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulation, Jan.–June 2011

Table 3.1. District-wise circulation of Dainik Bhaskar

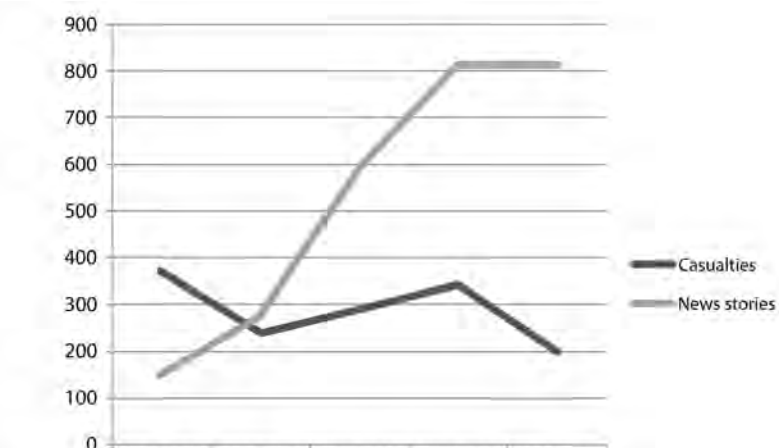
Unlike national English-language newspapers that earn a large part of their revenue from brand and product advertising by private companies, especially those selling consumer goods, Hindi newspapers in states like Chhattisgarh depend much more on government advertising. Not only does the state government contribute nearly half the advertising spend in the state,[13] it also pays regional channels for favourable coverage by sponsoring news and programmes without any overt disclosure.[14] This has been widely criticised as a form of 'paid news'.

Another factor that curtails the independence of newspapers in Chhattisgarh is the trend towards cross-ownership in business. The leading newspaper groups in the state have major stakes in the mining and power sector, which makes them sympathetic to the interests of industry and blind to the protests by local communities. Take for instance, the largest newspaper, *Dainik Bhaskar*. Its owners have recently set up a mining and power company. The conflict of interest showed up

[13] Market research shared by newspaper executives on condition of anonymity.
[14] Ashutosh Bharadwaj, 'Chhattisgarh Govt Pays for All TV News that is Fit to Buy', *Indian Express*, 7 Dec. 2012.

starkly in the pages of *Dainik Bhaskar* when it published a series of reports in February 2011 on the philanthropic acts of a company seeking to acquire land for coal mining without disclosing that the company, D B Power, was part of the same business group.[15] Not only did it conceal vital information from its readers, it even distorted facts. A court petition filed by a local resident of Raigarh, which alleged the company had used 'deliberate, illegal and manipulative measures' to influence the hearing's outcome, led to a stay on the project's clearance.[16]

At the other end of the newspaper market in Chhattisgarh are English-language national newspapers that have a very limited reach in the state – just 20,000 readers of the *Times of India* and 5,000 readers of *The Hindu*. The status of their correspondents is not dissimilar to that of 'foreign correspondents' in their own country, reporting news from the outback to the metropolis. And the metropolis, it seems, does not care much for the outback, which perhaps explains why several national English dailies have often gone without a correspondent based in the state.



	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Casualties	369	242	290	343	202
News stories	153	276	592	815	815

Table 3.2: News stories in English-language dailies, 2007–12

[15] 'DB Power Will Open the Doors to Development', *Dainik Bhaskar*, 13 Feb. 2011.
[16] Aman Sethi and Priscilla Jebraj. 'High Court Stays Clearance for DB Power Coal Mine in Chhattisgarh', *The Hindu*, 11 Dec. 2011.

However, the rising violence levels in Chhattisgarh briefly jolted the national newspapers out of their indifference. As casualties mounted in the state's Maoist insurgency between 2008 and 2011, so did the number of news stories in English-language news dailies (see Figure 3.1). The graph plots the number of insurgency- related casualties in Chhattisgarh during 2007–12 and the number of news stories in the three leading news dailies – the *Times of India, Hindustan Times,* and *The Hindu* – as searched on the database Factiva. The number of news stories rose more dramatically than the casualties, which could be explained as *media hype*, which refers to reinforcing cycles of news that amplify events, or *moral panic*, which refers to an exaggerated response or over-reaction in the media to what is seen as a social problem. But while the Maoist conflict was being finally reported in the national press, what about the resource conflict?

Analysing Conflict Coverage

To examine conflict coverage in Chhattisgarh, the study came up with two hypotheses, reasoned as follows:

1. The Maoist guerrillas in south Chhattisgarh use violence to fight the state. They launch ambushes on government troops and trigger explosions on government targets. In contrast, the resource conflict in the north of the state is manifested in terms of largely peaceful mobilisations of local people who hold protests, attend public hearings, and petition the law courts to safeguard their land and livelihoods from corporations. Sections of the media have interests in the mining and power sector, which makes it unlikely that they would report the protests against industry. Also, scholars of news media have ascribed high news values to violence.[17] Hence, it appears likely that: *The Maoist conflict is covered more than the resource conflict by both regional Hindi and national English-language newspapers.*
2. As an armed movement being fought in areas of material deprivation and social injustice, the Maoist insurgency is more than just an exchange of hostilities between armed guerrillas and state troops. It has social causes and consequences. But as scholars have documented in other conflicts, the news media rarely provide historical and social

[17] See Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, 'The Structure of Foreign News', *Journal of Peace Research*, 2/1 (1965), 64–91. This seminal study of foreign news in Norwegian newspapers contended that war is inherently newsworthy since it is saturated with 'news values' or attributes of negativity and unexpectedness.

context in reportage of armed conflict, focusing instead on overt acts of violence and producing largely episodic narratives.[18] This suggests that: *Within the Maoist conflict, violent acts are covered more than any other dimension in both Hindi and English newspapers.*

Methodology

The study selected four leading newspapers in terms of circulation and readership:[19]

1. *Dainik Bhaskar*, Raipur edition – highest circulated and read news daily in Chhattisgarh
2. *Navabharat*, Raipur edition – second most circulated and third most read news daily in Chhattisgarh
3. *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi edition – second most circulated and read English news daily in India
4. *The Hindu*, New Delhi edition – third most circulated and read English news daily in India

For the sake of comprehensiveness, the study examined news reports in all issues of the four newspapers published in 2011.[20] Keywords were used to identify news stories related to conflict.[21] The total sample of stories was 540.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1. *The Maoist conflict is covered more than the resource conflict in both regional Hindi and national English newspapers*

[18] S. Iyengar and A. Simon, 'News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion: A Study of Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing', *Communication Research*, 20/3 (1993), 365–83.
[19] *Times of India* has been excluded since I reported for the paper from Chhattisgarh in 2011 and so analysing its coverage would pose a direct conflict of interest.
[20] Physical copies of the Hindi newspapers were scanned in the archives while the English papers were searched using online databases. For the Hindi regional papers, the focus was narrowed to the front page since it features the stories that are considered most important by the editors. In contrast, not enough front-page stories on Chhattisgarh were found in the English newspapers and hence the scope was expanded to include all stories. While the difference in data-sets reduces comparability of results between the English and Hindi newspapers, an exercise of random sampling over four weeks showed that the difference is not substantial.
[21] Keywords for Maoist conflict: Maoist, Naxal, and Naxalite, and their Hindi synonyms *Maowadi, Naxal, Naxali.* Keywords for the resource conflict: mineral, mining, coal, iron ore, company, industry, land, and their Hindi synonyms, *khanij, khanan, koyla, loha, company, udyog, zameen.*

	Maoist conflict		Resource conflict		Maoist and Resource conflict		Total stories
Dainik Bhaskar	154	93%	11	7%	6	4%	165
Navabharat	166	94%	11	6%	5	3%	177
Hindustan Times	69	93%	5	7%	0	0%	74
The Hindu	109	88%	15	12%	6	5%	124
All four newspapers	498	92%	42	8%	17	3%	540

Table 3.3. Maoist conflict versus resource conflict

To test this hypothesis, stories were identified and counted according to their main subject (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 shows that stories on the Maoist conflict constitute 92% of all stories on conflict in the four newspapers in 2011. Only 8% of stories relate to the resource conflict. Of this percentage, 3% of the stories intersect with the Maoist conflict, which means only 5% of stories report just the resource conflict. This supports the hypothesis that the Maoist conflict is covered more than the resource conflict in both regional Hindi and national English newspapers.

> Hypothesis 2. *Within the Maoist conflict, violent events are covered more than any other dimension of the conflict in both Hindi and English newspapers*

To test this hypothesis, all stories on the Maoist conflict were classified further in terms of the main subject.

Table 3.3 shows that violent events account for 46% of the coverage given to the Maoist conflict in all four newspapers. In every newspaper, they form the largest single subject category. In addition, another 18% of stories in all four newspapers relate to security issues. Taken together, this adds up to 64% or nearly two-thirds of all stories that pertain to the violent dimensions of the conflict, providing support for the hypothesis that coverage of the Maoist conflict is focused on violence and in particular violent events.

	Navabharat		*Dainik Bhaskar*		*HT*		*The Hindu*		All Four	
Violent events	105	63%	67	44%	23	33%	34	31%	229	46%
Security related issues	31	19%	37	24%	9	13%	13	12%	90	18%
Salwa Judum and SPOs*	2	1%	8	5%	8	12%	19	17%	37	7%
'Maoist sympathisers'	9	5%	18	12%	19	28%	30	28%	76	15%
Development and peace	13	8%	14	9%	7	10%	5	5%	39	8%
Total stories	166		154		69		109		498	100%

* Salwa Judum was a state-supported armed civil vigilante movement, which in its opposition to the Maoists targeted ordinary civilians, forcibly evicting thousands from Maoist-dominated areas of southern Chhattisgarh in 2005–7. Subsequently, the state police enrolled a majority of adivasi fighters of Salwa Judum as SPOs or special police officers. In 2011, the Supreme Court held the appointment of SPOs as unconstitutional, chastising the state for employing adivasi men as cheap cannon-fodder in the fight against Maoists.

Table 3.4. Dimensions of Maoist conflict

Additional Observations

There are significant differences between the results for the national English-language newspapers and the regional Hindi newspapers. For instance, a sharp difference can be observed in the amount of coverage given to cases of activists accused by the state government of supporting or sympathising with Maoists. The main story featured in this category was the high-profile case of civil liberties activist Dr Binayak Sen who was accused of sedition by the Chhattisgarh government and convicted by a local court. The verdict provoked outrage outside the state and India's highest court granted him bail, which was seen as a setback to the Chhattisgarh government. The English national press gave the issue greater space (28% in both newspapers) than the Hindi regional press (5% and 12%). The difference could be ascribed to a greater bias in favour of the government in the Hindi press. This bias is visible in the Hindi newspapers' higher reliance on government sources compared to English press (see Table 3.4). It can also be seen in the use of dehumanising terms – *dher hue* or collapsed in a heap – for the death of rebels and valorising language – *shahid hue* or martyred – for the death of government troops (see Table 3.5).

	Dainik Bhaskar		*Navabharat*		*Hindustan Times*		*The Hindu*		All four newspapers	
Security forces	56	46%	67	46%	39	29%	56	24%	218	34%
Government	43	35%	48	33%	43	30%	46	19%	180	28%
Rival political parties /Activists	11	9%	20	13%	27	20%	55	23%	113	17%
Maoists	4	3%	2	1%	4	3%	21	9%	31	5%
Villagers/Victims	0	0%	4	2%	6	4%	23	10%	34	5%
Total	122		145		140		237		644	

Table 3.5. Identified sources in the coverage

	Navabharat		*Dainik Bhaskar*		Total	
Stories on policemen killed	26		22		48	
Martyred	18	70%	15	68%	33	69%
Killed	8	30%	7	32%	15	31%
Stories on Maoists killed	14		8		22	
Collapsed in a heap	5	35%	4	50%	9	41%
Killed	9	65%	4	50%	13	59%

Table 3.6. Labels for deaths

Here it must be stressed that the Hindi papers have a stronger bias not because they are published in Hindi but because they are regional papers. This becomes evident in the coverage of the Binayak Sen case. Reports filed by *Navabharat*'s reporting team in Chhattisgarh consistently reflected the state government's position and described Sen as a man 'accused of aiding Naxals'. However, reports published in the same newspaper but sourced from news agencies in New Delhi refer to him as a 'human rights activist' and offer a more balanced account of the case. This indicates that the key factor for determining the extent of bias in the newspapers is location. A newspaper published in Chhattisgarh is more likely to depend on state advertising and hence more likely to favour the state government.

Since the study is limited to just four newspapers over a one-year period, the results are indicative and not conclusive. But it must be noted that the results are consistent with the universal fault lines of news

documented by media scholars, that violence has high news value, journalists privilege authority sources, and economics embed the media in existing power structures.

Commentary on the Findings

Interviews with reporters and editors at the four newspapers further corroborate and contextualise our findings. What media scholars document as the 'newsworthiness' of violence comes as reflexive thinking to most journalists. 'From the very beginning, we have been taught in journalism that violence has high news value,' says Shyam Betal,[22] the editor-in-chief of *Navabharat*, who has three decades of experience in the Hindi press in north India. He connects news values with 'readers' interest': 'When they wake up in the morning, the readers want to know about all the disruptions that may have taken place in the day before which might affect their lives today.'

Journalists at the English newspapers also invoke reader's interest to explain why violence dominates the coverage from Chhattisgarh, but the arguments they make are different. 'Over the last two decades, the urban–rural divide in India has widened. Residents from metropolitan cities are alienated from the larger country. So as an editor you find yourself asking subconsciously – will the reader care [for news from Chhattisgarh]?' says Rajesh Mahapatra, deputy executive editor at the *Hindustan Times*.[23] Mahapatra, who has worked at the international news agency Associated Press, says this is not unlike the narrow lens used by the international media to report India before the recent economic boom. 'India did not matter on the world stage and so for the international media then, the preoccupation was Kashmir,' he says. 'Even if two people died in Kashmir, it would be news.' In the same way, states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Orissa have remained peripheral to the national arena, he argues, and so 'the only time they feature in the news is in relation with natural calamities or Naxal attacks'.

The resource conflict sweeping large parts of Chhattisgarh barely finds any space in the newspapers. What explains the near-blanking out of the resource conflict, especially in the Hindi papers? Could it be explained by Herman and Chomsky's 'manufacturing consent' thesis[24] that argues that political and economic elites use advertising muscle to control the media? The editors of the Hindi newspapers declined to

[22] Interview in June 2012.
[23] Interview in July 2012.
[24] Interview in July 2012.

comment. *Dainik Bhaskar*'s editor did not respond to questions on whether the newspaper group's interests in the mining and power sectors posed a conflict of interest. But journalists in various Hindi publications confirmed, on the condition of anonymity, that commercial pressures on the papers are intense and they risk losing both government and corporate advertising if they report the protests against industry.

Compared to the Hindi regional media, the national English newspapers are relatively insulated from such pressures, which may explain why *The Hindu* has twice as many stories on the resource conflict than *Navabharat*. But such stories are still few in number. 'I believe the resource conflict is as important [as the Maoist conflict] and should definitely be given more attention by the press,' says Aman Sethi, who reported from Chhattisgarh for *The Hindu*. 'But it is hard to cover both the conflicts. The sources are different, the distances are vast.' This produces real dilemmas for correspondents who must choose between covering an armed insurgency claiming hundreds of lives in the south and a slower, less dramatic but intensely disruptive resource conflict in the north.

'It is tough to find good reporting talent for places like Chhattisgarh,' says Rajesh Mahapatra, deputy executive editor at *Hindustan Times*. 'In Associated Press, if you lived in difficult regions, you earned a hardship allowance. And when you completed the stint, you were often promoted. But in India, we do not reward such journalism.' He says journalists hired fresh out of college by *Hindustan Times* are paid 3.5 lakhs (Rs 350,000 or US$ 6,300) a year for a position in New Delhi and just 2.6 lakhs (Rs 260,000 or US$ 4,500) a year for a position in Jharkhand. 'There are very few Chhattisgarhiyas, Oriyas and Jharkhandis who have the English skills and want to become relatively underpaid journalists', says Sethi.

> *The well-educated elite are usually part of the 'system' and first generation English speakers come from families who have made huge sacrifices to educate their children. They have massive responsibilities and liabilities and need to get secure, well-paying jobs. The only places with an 'English-speaking elite surplus' are Metros and journalists from Metros are unwilling to live in Raipur, Ranchi, Keonjhar or Kalahandi.*

'You could hire a local who is a good reporter but lacks English language skills. But this requires both effort and area expertise,' says Mahapatra. According to him, editors in English newspapers lack expertise to even

locate and hire talent in states like Chhattisgarh. 'The editorial collective's understanding of the country falls drastically short,' he says, suggesting that editors in English newspapers mirror the ignorance of their readers. As media theorists would say, they are part of society, which in this case is a metropolitan affluent society which is not much interested in how the rest of India lives – or dies.

Between a constrained and partisan regional press and an uninterested and ignorant national press, the coverage of conflict in Chhattisgarh remains patchy and skewed.

Conclusions

The media are often the 'central battleground' for social movements.[25] While movements are often concerned about the adverse affects of negative media coverage, scholars contend that any coverage is better than no coverage. For instance, a study of the media coverage of the Landless Farmworkers Movement in Brazil (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra or MST), which has demanded more equitable land distribution, found that the movement benefited from media coverage, even if the coverage was often hostile.[26] Extending the argument further, it can be argued that when movements do not get space in the media their ability to make their claims in the public arena stands diminished.

The key finding of this study is that the armed insurgency of the Maoists in the south of Chhattisgarh gets more media attention than the resource conflict in the north of the state, manifested in non-violent protests against mining and industry. By singularly focusing on the Maoist insurgency, the media amplifies it at the expense of other forms of resistance in the state, thus misrepresenting the ferment in Chhattisgarh – and arguably even distracting from its underlying causes. Even though the coverage of the Maoists might not be positive – as indicated by the bias towards the government in the coverage – the very fact that the insurgency is getting space in the media means the Maoists have been able to establish themselves as a powerful actor in the politics of the region.

This explains why a raft of new legislations is being seen as the outcome of the Maoist insurgency – even though the Maoists do not seek to influence policy but instead seek to overthrow the state. Such

[25] William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub, 1990).
[26] John L. Hammond, 'The MST and the Media: Competing Images of the Brazilian Landless Farmworkers' Movement', *Latin American Politics and Society*, 46/4 (Winter 2004), 61–90.

legislation includes the Draft Land Acquisition Bill, and also the Draft Mining Bill, which aims to make it mandatory for mining companies to share 26% of their profits with local communities. While to the affected populations any correction spawned by an insurgency is welcome, it is hard to ignore the humanitarian costs of violence.

Also, more intangibly, change brought about in this manner weakens faith in democracy. Every time the Indian state fails to respond to non-violent movements, it strengthens the intellectual critique made by the Maoists, if not their rebellion on the ground. Among other things, the responsiveness of the state to a social movement is linked to the perceptions of the movement's power, which is often gauged through its representation in the media. When peaceful protestors defending their rights are unable to secure space in the media, not only do they stand weakened, but so does the idea of democratic struggle. Academic studies caution against a simplistic reading of the media's impact, but it can be argued that the media are unlikely to further the cause of democracy in states like Chhattisgarh if they continue to ignore the voices of resistance until they speak the language of violence.

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4. Marginal on the Map: Hidden Wars and Hidden Media in India's North-East

Arijit Sen

The north-eastern states of India have experienced a long history of violent conflict, and at the same time a similarly long history of neglect by the country's mainstream media. Even though there are constant cases of excessive military action and clashes with rebel groups, reports from the North-East are few and far between. Newspapers, publications, and television networks have reduced the region almost to a footnote in Indian history and have made it invisible to the world. Only a handful of journalists have reported on the violence and the various changes that have come with it. When they do cover the region, this tends to be sporadic and short-lived, with little impact or follow-up reports. Or the region is subject to misrepresentation and stereotypes. The result is that, in metropolitan India, the dominant image of the North-East remains that of an alien frontier.

In this study I map out the characteristics of the region, its neglect by the mainstream media, and the limitations on the regional or local media. I conclude with some thoughts on why the region will become more important and what might improve the coverage.

Media Neglect

On 28 April 2013, Rashida Manjoo, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, reached the Indian state of Manipur which borders Burma. In a closed-door meeting she listened to

testimonies of 40 women. Each of them had a story of suffering and loss, allegedly due to the violence that has been unleashed because of counterinsurgency operations carried out by the Indian Army in Manipur. There was not a single mention of this event on Indian television channels.

According to some reports, Ms Manjoo wept after hearing one testimony narrated by the mother of Thangjam Manorama, a 32-year-old woman allegedly raped and killed by Indian paramilitary forces.[1] It was a story that went back nine years. On the afternoon of 15 July 2004, 12 women disrobed themselves and stood naked in front of the Indian paramilitary headquarters in Imphal. Together they held one single length of white cloth that had 'Indian Army Rape Us' emblazoned on it in red paint. It was probably the first time that any part of India had witnessed such a display of anger.

The Manipuri women were protesting against the rape and murder of Manorama. The incident was clearly gruesome, and the anger of the people widespread, but the national media initially did not report it. It was only after this protest by the 'Imas' or mothers of Manipur and the publication of photographs of their protest in some newspapers that the rest of the mainstream media paid any attention. Reporters were sent to Imphal. Stories were carried and awards won. But the main demand of the protest, the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958, fell on deaf ears. Manipur again dropped off the national mainstream news radar. In December 2008, the same group of 12 women travelled from Manipur and staged a sit-in protest in New Delhi. The media did not find that protest as newsworthy. There was only one TV crew and a couple of print journalists present.

The UN representative's visit came a month after a committee appointed by India's Supreme Court found that Indian security forces had orchestrated six murders and passed them off as a clash with militants.[2] In other words, the encounters were faked. It was a landmark ruling and a possible first step in the direction of truth. Again, it was a piece of news that was relegated to the inside pages of newspapers and only a brief mention on India's television channels.

Ignoring North-East India has become commonplace, and this neglect is often compounded by an unhelpful stereotyping that does not build bridges between this corner of India and the rest of the country. In August 2009, NDTV aired a programme called *Warrior Tribes of Nagaland*. 'The longer I travelled, civilisation as I knew it, was being left

[1] 'UN Special Rapporteur Visits Manipur, Weeps', *The Hindu,* 29 Apr. 2013.
[2] 'Panel Identifies 6 Fake Encounter Killings in Manipur', *The Hindu,* 4 Apr. 2013.

behind', says the programme anchor as she crosses a modern-day bridge in a four-wheel-drive luxury car and enters Nagaland. Her statement seems a carryover from British times. Read alongside a report in 1905 by B. C. Allen of the colonial government,[3] it displays an uncanny similarity in content, and possibly also in the authors' mindset. Allen writes that the British thought there were places in Nagaland that were inhabited by 'pertinacious savages'. Allen's comment demonstrated a long-standing colonial belief that had resulted in ten military expeditions into the region by 1850. Each expedition resulted in the slaughter of locals, and the tenth expedition alone claimed one hundred Naga lives. An 1873 missive from Lord Dalhousie, the British Governor General, makes explicit the British attitude towards the people of British India's North-East:[4]

> *Hereafter we should confine ourselves to our own ground; protect it as it can and must be protected; not meddle in the feuds or fights of these savages; encourage trade with them as long as they are peaceful towards us; and rigidly exclude them from all communication either to sell what they have got, or to buy what they want if they should become turbulent or troublesome.*

The Naga hills are home to at least sixteen tribes inhabiting the border areas between India and Burma. A Naga movement spearheaded by the Naga National Council (NNC) started to seek independence from India soon after India gained its independence from Britain in 1947. When talks, veiled threats, and various promises all proved futile in the face of the mounting insurrection, the Indian army moved into Nagaland in 1955. A raging conflict with the separatists did not fit in with the democratic image the Indian government was promoting at the time, so it suppressed news of this agitation from the rest of the world. From 1955 to 1960 the press was blacked out in the Naga hills, and very few details of the conflict became known.

On a February night in 1961, British journalist Gavin Young arrived in the Naga hills. Young was a reporter with the *Observer* of London and was interested in the largely unreported war. Flanked by Naga rebels for 18 days, Young trekked along the switchback jungles of Nagaland meeting several people from the underground and finally emerged with some answers about what still is one of Asia's oldest unresolved conflicts. It was the first true instance of reportage on the Indo-Naga War in the

[3] B. C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteer's Report*, vol. 9, *Naga Hills and Manipur* (New Delhi: Mittal, 1905).
[4] Ibid.

world media and broke what had been a wall of silence on the conflict.[5] Fifty years after Gavin Young's report, the North-East still remains trapped behind a veil of selective silence. The engagement of mainstream Indian media with the North-East remains marginal.

An Invisible Region

The eight north-eastern states of India share porous borders of at least 4,500 km with Burma, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and parts of Tibet (see Map 3.1, p.29). A 22 kilometre stretch in Siliguri connects this entire zone with the rest of India. Unfortunately, 'the North-East tends to be seen as a distant outpost, some kind of land's end. Yet it was until recently, a crossroads and a bridge to Southeast and East Asia, with its great rivers ending in ocean terminals at Calcutta and Chittagong'.[6] The location of this frontier zone and the porous nature of its borders have mostly been used for free movement by rebel units. On 30 October 2008, just a month before the 26/11 Mumbai Terror Attack, a well-planned militant attack took place in Assam: nine serial blasts killed 100 people. It was carried out by rebel groups who had crossed over from Bangladesh. Four years earlier in April 2004, the port of Chittagong in Bangladesh reported one of the biggest arms hauls in South Asia. Estimated at US$4.5–5.7m, the seizure included rocket launchers, rockets, over a million rounds of ammunition, grenade launchers, grenades, and assorted assault weapons.[7]

Most of the neighbouring countries around North-East India have allowed training camps to be set up by armed groups. Even now, Burma is still being used by militants for their bases. A severe crackdown by Bangladesh in 2010 led to the dismantling of several militant camps there. India's internal security mechanism is constantly engaged with the region. Most legislative and administrative policies for the North-East are made with the security establishment's concerns kept firmly in mind. In many areas of the North-East, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act gives the army sweeping powers to arrest and shoot anyone on suspicion, without prosecution.

[5] Gavin Young's report 'The Nagas: An Unknown War' is available via http://www.nagajournal.tk/publ/others/achan/8-1-0-6.

[6] Government of India, Planning Commission, *Transforming the Northeast: Tackling Backlogs in Basic Minimum Services and Infrastructural Needs*, report to Indian Prime Minister (New Delhi: Government of India, 7 Mar. 1997).

[7] Anthony Davis, 'New Details Emerge on Bangladesh Arms Haul', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 16/8 (Aug. 2004), 4–5. See also the interview with Davis in 'Consignment from China', *Prothom Alo,* 8 Mar. 2009, and Sreeradha Dutta, 'Complicity of State Actors in Chittagong Arms Haul Case Revealed', *Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses*, Comment, 9 Mar. 2009.

In the last sixty years the North-East has seen the emergence of at least 117 armed groups. Out of these, at least 15 are currently active. In the Home Ministry list of 35 rebel groups banned under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (1967) across India, 11 are from the North-East. Out of these banned groups, 3 are from Assam, 6 from Manipur, and 2 from Tripura. At present, the Indian government is simultaneously in talks with at least 24 rebel groups from the North-East. Some talks go back as far as 1947, and some negotiations are as recent as October 2012. Yet, in all these years, not one round of talks has had a final resolution or put a permanent lid on any conflict. One reason remains that multiple groups profess to be the sole arbitrator for peace. For example, the Naga group National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) describes their path as the correct one. Another Naga group, the Khaplang faction, rejects it. The demands of the militant groups range from a complete breakaway from India to more regional autonomy or sometimes for a complete redrawing of Indian state maps to carve out a land the militant group considers its own. Such demands often lead to a stalemate as elected Indian state governments stick to their state's territorial integrity.[8]

The root causes of these rebellions are diverse. One factor is the repeated failure by the Indian state to bring development to the various regions where the militant groups are active.[9] In Nagaland and in Manipur it was resistance to alleged Indian domination and territorial claims that gave birth to the rebel groups. In Mizoram a famine and utter neglect by the Indian government were two factors behind the rise of the Mizo National Famine Front in 1966. In Assam, the United Liberation Front of Assam (UFLA) grew simultaneously with a resistance movement, the Assam Agitation, which demanded the expulsion of illegal migrants from Bangladesh and corrective measures to stop economic exploitation. In many instances, militant groups have started a dialogue with the government, but despite ceasefire agreements the disarming of militants remains a distant possibility. The free availability of small arms often leads to violation of ceasefire ground rules and gives rise to extortion. To date, the Mizoram Accord of 1986, which allowed militants to come out of hiding, give up arms, and replace an elected state government, remains the most successful story of conflict resolution.

[8] For a look into the peace efforts, see 'NSCN (I-M) to Consult People Before Inking Peace Accord', *The Hindu*, 26 Oct. 2012.

[9] On the cause of insurgency in 2011, see an interview with Pradip Phanjoubam, editor of *Imphal Free Press,* in the *Times of India*, editorial page, 14 Nov. 2001. He brings up the point of political representation: 'If Manipur had 12 Member of Parliaments instead of two, we would have been wooed. But as long as democracy remains a numbers game, minority voices will remain unheard. And when your democratic voice is not heard, you resort to undemocratic methods. That's the prime reason for the insurgency – it's a language that's heard.'

Another factor behind the conflict is the Inner Line Permit policy. In 1873, the British government introduced an Inner Line Permit for Nagaland between the hill areas and the low plains of the state. According to this regulation, no outsider could go without an official pass beyond Dimapur, the main entry point into Nagaland. The idea of the permit was to extend protection to different tribes, but in effect it created an imaginary wall of alienation, a divide between the North-East and the rest of India. In 1947, the newly independent government adopted both the permit and the idea behind it. In 2011 the then government removed the permit system on an experimental basis for a year from the entire North-East except Arunachal Pradesh. Often various groups have misused the permit to portray the North-East as India's savage frontier, underline differences, and also set the grounds for future conflicts.

Mutual suspicion is often the key element in interactions between people from the so-called mainland and people from the North-East. Indians who are not from the North-East and in effect outsiders are often called *bahirot manu, mayang, vai, bahar manu, tephreima, tsiimar* in North-East India. There are different terms with almost similar meanings used in different states of India's North-East and often they have a derogatory sense. Similarly, to mainland India North-Eastern Indians are 'chinkies', indistinguishable from South-East Asians.[10] This racial profiling leads to an 'othering' of people living in the region and a denial of Indian nationality and its benefits. This margin–mainstream perspective drives representations of the region in different parts of the media.

Ignoring the Violence

Between 1992 and 1997, 900 people from the Kuki community were allegedly killed by one faction of the Naga underground group, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah). For example, on 13 September 1993, 105 unarmed Kuki women, children, and men were allegedly slaughtered by armed Naga men. The filmmaker and journalist from Manipur, Bachaspatimayum Sunzu, observed that 'The ethnic strife was almost not reported in the national media. I was in Bombay and remotely aware of it.' Some senior journalists note that the media in Manipur did extensive objective reporting on the conflict and even

[10] Different terms used to denote Indians as outsiders in Assam (*bahirot manu*), Manipur (*mayang*), Mizoram (*vai*), Nagaland (*bahar manu*), Anagmis in Nagaland (*tephreima*), and Aos in Nagaland (*tsiimar*).

prompted the neutral majority community (Meiteis) to broker peace in the ethnic strife. However, the mainstream media remained silent.

Almost a decade before the Kuki–Naga clash, in February 1983, in one of the worst communal riots India had ever witnessed, at least 2,000 Muslim men, women, and children were hacked to death in Nellie, a small village in Assam. A meagre compensation of 5,000 rupees (£65) was paid to the next of kin of those killed, and between 3,000 rupees (£39) and 1,000 rupees (£13) to the injured, depending on the seriousness of the injury. Twenty-five years after the riots I travelled to Nellie. The victims were still waiting for adequate compensation, with no real hope of getting it. Nellie hit the headlines after the massacre but quietly fell off the media map soon after. The horror still remains in the public memory but reports on the condition of the victims' families or that of Nellie is not a priority for the media.

The government is probably happy to keep it like that. In November 2004, just 30 minutes before she was supposed to begin a talk on Nellie titled 'Memories of a Massacre: Competing Narratives of an Incident', Japanese scholar Makiko Kimura was prevented from talking by the Assam government. Against popular perception, Kimura had argued in interviews that it was not the land dispute between tribals and migrants that had led to the violence. However, the wrong interpretation persisted since the government liked it that way and the regional media supported it. It was reason enough to stop Kimura's talk.[11]

The Nellie massacre happened during a period from 1979 to 1985 when Assam rebel groups, who were then considered post-independence India's largest popular movement, were at their peak. They demanded the expulsion of illegal Bangladeshi migrants. Agitators believed that the long border that India shares with Bangladesh was being used by illegal immigrants, who were crossing over into Assam and settling there. The protests ignored the long shared history between the two nations, which not that long ago were part of one country. The Assamese would not settle for anything less than a complete eviction of the settlers. The militancy of their demand was partly a reaction to the practice by local Assam politicians of exploiting the helplessness of illegal immigrants and giving them shelter to create a bigger voter constituency. But the agitation also led to an environment of mutual suspicion between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Often *bona fide* Indian Muslims, who might have had roots in what is now Bangladesh, would be hounded out.

[11] Abstract in online notice board of the Centre for Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia Studies http://www.mail-archive.com/assam@pikespeak.uccs.edu/msg09693.html.

But the struggle, many insist, also had an economic basis: Assam was supplying the rest of India with tea and oil, yet lagged behind economically. This economic frustration was at least partly responsible for the formation of the rebel group, ULFA. During the unrest, Assam's regional newspapers clearly supported the movement and its aspiration to reverse economic exploitation and neglect. But the absence of critical media also led to the targeting of those who questioned the chauvinism of the protestors. In 1991 Kamala Saikia became one the first journalists to be killed by the militants after he dared to criticise them. The news of his death was not widely covered and Assam remained on the margin of national consciousness.[12]

Over the years militant groups have established parallel state structures. For example, four Naga rebel groups run a system of parallel taxation that requires every individual in Nagaland to pay 'tax'. According to a study by the Maulana Azad Institute of Asian Studies in 2011,[13] the group collected the equivalent of £7.24m in 2007–8 through such extortion. This sum represented over 50% of the state's tax revenue. Such parallel tax systems also prevail in Manipur, and parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that several schemes of the Ministry of Home Affairs have failed to woo militants to renounce arms.

Easy money through extortion and various other means remains another reason why militancy thrives in North-East but the media often doesn't report such arrangements. The National Investigative Agency (NIA)'s first case was to look into allegations of development money being siphoned off to fund the militant group Black Widows or the Dima Halam Daogah (Jewel-Garlosa) faction. The NIA found that in the North Cachar hill district of Assam, money was shared between politicians, bureaucrats, militants, allegedly a governor who was also a former army man, and every other dot that made the circle.

The Justice Manisana Commission report (2008) on the misappropriation of funds in North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council mentions how funds meant for development work were channelled to militants and all departmental officers in Assam received their due share. But there was little engagement on the part of the metropolitan media with the story – only one national news magazine, *The Week*, carried a report.

[12] Nitin Gokhale, who has been reporting from the North-East for more than two decades, disagrees on the Assam agitation not getting featured in the national media. According to him, the agitation did get its fair share of media presence, although he agrees that the Kuki–Naga clash was off their radar.
[13] Rakhee Bhattacharya, *Development Disparities in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2011).

Limits of the Local Media

The regional media are of course a lot more engaged than the national media with the news in the North-East. But news reports in the regional media rarely have the power to influence policy or impact changes at the level of the central government in Delhi or even state governments. Moreover, they are often intimidated by rebel groups. In the course of my travels in Manipur and Nagaland as a reporter over the last five years, I have seen that regional newspapers come under a lot of pressure from these groups to carry their press releases *verbatim*. Small newspapers do it for survival. If they don't, their reporters are attacked. They are soft targets. From 1991 to date, 26 journalists have been killed in the region. Yet there is no perceptible change on the ground. Militant groups threaten the regional media at will.[14]

The government also tries to put pressure on the regional media. For this, the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act, 1911, has been used in the past.[15] In 1997, Assam police arrested Ajit Kumar Bhuyan, editor of *Asomiya Pratidin* and *Sadin,* which are both regional newspapers openly critical of government policies. Bhuyan was arrested under the National Security Act. The charges included abetment in the abduction and subsequent killing of an activist. This was his third arrest. In 1992 and 1994 he had been arrested and in both instances acquitted as there was no evidence against him. In 1997, the courts again found Bhuyan not guilty of any crime. The primary reason for hounding him was his bold criticism of the government. The arrest was the government's attempt to silence him and his paper.[16] Also, if a newspaper is overtly critical of the state, the state government can respond by refusing to give it advertisements. This affects the revenue source of small newspapers and threatens their very existence.

Recently Assam has witnessed some changes in the regional media with the arrival of private television channels. These channels are indirectly owned by politicians or by corporate groups with political ambition. This style of ownership, which is common across India, cripples media freedom. In many instances government policies are not questioned. For example in 2006, India's National Games were held in

[14] International Federation of Journalists, *Situation Report: India's Northeast*, Journalists Pressured by Multiple Insurgencies and Ethnic Divides (Brussels: IFJ, Sept. 2009). Three more journalists were killed after this report was published.
[15] L. Kanchan, 'The Media in Terror: Analysing Reportage from Theatres of Conflict', *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume8/Article2.htm.
[16] Jugal Kalita, 'Ajit Kumar Bhuyan: A Prisoner of Conscience in Assam', 1997. Published in full at www.cs.uccs.edu/~jkalita/assam/human-rights/ajit-bhuyan.html.

Assam. A regional television network raised uncomfortable questions about the state government 'buying peace' by paying money to the rebel group ULFA which had issued threats against the games. The network suggested that this was the government's method of ensuring that the games were held without any trouble. Immediately the channel was blacklisted from attending government press conferences. The Assam government has started its own television channel, in part to stop critical news. Such steps considerably weaken the regional private media. Every year the Assam state government distributes free laptops to journalists. The *quid pro quo* is unstated but understood. The Sikkim government follows a similar policy.

The World Bank describes conditions in the North-East as that of a lowlevel equilibrium of poverty, non-development, civil conflict, and lack of faith in political leadership. The deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of India has said that funds to North-Eastern states add up to more than the amount India receives from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.[17] Yet basic facilities such as electricity, roads, and water are absent in most of North-East. Local militias call the shots in various places and often the ideology of resistance has been replaced by the convenience of a money-sharing arrangement between local militias and the bureaucracy.

The regional media are mostly a silent spectator to this happening. The misuse of funds is hardly reported, thereby strengthening the nexus between politicians, militants, and the security forces. Land grabs, trafficking, arms deals, public money used for personal benefit, and even arrangements where money is paid to buy votes, are all carried out with impunity in part because they are not reported.[18]

Looking to the Future

Between the lack of interest of the national media and the lack of objectivity – or at the times the powerlessness – of the regional media, reporting from the region has become insignificant or flawed. Could new media help to break the silence? Unfortunately, this platform is virtually absent in the North-East. According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, the North-East II circle, which includes Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal, has an overall telephone density of 8.7%. So, for every 100 people there are about nine telephones. In the rural areas,

[17] Reuters, 'The Economic Paradox of Northeast India', 18 Dec. 2009.
[18] Author interviews with the Naga underground representative of the ceasefire monitoring cell and with politician Abu Mehta. Both of them admitted that money is used to buy votes.

the number dips to three telephones for every 100 people, and in the urban areas the number goes up to a modest 27.[19] The overall tele-density for the rest of rural North-East stands at six. India's average stands at nine for rural areas.

Against this background it is easy to see the obstacles to the development of citizen journalism or video volunteers in most parts of North-East. Moreover, some local people have reservations about these platforms. In the course of my travels in the North-East, several people, especially in Manipur, spoke against the idea of citizen reporters. Their big concern is that there are sharp ethnic and political lines that could turn it into loose-cannon journalism. Nagas staying in the hills of Manipur will have a different view of things from Meiteis staying in the valleys. Manipur, however, has a unique example of unusual radio broadcasts. Every now and then, a certain 'Leikai' (Manipuri for neighbourhood) decides to have its own rendition of the news that is read out on All India Radio. There are also Leikai announcements made via the radio at certain hours. But such announcements do not include community discussions or any serious news content.[20]

New initiatives are bringing about some changes, but they remain limited. A citizen journalism platform, Video Volunteers, encourages freelance journalists to file their own reports and also get paid. It remains a source of powerful reports filmed by citizens and bought by Video Volunteers. Through their platform they distribute such content to mainstream Indian television channels as well. Funding is through an NGO partnership. Naomi Hatfield Allen from Videovolunteers.org told me, 'Our North-East correspondents, particularly three of our women correspondents, are incredibly active and outspoken reporters.' However, she agreed that connectivity problems can prevent reports from getting out.

Representatives of the mainstream media argue that the remoteness of the region makes it difficult for them to get access to it. This argument hides the fact that the media suffer from self-imposed restrictions and rarely invest money in travel and equipment that is essential to get access to remote regions and report from there. But why should the mainstream media report on the North-East? Bertil Lintner, an old hand at conflict reporting and a former correspondent with the *Far Eastern Economic*

[19] Sumanjeet Singh, 'Digital Divide in India: Measurement, Determinants and Policy for Addressing the Challenges in Bridging the Digital Divide', *International Journal of Innovation in the Digital Economy,* 1/2 (2010), 1–24.

[20] I am grateful to Chitra Ahanthem for bringing to my notice the Leikai aspect while discussing community radio in North-East.

Review, has a simple answer: 'Because it's an important part of India and the region, the crossroads between India, Southeast Asia and China.'[21]

The region will become more important in the future. As part of a new diplomatic thrust the United States has expressed a desire to support India's 'Look East' Policy, a policy of trade, development, and security that connects India with South-East Asia. North-East India is at the heart of this initiative. US President Barack Obama in his address to the Indian Parliament on 8 November 2010 said: 'Like your neighbours in Southeast Asia, we want India to not only "look East," we want India to "engage East" – because it will increase the security and prosperity of all our nations.' A year later US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in her address at the East-West Centre in Hawaii said that the US wanted to actively support India's Look East policy as it grew into an Act East Policy.[22]

However, for such promises to deliver, crucial steps need to be taken. Development as promised in Look East policy documents can only happen when militancy is curbed. More investment for the free flow of information through unhindered and critical reporting could help to put an end to the cycle of violence. Currently, reporting from the North-East is affected by the absence of media organisations which are critical of both the state and the militant organisations. Often this leads to reporting based on handouts and to a vicious cycle where violence goes unreported and leads to more violence.

There should be more reporting in its various forms, from reporting by citizens to Right to Information campaigns by activists to increased engagement by the mainstream media. Through collaborations, new ideas, new media, radio, and television, it is possible for the media to turn the spotlight on conflict in this corner of the world. There is a recent example of how this can work: between July and August 2012, communal violence in the Kokrajhar district of Western Assam between Bodo tribals and Muslims resulted in at least 100 deaths and the displacement of 400,000 people from both communities from their villages. Probably for the first time in this region, the Twitter space, independent media, blogs, and the regional media ensured that the violence and the riots were reported. The Indian mainstream media and even international media like the BBC, Al-Jazeera, and CNN International were forced to sit up and take notice. The violence did persist but the constant reporting created pressure on the national and local governments to take exceptional measures to bring it under control.

[21] Author interview with Bertil Lintner (2011).
[22] 'US will Actively Support India's Look East Policy says Hillary', *Economic Times*, 11 Nov. 2011.

This incident showed that the more noise that can be raised by different forms of reporting, the better it will be for India and its North-East.

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5. The Decline of Foreign News Coverage in the Indian Media

Jasodhara Banerjee

India on the World Stage

Ever since the introduction of free market economic reforms in the 1990s, India has seen rapid growth and increasing international political and trade relations. The country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which had grown at 3% in the decades after independence in 1947, grew by more than 6% in the 1990s, and well over 7% between 2004 and 2006.[1] In April 2012, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report predicted that it would continue to grow by between 6 and 7.5% in 2012–13.

In the decade between 2000–2001 and 2010–2011, India's foreign trade increased from $95bn to $625bn. Between 1990 and 2005, the ratio of India's merchandise trade to GDP rose from 13 to 29%. According to a 2012 World Bank report, this figure had risen to more than 40% in January 2011. Foreign direct investment (FDI) also increased many times during the same period, from $0.2bn to $6.6bn.

After independence, in keeping with its foreign policy, India largely traded with members of the Non-Aligned Movement, and then with the former Soviet Union. However, along with its economic growth India's foreign trade relations diversified significantly: in 2000–2001, the European Union was India's biggest export (23%) and import (20%) market, but by 2010–11, West Asia and North Africa was India's largest export (19%) and import (29%) market. In 2012, about 20 years after

[1] Pieter Bottelier, 'What India Can Learn from China and Vice Versa', *China and World Economy*, 15/3 (2007), 55–69.

economic reforms were introduced, India's economy surpassed that of Japan (in terms of purchasing power parity) to become the third largest in the world after the United States and China.[2]

These years also saw India strive for global aspirations such as a seat at the United Nations Security Council and the formation of the G-10, and at the regional level, it pushed initiatives such as its Look East policy and greater ties with ASEAN. Although India has lacked a definitive foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, its involvement with other nations is far more diverse and in-depth than it was before economic liberalisation.

India has entered into deals with the US, France, Russia, the UK, and others for the supply of nuclear technology and fuel; it has defence deals and agreements with France, Russia, Israel, and Spain, among others; recently, it has been increasing cooperation with Japan, especially as a counter to the growth of China. Where private enterprise is concerned, Indian companies are investing vast amount of money and efforts in Africa and North America.

However, this increase and diversification in India's international interests has not been adequately reflected in the country's news media. Despite the proliferation of news provision through print and television, the amount of space dedicated to coverage of foreign developments has actually shrunk when compared to pre-liberalisation figures; the editorial focus is largely restricted to the country's immediate neighbours or to Indians living abroad.

Case Study of India–China Relations

A hugely significant story has been the rapid evolution of relations between India and China over the past decade. The two neighbours have emerged as frontrunners of the developing world, defying global economic trends, building international alliances after decades of inward-looking policies, and juggling domestic political strife, separatist movements, and rising inequality. The rise of these two nations attracted increased attention during the global economic downturn, which saw Western nations experience shrinking economies, job losses, and government bailouts of multinational corporations.

From the 1940s onwards, India and China had economies dominated by the state, and political relations took precedence over economic ones where international trade was concerned. However, following the

[2] IMF, *World Economic Outlook*, Apr. 2012.

economic reforms adopted by China in 1978, and by India in the 1990s, the economies of the two countries became market-oriented, decentralised, and privatised.

India–China trade has surged since 2000, when bilateral trade was worth $2.92bn.[3] By 2008, China replaced the US as India's largest trading partner (as a single country), with trade worth $51.8bn, and $61.7bn by 2010. India expects volumes to reach $100bn by 2015. Better diplomatic relations, the resumption of border trade, and increasing domestic consumption in both countries are the drivers of this surge. India largely exports ores, slag and ash, iron and steel, plastics, organic chemicals, and cotton to China, and imports electrical machinery and equipment, nuclear reactors, machinery, boilers, cement, silk, and mineral fuels in return.

Both countries have found in each other alliances and joint ventures that are complementary to each other's resources, needs, and capabilities. For example, in the Greater Nile Project, India's state-owned ONGC Videsh Limited is partnering with the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation for oil exploration in Sudan;[4] in 2006, China's SINOPEC and India's ONGC made a joint bid for a 50% stake in Ominex, an oil company based in Colombia.[5]

However, bilateral trade remains heavily in favour of China: as of August 2011, India faced a trade deficit of nearly $17bn.[6] India has also witnessed protests against cheap Chinese goods flooding the market, and has initiated 149 anti-dumping cases against them.[7] In 2010, India banned the import of Chinese telecommunication equipment, claiming it could be embedded with spying mechanisms.[8]

Ongoing political tensions

Despite the boom in economic relations, India–China political relations have been fraught with tensions, mutual suspicion, and strategic posturing since they went to war in 1962. Political relations between the two countries began in 1949 when India recognised the People's Republic of China.[9] Despite the two countries signing the Panchsheel Agreement in 1954, relations soured later in the 1950s, over the disputed regions

[3] Indianembassy.org.cn, 29 Feb. 2012.
[4] 'India to Get 3 MTPA More Crude from Greater Nile Project', *Financial Express,* 14 Mar. 2003.
[5] Bottelier, 'What India can Learn from China'.
[6] Indianembassy.org.cn, 29 Feb. 2012.
[7] 'India, China Hold Talks on Anti-Dumping, Trade Disputes', *Press Trust of India*, 18 Apr. 2012.
[8] Joe Leahy and Kathrin Hille, 'India Bans Chinese Telecom Imports', ft.com, 29 Apr. 2010.
[9] Christopher J. Rusko and Karthika Sasikumar, 'India and China: From Trade to Peace', *Asian Perspective*, 31/4 (2007), 99–123.

along the India–China border in the Indian states of Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh. China refused to accept the terms of the 1914 Simla Agreement (between British India and Tibet), and offered to give up claims on Arunachal Pradesh only in return for India relinquishing Aksai Chin in Jammu and Kashmir. India refused the offer.[10] Tensions escalated when the Dalai Lama, and thousands of Tibetans, sought refuge in India.

In October 1962, China launched simultaneous military offensives in Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin and, despite clearly winning, announced a ceasefire after a month. The India–China war is an event that continues to strain sentiments on either side of the border even after 50 years.

Diplomatic and trade relations were restored in the 1970s,[11] negotiations were held over the border dispute between 1981 and 1987, border trade resumed in 1992, and attempts were made to separate the border issue from relations in other spheres. However, despite all these developments, India and China continue to remain suspicious of each other's motives and actions. This political disconnect has continued despite the signing of the Declaration of Cooperation in 2003, which reaffirmed India's acceptance of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, and China's acceptance of Sikkim being part of India.[12]

India has been particularly suspicious of China's strategic and military alliance with Pakistan, which began as China's step towards countering India's friendship with the former Soviet Union in the 1960s. In addition to supplying conventional military equipment – 'F-22P frigates with helicopters, K-8 jet trainers, T-85 tanks, F-7 aircraft, small arms, and ammunition'[13] – it provided Pakistan with uranium in the 1980s, nuclear warheads, and ring magnets for use in its nuclear weapons programme. China has helped Pakistan to build two civilian nuclear reactors, and is planning to build two more; it has provided assistance in building the first phase of the Gwadar deep-sea port in Pakistan's Baluchistan province;[14] and it is willing to entirely take over the port's second phase.[15] For Beijing, this has been an effective way of keeping

[10] Gillian Goh Hui Lynn, 'China and India: Towards Greater Cooperation and Exchange', *China: An International Journal*, 4/2 (Sept. 2006).
[11] Rusko and Sasikumar, 'India and China'.
[12] Lynn, 'China and India'.
[13] Lisa Curtis, 'The Limits of the Pakistan–China Alliance', blogs.reuters.com, 20 Jan. 2012.
[14] Jamal Afridi and Jayshree Bajoria, 'China–Pakistan Relations', Council on Foreign Relations, Washingston, 6 July 2010.
[15] 'China Confirms Takeover of Pak's Gwadar Port', *Press Trust of India*, 4 Sept. 2012; 'China Set to Take over Reins of Strategic Port in Pakistan', *Indian Express*., 29 Aug. 2012.

India preoccupied along its western border and containing its global ambitions.

In more recent years, Sri Lanka has emerged from its three-decades long civil war and has become a region of keen interest for both China and India. In 2005, China and Sri Lanka signed eight agreements covering finance, infrastructure, construction, and tourism. China is investing in several major infrastructure projects in the country, including the Hambantota port and a container terminal in Colombo.

There have been other sources of tension. India continues to provide refuge to the Tibetan government in exile, the Dalai Lama, and thousands of Tibetan Buddhist monks. The two countries are also sparring over the waters of the Brahmaputra river: China has built a dam along the river's upper course, which India believes will severely affect water availability in its lower course. India's state-owned ONGC-Videsh's oil exploration in the South China Sea has sparked tensions with China regarding a territorial dispute over 52 islands involving China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines.[16] Indian and Chinese oil companies are also competing for oil and natural resources in Africa and Central Asia.

However, China has made gradual efforts to improve Sino-Indian relations: it has inched towards a neutral stand on Kashmir, and has adopted a South Asia policy that is more in line with its broader policy of reducing tensions around its periphery. But India remains apprehensive that China's port-building activities in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and infrastructure projects in Myanmar, are part of its attempts to gain further access to the Indian Ocean and 'encircle' India. India also fears that China could use these ports for naval purposes in the future.

Explaining the differences

It is clear that better trade relations have not been enough to bridge the political chasm between the two countries. Three factors help to explain this.

First, the increase in Indo-China bilateral trade is insignificant compared to the increase in their total foreign trade. The trade volumes are not significant enough to each of the countries for them to consider improving political relations for the sake of better trade. Bilateral trade between India and China increased from $2.92bn in 2000, to $73.9bn in 2011; it is expected to be worth $100bn by 2015.[17] But despite this increase, India and China form a small portion of each other's total

[16] 'ONGC-Videsh Going Ahead with South China Sea Exploration', *Economic Times,* 24 Apr. 2012.
[17] 'India, China on Course to Achieve $100 bn Bilateral Trade by 2012', *The Hindu*, 3 Nov. 2011.

foreign trade. China represented about 2.5% of India's total foreign trade ($95bn) in 2000–1, and about 9.5% (of $620bn) in 2010–11. In 2010, India was 10th on China's list of trading partners. Derek Scissors, a senior Research Fellow at the Asian Studies Center, the Heritage Foundation, believes there is nothing exceptional about the volume of bilateral trade between India and China.[18] He says there was a surge in the total volume of trade between China and other countries after China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001, and that trade with India is a part of the global phenomenon.

Secondly, bilateral issues between India and China have become more multilateral in nature, and their foreign alliances complicate the resolution of bilateral issues. Following the end of the Cold War, and the economic reforms in China and India, the two countries have built external relations based on domestic requirements and global aspirations. The role that Pakistan and the United States have come to play in Indo-Chinese relations is perhaps the most significant. India has remained suspicious of China's continued alliance with Pakistan and its port-building activities in the country. China was suspicious, first, of India's alliance with the former Soviet Union and, following its collapse, with the United States.

According to Dr Rosemary Foot, a professor of international relations at St Antony's College of Oxford University, China has been particularly irritated by the civilian nuclear deal between the US and India.[19] China sees the deal as an effort to contain it, and also as an example of US's double standards and how it bends global rules for its own interests. While India is striving to enhance political and economic relations in East Asia and South-East Asia through its Look East policy, China wants to have a stronger presence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. The aspirations of India and China, and their foreign alliances, within Asia and outside, adversely affect their bilateral relations.

Thirdly, for China, sovereignty is more important than economic gains. Experts say that, as China increases its search for natural resources and export markets to maintain its economic growth, it is difficult to determine accurately how important economic interests will be for the country's foreign policy. The interviewees, however, maintain that sovereignty remains the most important factor in determining China's foreign policy. Dr Foot says China's border agreements with its other neighbours show that China 'is not incapable of compromise on sovereignty questions', but 'the compromises were made at the time when

[18] Author interview.
[19] Author interview.

Mao [Zedong] had complete authority. Now, many more people have a voice … it's a different era.' She adds that the disputed territories with India are of more significance to China than to India because 'these regions are populated by minority communities whose loyalties [to the Chinese government] are suspect' and 'this makes it hard for the Chinese to compromise on them'. Dr Srikanth Kondapalli, an associate professor in Chinese studies at Jawaharlal University, New Delhi, says that in 2009 China defined its 'core interests', and these included Tibet, Taiwan, and the South China Sea. 'Core interests mean China will go to war over these issues, regardless of economic concerns.'[20]

The need of the Chinese government to maintain its sovereignty includes maintaining its supremacy over domestic politics and power equations. All the interviewees agree that the government's prime concern is to continue creating jobs, absorb larger sections of the population into the workforce, and reduce inequality in order to ensure political stability within the country. This need for internal stability is fuelling China's search for natural resources and to secure supplies. Explaining China's port-building activities around the Indian Ocean, Dr Foot says:

> *They have moved from being an oil exporter in 1993, to becoming an oil importer and, therefore, energy security has come into the agenda. And that explains a lot of the port activity … But the Chinese are not just doing the port building: they are building strategic reserves, they are going for land, pipelines.*

Rob Gifford, China correspondent for *The Economist,* says China's need for resources, and its resultant presence in Latin America and Africa, raises the question of when this need will start affecting foreign policy; and although China has a policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of foreign countries, its degree of contact (and, perhaps, conflict) with these resource-rich countries will keep increasing.

In general, we can conclude that, for the Chinese government, the disputed borders with India are crucial to maintaining its sovereignty within the country. So they would be less likely to make compromises on them. Also, its economic activities in other South Asian nations can be viewed as steps to secure supply of natural resources – and therefore secure economic growth – in order to maintain domestic political stability.

[20] Author interview.

The Coverage of International Affairs in the English News Media

The preceding section laid out the evidence of why India's role on the world stage has become a very important story to cover. In particular its economic and political relationships with China are of crucial significance to its past, present and future. However, despite the boom in Indian broadcast and print media since the early 1990s, the coverage of international news has actually fallen.

One of the outcomes of the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s was the burgeoning of the country's news media. There has been a mushrooming of television news channels, as well as a phenomenal growth in the number of newspapers and magazines, and their individual circulation figures. It is to be noted that this growth, both in electronic and print news media, has been highest in regional Indian languages, although English continues to be the language of the urban, middle-class, and affluent population.

In 1979 the total number of newspapers in India was 929,[21] with the English press having a slightly higher circulation than the Hindi. In 2010–11, the number of registered newspapers in India exceeded 80,000: of these, nearly 33,000 were in Hindi, while the number of English publications was more than 11,000.[22]

While newspapers in India have always been privately owned enterprises, television was an entirely state-sponsored and state-governed domain. In 1988, New Delhi Television (NDTV) became the first private enterprise to produce a news programme, *The News Tonight*, which was broadcast on the only state channel, Doordarshan. NDTV also produced *The World This Week*, a weekly round-up of foreign affairs and news, for broadcast on Doordarshan as well. After 1991, private and foreign broadcasters were allowed limited operations in India. At the end of 2011, there were 825 permitted private satellite channels in India, about 122 of which were 24-hour news channels.[23]

I now turn to a detailed comparison of the coverage of foreign news by three of India's leading national dailies, the *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times,* and *Indian Express*, in preliberalised (1979) India, and in 2012. The analysis of newspapers and television news in 1979 has been taken

[21] Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, Kaarle Nordenstreng, Robert Stevenson, and Frank Ugboajah, *Foreign News in the Media: International Reporting in 29 Countries* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985).
[22] Registrar of Newspapers for India.
[23] Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, TAM (Television Audience Measurement), Peoplemeter System.

from study undertaken for UNESCO by the International Association for Mass Communication Research.[24] In the study, the media sample included five English-language dailies, selected for their significant place in the Indian press system, and their coverage of different regions of the country: *The Hindu* (Madras); *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi); *Times of India* (Bombay); *Indian Express* (Cochin); and *The Statesman* (Calcutta). The English-language national radio news broadcast at 9 pm and the regional English-language television newscast on Delhi TV at 9.45 pm were also included. For the purpose of comparison in this chapter, data have been selected from only three newspapers – the *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India,* and *Indian Express*.

The 1979 samples were taken from a randomly chosen week, 23 to 28 April, and are based on the definition of foreign news as 'events or situations outside the home country, or events in the home country in which foreign nationals take part or which are presented as having substantive relevance to foreign situations'.

To make the comparison with 1979, a second set of samples was taken from the same three newspapers – *Hindustan Times* (Mumbai), *Times of India* (Mumbai), and *Indian Express* (New Delhi) – over the course of another randomly chosen week in 2012, namely 8 to 13 April. The *Hindustan Times* and *Times of India* can be considered national newspapers as they are published from several cities across India. The *Indian Express*, although lower in circulation, continues to be one of the most respected newspapers in the country. The foreign news pages of all three newspapers remain the same across editions. The samples chosen from 2012 include news that pertains to foreign countries and Indians living in foreign countries. Business news was not included as it now falls under a different category of news in publications, and 'news briefs'.

Figures 5.1 to 5.3 show the comparative figures of foreign news coverage for each of the three national dailies, highlighting both the average number of stories and the percentage of total space dedicated to foreign news in the given weeks.

[24] Sreberny-Mohammadi *et al.*, *Foreign News in the Media*.

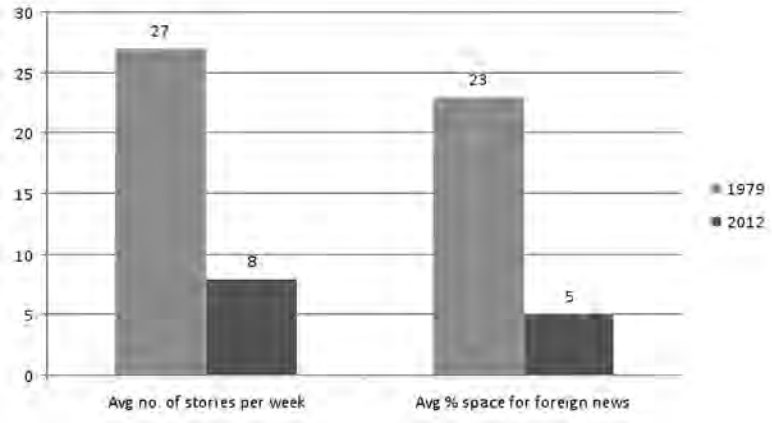


Figure 5.1: *Hindustan Times*

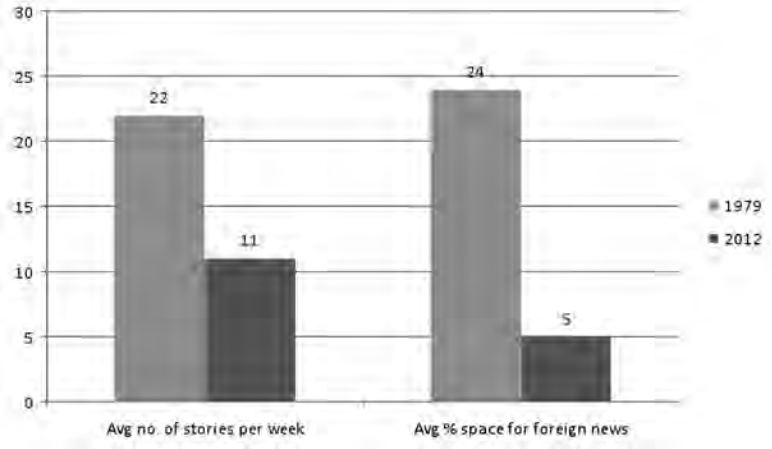


Figure 5.2: *Indian Express*

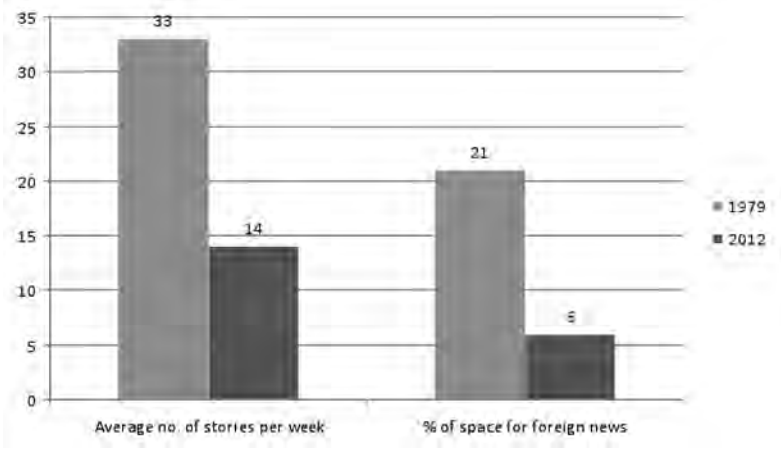


Figure 5.3: *Times of India*

As can be seen from the diagrams, for each of the three newspapers the decline in foreign news coverage since 1979 has been very marked, measured by both the average number of stories and the amount of space given to foreign news. The main foreign issues that were covered in the April 1979 sample were: elections in Rhodesia, rebellion in Uganda, the Iran–Egypt peace treaty, bilateral ties between India and its regional neighbours, political unrest in Nepal and Sri Lanka, and Asian immigrants. The main issues covered on the foreign pages of the 2012 samples included developments in Pakistan and China, relations and developments in the United States, Indians living in foreign countries, acts of violence and terrorism.

A supplementary analysis was then carried out of the presence of news about China on the front pages of the Mumbai editions of *Hindustan Times* and *Times of India*, in two randomly selected weeks of 2012 and 2013 (8 to 14 April 2012 and 28 April to 5 May 2013). The analysis showed that news related to China was published on the front page only when it was related to an incursion by the Chinese into Indian territory in April–May 2013. The 2012 sample had no news related to China on the front pages of the newspapers.

It is difficult to compare foreign news coverage on television between India in 1979 and 2012, as the coverage of a multitude of news channels today is such a different environment than the 15-minute national news telecast on the only channel that existed in 1979. However, the following point can be made. In 1979, the national 15-minute news telecast

included an average of six reports (302 seconds) of foreign news – comprising 34% of the total amount of news time. In 2012, CNN-IBN, a national 24-hour English news channel, dedicated a combined airtime of half-an-hour to foreign news coverage throughout the day (5 minutes on the breakfast show, a couple of minutes in the one-hour news programmes during the day, and so on); the channel also has a half-hour programme on foreign news once a week.

Commentary on the Results

Interviews with several leading editors from both the print and broadcast media suggest reasons for the decline in the amount of space given to the coverage of foreign affairs. Pramit Pal Chaudhuri, the foreign editor at the *Hindustan Times*, puts forth three explanations: more professionally marketed newspapers are subject to fiercer competition between them, which has led to the recognition that reader interest in international news is both less and different than earlier thought; there is now a wealthier readership especially for English papers, which has turned the focus more onto subjects like lifestyle and personal finance; India has itself become a more interesting topic since 1991, when domestic economic news expanded enormously and politics became more competitive and complicated.

'Newspapers changed dramatically after liberalisation in 1991 and the subsequent massive rise in profitability. I would guess the shift to domestic news began roughly five years after that,' says Pal Chaudhuri.[25] 'About a decade ago, two pages were common. But now, one page is more likely for international news,' he adds.

The *Hindustan Times*, with the second highest readership in the country, now has just one-and-a-half pages dedicated to foreign news on four days of the week, and a single page on the other three days. Part of this space is earmarked for news on international lifestyle, trends, and technology. The newspaper has between 20 and 22 pages of news every day, along with an entertainment and lifestyle supplement of 8 to 10 pages.

A similar picture can be found in the *Times of India*. It dedicates one page to international news every day (it has about 24 pages of news every day, apart from an entertainment and promotional feature with a varying page count), and another half a page to technological innovations and scientific findings (usually both are related to lifestyle issues). The paper has also recently started publishing a weekend page of 'curated' articles

[25] Author interview.

from the international media. Although there is more variety in the selection of news on this page, it is still noteworthy that it is largely 'soft' news.

The foreign news pages in both these newspapers do not attract advertising, except for the half-pages, which, by definition, have a half-page advertisement.

As for the broadcast media, Surya Gangadharan, editor of defence and strategic affairs at CNN-IBN, says that:

> *The decline has been gradual ever since the advent of 24x7 news channels. But it seems to have quickened in the past couple of years. Yes, big events such as terror attacks are covered in detail, or a high profile visit like that of the US president or the Chinese premier. It's the day to day coverage that has declined; the number of stories (packaged with bites) is few and far between.*

'Foreign news segments do not attract advertising. They don't make money,' says a senior journalist at another leading television news channel.[26] 'Cricket makes money. So you will see the IPL [Indian Premier League] playing out on news channels. There are sports channels for this, so why are news channels showing cricket? And Bollywood – that is also what brings in the advertising.'

This journalist added that English news channels tend to follow the trend that has been set by the market leader, Times Now. This includes

> *picking two or three stories, and flogging them for the rest of the day, without caring about what else is happening in the world. It is an entirely anchor-driven exercise, where reporters are reduced to sound-bite gatherers. There are no real news reports or packages. Following this pattern leaves very little scope to tell any kind of story.*

Newspapers and TV channels depend largely on foreign news agencies and stringers for their international news. The *Hindustan Times* for example has four foreign correspondents, while CNN-IBN has none.

'More correspondents or at least a larger news gathering budget would help. Indian interests encompass many more parts of the world, such as Africa, than it did in the past. But space constraints also mean that adding too many correspondents would be pointless', says Pal Chaudhuri.

[26] Author interview. The journalist asked not to be named.

'We take video footage from Reuters, APTV … we also get footage from CNN', says Gangadharan. 'But if it is something about, say, Egypt or Syria, we will change the script according to what we would like to say. We don't always agree with the US standpoint on these subjects.' He adds:

> *It would be ideal to have locals reporting from a foreign country. They have better access for interviews, they know the language and the culture. They can also give piece-to-cameras on breaking news. What they should have is an understanding of what is required for an Indian audience.*

So what does attract foreign coverage according to the editors? Pal Chaudhuri says that reader surveys show that news stories related to the US, China, and Pakistan are the most popular, as is the coverage of Indians living abroad. The selection of news, therefore, includes these issues, as well as international lifestyle, health, and career trends. International stories that make it to the front page are ones 'that have a strong India connection, economically or politically, while editorial pages tend to have a slightly more big-picture view, and look for India-relevant policy issues', he says.

'We will cover bomb blasts in Pakistan, but not really the building collapse in Bangladesh [when over 1,000 lives were lost in April 2013]', says Gangadharan. 'But don't expect us to include news from Syria.' He adds that foreign news remains focused on Pakistan, China, and the US, and it finds a slot in the prime time news bulletin when 'an Indian gets beaten up somewhere, gets shot in Afghanistan or they have to be evacuated from places like Libya'.

And what about China? 'China has risen from a low interest issue to number three in about a decade. What used to be about its economy is increasingly about its foreign policy', says Pal Chaudhuri. 'But internal Chinese dynamics are often neglected, especially politics and the regions.'

'We usually carry news about defence-related issues, and the border dispute', says Gangadharan. 'It could be an US analysis of their defence budget, or a remark made by a Chinese general that has implications here … These are the standard stories that come from China.' He adds that the challenges of covering include gaining access to news. 'It is very hard to get people to talk to you. Getting visas is problematic. Language is another issue.'

Pal Chaudhuri agrees that language and the lack of transparency are some of the challenges faced in covering China. 'Reporting that something has happened is easy. But trying to report why it is has happened is the difficult part', he says. Although Pal Chaudhuri feels there is bias reflected in the reporting of news from China, and that it 'reflects a genuine threat', he also says, 'It is important that we carry more nuanced reports of their domestic politics and internal culture.'

Conclusions

We have seen that, following the reforms of the 1990s, there has been sustained and rapid economic growth in India, accompanied by the expansion of foreign trade and trade relations. The country has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies and markets of the world. It broke away from its earlier foreign policy of non-alignment, becoming a significant member of the G20, and it is building stronger relations within Asia, through the ASEAN, and with Japan and South Korea as part of its Look East policy. The civilian nuclear deal between the United States and India in 2008, and the subsequent agreements with France, Russia, the UK, South Korea, and Canada, among others, over the supply of nuclear technology, reactors, and fuel, has also to be seen as a significant step in the global acceptance of India as an emerging power.

The growth that has taken place in India's economy, businesses, and trade has been reflected in the country's media sectors as well. India is now home to thousands of newspapers, television channels, and FM radio stations in regional languages as well as in English.

However, India's growing relations with other nations do not find adequate space in the country's news media. The coverage of foreign affairs that does get into the newspapers remains largely confined to developments in, and relations with, Pakistan and China. In the coverage of these two countries, issues remain restricted to border incursions or skirmishes, Pakistan's role in terror attacks in India, the growth of China's economy and military and its presence in South Asia, and visits and negotiations conducted by state officials.

News from beyond South Asia is often restricted to what's happening in the US, what Indians living abroad are doing, and information on lifestyle, healthcare, and entertainment.

Editors of newspapers and news channels argue that one of the main reasons for this is the fact that India itself has become a far more

interesting place post economic liberalisation. Another central factor is the media's dependence on advertising for revenue, which ensures that cricket and entertainment are given an abundance of space and time. Several editors feel that, unless a development or event in a foreign country, especially outside the South Asian region, has implications for India in some way, it will not attract readers or audiences. However, as this chapter has shown, India's future is more and more tied up with its political and economic links beyond its boundaries. One of the pressing challenges for editors and journalists alike is to find a way of making these significant developments interesting to their readers and viewers.

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6. Citizen Journalism: In Pursuit of Accountability in India

Parul Agrawal

Introduction

> *I don't know what they call me … I have never heard of this word, but I am doing what I do because I know this is needed for me and my community's survival.*
>
> *(Pitbasu Bhoi, a daily wage labourer, on his motivation for becoming a citizen journalist)*

Like anywhere else in the world, citizen journalism in India is a fascinating and important development in what is happening to the media. However, it is the narrative of ordinary citizens like Pitbasu Bhoi that makes it substantially different from its Western counterparts.

Pitbasu Bhoi is a skilled farmer in the remotest of remote villages in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh. He was forced to become a daily wageworker due to the lack of agricultural facilities and increasing unemployment in the area. With no social support system in place, he got himself registered under the National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREGA) scheme that promises 100 days of employment with a minimum wage to each adult member of a rural household.

NREGA stipulates that the disbursement of wages has to be done on a weekly basis and never beyond a fortnight. However, like other welfare schemes in India, NREGA is marred by corruption. On his 100th day of

work Pitbasu had still not received payments for even a single day. While he was struggling to get his payments released, his son was admitted to hospital. Due to lack of money and lack of treatment, he died within a couple of days.

At this point Pitbasu's story was reported on a citizen journalism portal called CGNet Swara by a local activist. CGNet Swara is a voice-based portal, freely accessible via mobile phone, which allows anyone to report and listen to stories of local interest. The post about Pitbasu made an appeal to the public to get involved, calling on 'callous' government officials to take action. The story of a father struggling to get his wages while his son dies in the hospital was soon picked up by the mainstream media; after weeks of publications and public activism, Pitbasu was finally delivered the wages due to him.

Tales of ubiquitous corruption, crippled welfare schemes, and personal tragedies like that of Pitbasu are commonplace in India, but what followed afterwards is not. Pitbasu is no longer just a daily wageworker. He is now a citizen journalist travelling from village to village, reporting endless stories like his for CGNet Swara and facilitating people to fight for their rights.[1] As a citizen journalist, his vision is simple but well-defined: 'things are seriously going wrong around us and if we are able to negotiate some change for ourselves by telling our stories to others, the least it does is to add another day to our life'.

The growth and evolution of citizen journalism in India is a story of ordinary citizens like Pitbasu Bhoi becoming citizen journalists with the help of platforms like CGNet Swara. It has helped to create a culture of accountability in the democratic yet often unaccountable system currently found in India.

Defining Citizen Journalism

As technology makes every citizen a potential publisher, journalism is no longer restricted to journalists. The citizen reporters who covered the 2009 Iran elections, the Mumbai terror attacks, and the Arab spring for the rest of the world have already made it clear that the use of social media and active citizen reporting can, in certain circumstances, become the primary source of news and information. The rise of citizen journalism is primarily attributed to technology as in the past there were very few ways that people could make known, beyond the sound of their

[1] 'Pitbasu Bhoi: Citizen Reporter for CGNet Swara', available at http://cgnetswara.org/index.php?id=10300.

own voices, facts they uncovered or opinions they held.[2] However, while citizen journalism embraces all forms of social media, not everything and anything that goes on social media is citizen journalism.

The concept of citizen journalism is adapting, modifying, and creating a space for itself in different territorial, economic, and social conditions. What started as information activism in the form of leisure blogging has now turned into serious reporting and fact-checking. These developments and transitions identify citizen reporting as an independent and important ally of mainstream journalism. In the Indian context it is about citizens like Pitbasu Bhoi becoming amateur journalists who combine activism with whistle-blowing.

Backed by the explosion of 24-hour television news channels and driven by the hunger for new stories and perspectives, citizen journalism in India is still in its nascent stage but it is quickly evolving as an important phenomenon in the media world. In India, it has its roots in the lack of an effective mechanism for redressing the grievances of ordinary citizens. While web-based and technology-driven media have been the main forces behind the phenomenon in the rest of the world, citizen journalism in India has been fuelled by the investigative vacuum left by the mainstream media. The growth of mobile telephony has acted as a further catalyst.

There have been many claims to be the first citizen journalism initiatives in India, like merinews.com[3] and the Indian branch of globalvoicesonline.org,[4] but few have managed to survive the financial crunch and sustain editorial independence. A few other mobile reporting, community radio, and video initiatives largely financed by non-government organisations have managed to maintain a presence, but they lack active citizen involvement and editorial independence.

In India the tools of the internet and new media are still to reach the poor majority, who usually lack the necessary resources to find a voice. In such a context, it is not surprising that the two most successful citizen journalism initiatives have evolved as a collaboration with professional journalists and the mainstream media.

Two specific success stories represent contrasting socio-economic realities and the urban–rural divide of the country. The first case study is CGNet Swara which operates in the tribal state of Chhattisgarh, where there are extremely low rates of literacy, a very low penetration of media,

[2] John Kelly, *Red Kayaks and Hidden Gold: The Rise, Challenges and Value of Citizen Journalism* (Oxford: RISJ, 2009), 5.

[3] www.merinews.com is a media platform for citizen journalists in India and across the globe.

[4] A collaborative alternate media network connecting citizen journalists all across the world.

and a violent conflict between the state and Maoist guerrillas. In contrast, the second case study is a television programme known as *The Citizen Journalist Show* broadcast on the national English news channel CNN-IBN, from Delhi. It would be no exaggeration to say that, while Delhi is the media hub of India, Chhattisgarh is somehow surviving in a communication vacuum.

The working models of *Citizen Journalist Show* and CGNet Swara highlight how citizen journalism is adapting, innovating, and modifying itself in diverse on-the-ground realities, holding governments accountable and at times setting a local agenda for the national media.

CGNet Swara: The Voice Revolution

CGNet Swara is a mobile phone-based citizen journalism service operating in the remote villages of Chhattisgarh, a resource-rich state inhabited by India's culturally distinct and socio-economically marginalised indigenous communities, known as adivasis. The area is home to some of the world's richest reserves of coal and iron ore, and for more than a decade Indian security forces have been locked in a civil war there with Maoist insurgents.[5]

Journalists working in the state are severely constrained. Shubhranshu Choudhary, a former BBC journalist and the founder of CGNet Swara, says

> *The majority of journalists in places like Chhattisgarh earn their income mainly from taking a cut from the advertisements they generate from their area, not out of reporting stories. The majority in fact, do not get a salary. There is a nexus between local government officials, business houses, and politicians in the area. But reporters are not in a position to report on corruption and such issues, because they are in turn the main generators of advertisement revenue for them.*[6]

It is against this backdrop that CGNet was started as a web forum by a group of people from all walks of life. The aim was to exchange and discuss what was happening in Chhattisgarh besides the story of violence. The forum was a hub for bringing issues like development and governance to mainstream discussion and expose stories like farmer

[5] See Ch. 3 in this book by Supriya Sharma for full background to the conflict.
[6] Author interview.

suicides and human rights violations by 'Salwa Judum' (the civilian army created by the government to fight Maoists), i.e. anything and everything that was important for the local community to know and discuss.

The forum soon grew in numbers and discussions developed into serious fact-checking and collating information on unreported issues. Gradually, these substantiated stories were picked up by the mainstream media and, once reported, the local government was forced to take action. However, the group soon realised that a large section of the population with the largest stake in what was happening in the state still fell outside the realm of the discussion forum. The obstacle was the low level of internet penetration in Chhattisgarh at less than 1% of the population.

The group grasped that in the forested villages, where there are few televisions and newspapers are not distributed, the medium of participation would have to be voice-based. Only this would allow universal access and build on the adivasi tradition of oral expression. The rapid penetration of mobile phones in low-income regions of countries like India has triggered widespread interest in building mobile systems and applications for the benefit of education, health, governance, and other social ends. Chhattisgarh is no exception.

In February 2010 the forum took the shape of CGNet 'Swara' (voice) that was launched as part of the Knight International Journalism Fellowship that Shubhranshu had received in 2009. It aimed to be a medium by the people, of the people, for the people. The mechanism of the portal is based on a server through which CGNet Swara users make an ordinary phone call to the system, which presents them with an option to record their messages or listen to the existing posts. All recordings are moderated by a group of trained journalists before being published on the portal. The published recordings are accessible via phone and on CGNet Swara's web portal, where they are also summarised in textual form.

A look at the kind of stories that are being reported through CGNet Swara reveals that it is not the day-to-day violence that bothers people in Chhattisgarh as much as the struggle to live through each day.

Apart from countless stories about corruption, lack of facilities, and inhuman living conditions, these are stories of human suffering that might never find a place in national or local newspapers. For instance, a report by citizen reporter Anil Bamne from District Bilaspur conveys the plight of a woman who had to walk 15 km at 2 am to call an ambulance for her pregnant daughter-in-law, as there was no phone connectivity in

her village. The report adds that the hospital promised to send an ambulance but never did. The pregnant woman was eventually carried to the hospital with great difficulty.[7]

CGNet Swara has established a cause-and-effect relationship between issues that concern people and the communication medium. A lot of activists and citizens who post their stories include the contact details of the officials and government departments responsible for lack of action. This serves to instigate public activism and motivate people to call them en masse. This is another way of acting as a pressure group on officials to take action. Strategies like these are debatable as they may be seen as violating a government officer's right to privacy or hindering the government administrative systems. But they are proving to be a way to create waves in a virtually non-accountable system.

Currently 'Swara' receives approximately 240 calls per day and publishes an average of 3 new posts per day. A vast majority of callers are only listening to content. The average phone call is 3.5 minutes long, and the server streams approximately 14 hours of audio content per day. Since the deployment of its server in February 2010, CGNet Swara has logged 46,000 calls to the system and filtered more than 1,000 reports to be published on the website.[8]

Clearly a lot of material posted on the server gets filtered during moderation, about which Shubhranshu says: 'We do not release posts that cannot be factually verified, use questionable language, or make unverified allegations of a personal nature against someone.'[9] An independent study by Microsoft on the type and subject of posts at CGNet Swara states:

> *Apart from news, the most common type of post was grievances relating to a variety of livelihood and civic issues. Grievances constituted 34% of all posts. Another category that reports categorized as 'performances' represents song and poetry, often rich in cultural tradition. The moderator did not discourage such submissions as celebration and preservation of tribal culture is fully within the scope of CGNet Swara. Often these messages also had social overtones.*[10]

[7] CJ Anil Bamne's report on CGNet Swara available at http://cgnetswara.org/index.php?id=9090.
[8] Preeti Mudliar, Jonathan Donner, and William Thies, 'Emergent Practices around CGNet Swara: A Voice Forum for Citizen Journalism in Rural India', Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies and Development, Mar. 2012, pp. 159–68.
[9] Author interview.
[10] Mudliar *et al.*, 'Emergent Practices around CGNet Swara'.

The study highlights that

> *almost 70% of the content was concentrated on very localized issues as compared to issues that were of significance at a state or national level. Almost 20% of posts pertained to NREGA grievances. 21% of the contributors were recording messages to intervene on behalf of someone else's grievances and around 45% of the contributors were reporting on personal experiences or eye-witnessed events.*

The case of Pitbasu Bhoi, who eventually received the wages he was due, is not the portal's only success story. Several reports have led to a redressing of grievances and benefited local communities. In a span of almost two years, there have been roughly 14 cases of 'impact', which is where the grievance or the issue reported managed to stimulate an official response, and where the citizen journalist report led to a tentative solution.

So what has moved the web users to participate in the lives of people they have never known? Smita Choudhary, an active member of the CGNet group, believes that

> *while no formal research has been carried out yet, this is probably the result of the stronger connection that is made by listening to people tell their story. What can sound sterile in words written by one person on behalf of another, is alive in the actual recording from a real person. Add a phone number to that, and the credibility goes up many times. A reporter in the mainstream media, or a bureaucrat whose area is being spoken about, can just pick up his phone and talk.*[11]

The Citizen Journalist Show@CNN-IBN

The Citizen Journalist Show (*CJ*) is a half-hour television capsule broadcast on the national English news channel, CNN-IBN, based in the metropolitan capital and media hub of India, Delhi. The show broadcasts stories by ordinary citizens who aim to raise and investigate an issue to bring about a positive change in their local community or wider society. A team of professional journalists helps citizen reporters gather, process, and report their stories with logistical support from the news channel.

[11] As stated in 'Speak up a revolution' (unpublished manuscript) by Smita Choudhary, founder member of the network CGNet Swara.

The story of citizen journalist Brajesh Kumar Chauhan who fought the water mafia in his locality helps us understand who these citizen journalists are and how they report their stories. This is an example of how citizen journalists often risk their lives to gather evidence and report stories that have long been ignored by the mainstream media. His story is a complex one of development, migration, urbanisation, and corruption. But for him, it is simply a fight to get a glass of drinking water for himself and his community.

Despite a population as high as 800,000, a large number of slum colonies in Delhi have no water connection. The irregular supply of water tankers to these colonies by the state government adds to the problem. At times there are as many as 500 households who depend on a single tanker. Potable water is often stored for as many as 20 days. At times of acute shortage, the residents are forced to filter and drink water with worms inside it visible to the naked eye. This has paved the way for the 'water mafia' to creep in. In cahoots with corrupt Water Board officials, a number of illegal tube wells were dug in the area.

The water illegally extracted was sold at high prices, but supplies were still restricted to twice a month. As the water crisis deepened, the water mafia became stronger and underground water levels dipped further. But the story of the people's suffering was either too complicated or too dangerous for the media to report.

When repeated complaints over six years had no results, a resident of the area, Brajesh Kumar, decided to become a citizen journalist. His decision was motivated by one of the episodes of the show *CJ*, where Brajesh had watched ordinary citizens reporting their stories with microphones in their hands and cameras following them. The format of *CJ* provides an opportunity for people who have a story to tell and a struggle to share, but who find it hard to bring it to light for the larger good. To be a citizen journalist with CNN-IBN, one doesn't need to be equipped with cameras or a reporting technique. All that's needed is an issue and the show's engagement with the problem. However, citizen journalists are encouraged to record their stories, shoot videos that showcase issues, and gather evidence in the form of documentary proof to strengthen their reports as investigative stories.

Inspired by this, Brajesh Kumar decided to collect evidence and report the problems in his area. None of the residents, including himself, could afford a video camera so they hired a videographer (available at affordable prices in India) to shoot a public demonstration, illegal tube wells, and contaminated water supply. He spoke to the residents and

recorded their plight on camera. He also gathered documentary proof of his correspondence with various government departments and evidence of violation of laws by seeking information under Right to Information Act.

It was with this evidence that Kumar got in touch with the citizen journalist team at CNN-IBN. The story was promptly picked up because of the sheer dedication shown by an ordinary citizen to gather information, build evidence, and seek justice. Parts of the story were reshot with the help of Kumar and a professional journalist who accompanied him. During one such attempt the crew was even attacked by the water mafia, and the story became part of regular news bulletins, not just the weekly show. After the arrest of the main culprit and a year of constant follow-up, the illegal tube well has now been handed over to the local Residents' Welfare Association. The water supply to the affected area is now near normal.

The content of the *Citizen Journalist Show* gives an insight into the wide gap between the marketing of news by the mainstream media in India and the way citizen journalists define news. While national dailies and 24x7 news channels are busy generating content for a competitive market, the stories ordinary citizens want to report are civic issues, police apathy and inaction, illegal encroachments, housing scheme frauds, and the wastage or misuse of government resources.

In a span of almost five years there have been about 30 cases of 'impact' with CNN-IBN *CJ*.[12] Manish Sisodia, a former journalist and an active member of the anti-corruption movement that started in 2011, sees huge potential in the trend. As he says:

> *In a country like India where day-to-day functioning of the system is crippled by unaccountability, the policing and implementation of law becomes the first casualty of corruption. Where there is a wide gap between social concern and what the media thinks is news, these cases of impact definitely lead to a way forward.'* [13]

Like any other news story, citizen reports that go on air at CNN-IBN and its Hindi counterpart IBN7 are scrutinised through a process of counter-checking facts, collecting documentary proof, approaching government authorities for verification, and asking a second party for their version of the story. The team believes that the need to scrutinise is crucial since there is always a personal interest involved.

[12] The figure was given to the author by the editorial team of CJ at CNN-IBN.
[13] Author interview.

It is worth asking what motivates a citizen journalist like R. P. L. Shrivastav, who has been reporting and following up huge corruption cases in multiple welfare schemes in Uttar Pradesh, one of India's most underdeveloped and populous states. For many like Shrivastav, the mainstream media's sheer neglect of what is happening in rural India is his motivation to take action. He says:

> *I have been born and brought up in this village. Most of the people in the village are illiterate. Village heads and government officials have been forging papers and siphoning funds from welfare schemes that are meant for us. Corruption is engraved in our system and this has been happening for years. For the media this is no more a story, but for us it's repeated exploitation. When I see a media organisation ready to raise our issues and bring these stories to a conclusion, I get courage to fight for my rights. This is my last hope.*[14]

But an indispensable truth about such citizen journalism initiatives is the fact that, while these stories have seen exceptional grit, courage, and media activism, not every citizen report that CNN-IBN airs is a success story.

Features Editor at CNN-IBN and *Citizen Journalist* series producer Ritu Kapoor says:

> *Apart from rigorous evidence-gathering and follow-ups by citizen journalists, we know that it's the fear of the camera and spotlight of a mainstream news channel that has led to an impact in most of our stories. There are times when regular efforts have failed. We constantly try to improvise our strategy.*[15]

These stories of change are now an integral part of CNN-IBN's brand entity. Ritu Kapoor says that 'From time to time we have run these stories in our prime time bulletins as CJ reports. If a story has potential we look forward to go big on it, but it still needs a lot of pushing. There are times when it becomes a tussle between the conventional ideas of journalism versus a citizen report.'

[14] Author interview.
[15] Author interview.

Lessons from India

This study of the *Citizen Journalist* show and CGNet Swara highlights an inevitable dependence of citizen media on professional journalism. A look into the evolvement of citizen journalism beyond the West also suggests that collaboration with professional journalism is a key practice in many parts of the world, as ordinary citizens in many cases lack the resources and internet tools to report and highlight anomalies in governance and media.

In countries like India, where accountability and answerability to the citizen is yet to be achieved, and the system in practice is yet to be absolutely bound by law, it is difficult, in fact almost impossible, for ordinary citizens to report and expose systematic failures single-handed. The support of mainstream media to citizen journalists is thus a prerequisite for their safety.

In the cases of both CNN-IBN *CJ* and CGNet Swara, the distinct partnership between ordinary citizens and a network of professional journalists is the nucleus of the change. For isolated communities in areas where the communication revolution is yet to reach, platforms like CNN-IBN *CJ* or CGNet Swara serve as the only available 'alternative media' that link them to the world.

It is also the case that the stories being reported are largely based on the grievances of citizen reporters. But this is not surprising as it is the day-to-day struggle of life and government apathy that become the strongest motivations for ordinary citizens to become citizen journalists.

So is the trend a boon in disguise, giving a new lease of life to investigative reporting in deadline-strapped and cost-driven mainstream media? The Indian case suggests that citizen journalists are, indeed, taking a step forward to bring investigative journalism into the public domain. However, it is difficult for them to connect the issue to a larger public good and reach out to a wider audience. To address the issue of security, more and more whistle-blowers are becoming citizen reporters to make their voices heard and create a shield for them, by exposing their fight and threats to them. Participation with the mainstream media is one such strategy.

However, CNN-IBN's Ritu Kapoor believes that

> *The independent investigation, in the larger national interest, will always be done by the mainstream media. Citizens report issues that connect to them directly, so most of these stories, despite being*

> *related to general public interest, have a personal bias attached to them. Investigative reporting is after all the job of the media; citizens will never have the time to carry out such investigations.*

Citizen journalism is modifying and defining itself as it is evolving. However, there is one certainty about its future: content and stories from citizen reporters will be a major source of information and investigative reporting for the mainstream media. They will gradually learn to create a credible list of sources in the form of citizen journalists.

For the mainstream media, collaboration with citizen journalists brings diversity, authenticity, and a deep understanding of local issues, but at a heavy cost in time and resources. If citizen journalism is to be viewed as a game changer, creating a wider role for itself in participatory democracy, the issue of commercial sustainability is an issue that needs to be addressed.

While CNN-IBN has promoted citizen journalism as its extended brand entity, which has in turn resulted in positive outcomes both for citizen journalists (in terms of impact) and the media organisation (commercial brand value), the model of CGNet Swara has been designed differently to be able to be independent and sustainable.

The team at CGNet constantly tries to inform, partner, and liaise with mainstream media to pick up, follow, and investigate important stories, but its working model is not in favour of any structural partnership with them. Shubhranshu Choudhary puts it forward as a simple calculation:

> *The working model of mainstream media in India has shown that less than 2 percent of people in India are funding 80 percent of the media. What follows is the fact that 80 percent of the media speaks about the agendas and concerns of 2 percent of India. That's why we always emphasise that if you want your information to be out and heard, you need to own your media. Unfortunately the media models that we have seen so far are too expensive for communities to own.*

In its technical and structural approach, CGNet Swara aims to offer an alternative to existing, commercially non-sustainable, community media. Its current model of technological innovation and community donations to sustain itself needs to survive the test of time.

With the internet establishing itself as the fifth estate, this is just the beginning of the way democracy, public participation, and the media

structure could be designed and altered in the future. Various studies based on citizen journalism models across the globe, like Sahara reporters from Nigeria, Oh My News from Korea, the Dazhalan project in China, and mobile-reporting citizen media initiatives at the grassroots level, suggest that rather than being reliant on expensive equipment like desktop computers and laptops, social media in many developing countries now thrive on mobile telephony.

So what is it that lies ahead for citizen journalism in democracies like that of India? The most important challenge facing citizen journalism initiatives all across the world is the need to maintain independence yet make the independent voice heard.

Preeti Mudliar, who is one of the co-authors of a research paper on CGNet Swara,[16] believes that collaborations between citizen journalism and mainstream media need to answer questions like what shape and form the partnership and the moderation by professional journalism take. Can you do away with moderation completely? What kind of filters would you then put to ensure reliable and valid content, without tending towards some kind of bias? And is media without bias possible anyway?

The question relates to both the ethics and the business of journalism, but the answer is probably yet to be found. A report by KPMG on the Indian media[17] stated that

> *In the first digital decade 'content is king' was believed to the key to success. As telecom operators and cable companies aggressively entered the digital value chain, the debate shifted to whether controlling distribution channels mattered more than owning content. In the second digital decade, the proliferation of devices created new channels of communication for personalized and localized content. The realization has sunk in that while content and distribution are important aspects of the digital business model, companies can provide value in many ways – by providing context, coverage or convenience to the target audience.*

As new roles and challenges for professional journalists are being defined, the future of citizen journalism and its relationship with mainstream media remains fragile. But we have already seen that in India it is already filling a huge gap in providing content for vast numbers of Indians whom the mainstream media do not target as their

[16] Mudliar *et al*., 'Emergent Practices around CGNet Swara'.
[17] KPMG, *Emerging Business Models to Help Serve Tomorrow's Digital Tribes*, 2009: www.kpmg.com/IN.

consumers, and in helping to redress the grievances of the same poor Indians, who have been largely left out of the country's economic prosperity.

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