Culture Unbound:

Journal of Current Cultural Research

Thematic Section:

Critical Explorations of Media Modernity in India

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Extraction from Volume 10, Issue 3 2018

Culture Unbound, Extraction from Volume 10, 2018

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Introduction:
Critical Explorations of Media Modernity in India

By Britta Ohm, Vibodh Parthasarathi & Per Ståhlberg

In October 2018, just as copyediting for this Thematic Section began, India was made the fourth country – after the US, China and Japan – to set up a Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by the World Economic Forum (WEF), the most influential congregation of political and corporate power in our times. The WEF-website announces projects 'to be scaled across India and globally' and reports the first focus to be on artificial intelligence, blockchain and drones so as to 'tackle some of the country's most pressing socio-economic needs, such as education, healthcare and agriculture.' Eventually, with machine learning and the application of smart contracts, the aim is to 'boost productivity and transparency while reducing inefficiency.'[1] In his inaugural speech in New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi projected that 'India's contribution to the 4th Industrial Revolution will be astonishing' and that 'Industry 4.0 has the strength to drive irreversible positive change in India' (The Hindu 2018b). He pointed out how, under his government (a coalition led by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP), the "Digital India" program was already in the process of bringing internet connectivity to villages in an unprecedented fashion and how the country's fast advances in information and communication technologies, optical fibre-infrastructure and biometrical identification were laying the foundations to success under the motto 'Solve for India, Solve for the World' (Varindia 2018).

When fine-tuning our editorial approach to this Thematic Section this acutely mediated vision – for all its conjuring of the upcoming and, by implication, "the (next) modern" – alerted us to the striking echo it finds in a "technological moment", powerfully accentuated by another Indian government over 40 years ago. As media scholars at least of earlier generations know, the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE)-project was conducted in 1975–76 in the wake of the then globally emerging paradigm of space technology. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of the Congress Party, and her scientific advisor Vikram Sarabhai, founder

of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), in partnership with NASA, visualized SITE to "leapfrog" (as the buzzword went then) the developmental gap in the most "backward" regions of India. Using a satellite to beam television programs (on education, healthcare and agriculture) directly to audiences in 2400 remote villages, it was hailed by science fiction-writer Arthur C. Clarke as the 'greatest communications experiment in history' (Krige, Callahan and Maharaj 2013). As Sarabhai put it during the early stages of planning SITE: 'We are convinced that if we are to play a meaningful role nationally, and in the community of nations, we must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to the real problems of man and society' (ISRO website).

When viewed together, what do these two moments of ostentatious technology -celebration tell us about India's media modernity – the overarching theme this Thematic Section of Culture Unbound seeks to address?

Re-projecting the Techno-Nation

Obvious in both moments is the hyperbole of the official representation and the underlying technological utopianism, i.e. the positivist display, bordering on the fantastic, of technology as the harbinger of the ideal, 'post-scarcity' society (see Giddens 1996). Correspondingly, we find the identical blueprint of the marginalized and the poor as the first beneficiaries of the ever latest technology, which in turn continues to be projected as being at the service of those most required to "catch up" in order for an Arcadian society to take shape.

In this context, the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" together with its domestic equivalent of "Digital India", appears to signify a re-emergence of the markedly national information-communication technology project as a theme. The 1990s had seemed to spell the very end of grand national schemes, particularly in the fields of media technology. Coordinated implementation, last seen with the massive expansion of the national television network in the 1980s, had diffused into a vague interplay, both in terms of rhetoric and practice, between a new variety of agents. Akin to elsewhere in the world, this diffusion in India too was catalyzed by, on the one hand, the "unfettered" neoliberal greed of gain under the mantras of (government) reform and (consumer) choice, and on the other hand, by the liberated and libertarian imaginations in the privatising mass media that immanently challenged erstwhile privileges in defining forms and contents, access and interaction (Appadurai 1996, Robins and Morley 1995, Schiller 1991, Sonwalkar 2002, Wilson and Dissayanake 1996). These seductions often blinded both the sensitivity towards dangers of creeping ethno-religious nationalism as well as the visibility of insidious legal and physical deployments of media technology by national and transnational actors (Gingrich and Banks 2006, Herman and McChesney 1997,

Mankekar 1999, Ohm 2007, Rajagopal 2001).

The re-emergence of the grand technology project, that is advertised and conducted by only a small internationalized group of partly non-mandated power holders who couple "development" with forceful national integration, thus also points towards the background of severely compromised democracy that India's projected contribution to the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" shares with the SITE endeavour. The seamless realization of SITE unfolded in parallel with the swift removal of democratic barriers under the open declaration of authoritarian rule by Indira Gandhi, known as the Emergency (1975–77), which ensured that the 'nightly arrests, illegal detention, torture and death in jails, voices of dissent silenced by transfers, firing and other means could not be seen on that television set' (Pendakur 1988: 37). Somewhat in an upgraded mode, that has repeatedly been termed an 'undeclared emergency' (The Hindu 2018), PM Modi has, in tune with other populist leaders around the globe, introduced 'tweet politics' (Kreis 2017, Pal 2015), i.e. a direct communication with "the people" via social media that largely bypasses democratic institutions such as the parliament and even the cabinet (Chakravartty and Roy 2015, Ohm 2014). The cascading verbal assault, physical violence and administrative oppression against critical media, activists and universities, members of minority communities, low castes and Adivasis under this government are now overwhelmingly, and often brazenly, mediated on a global scale but so far fail to provoke resounding majoritarian condemnation, both within India and abroad (see Banaji 2018). And yet, just like in 1977, when Indira Gandhi was at least temporarily voted out of power, these excesses might eventually not lead to the desired results in elections.

Unraveling a Media Modernity: What Can it Mean?

These resonances between two striking moments of technological celebration in time indicate a well-established connection between media and modernity in India's postcolonial history and imagination. Equally, and more widely, they tell about the continuous mutual reinvention of this connection under shifting conditions (see Thompson 1995). What they seem to speak of, moreover, is the successive dissolution of a discernible difference between "media" and "modernity" (also) in the Indian context, which the key term of this Thematic Section – media modernity – attempts to capture. Of this process of dissolution, the fading away of an "outside" (a.k.a "the West"), that would both be enforcing new structures and enabling new perspectives, can be seen as one crucial expression. The abrupt and penetrating effects of transnational satellite television post-1991 (Bhatt 1994, Sulehria 2017), which erased virtually overnight India's carefully groomed technological sovereignty initiated by SITE, are increasingly unlikely to find a qua-

litative parallel in the future. On the analytical level, the successive replacement, for instance, of "modernization" through "mediatization" in academic approaches appears to be but one indication of the same dynamics (see Downey and Neyazi 2014, Udupa 2010): media are not any more just an "instrument" or a "representative" of change; they *are* change, in India as much as across the planet, even if the conditionalities vary greatly (see Sundaram 2010).

Indeed, media modernity refers not only to the globally increasing ubiquity and abundance of media and technology in ever more people's lives but also alludes to their simultaneous experience of modernity's ambivalences (Athique 2012, Dirlik 2007, Ståhlberg 2014). At the theoretical level, in turn, media modernity implies an ontological proximity between the two concepts of media (technology) and modernity. They share an adaptability, an emptiness even, that bears the old advantage of form over content as theirs much exceeds the variability of single modern achievements such as democracy or enlightenment or the idea of social justice. Media modernity need neither be democratic nor enlightened nor just (see Alexander 2013, Azoulay 2015, Butler 2009, Sontag 2003). As the two moments we invoked illustrate, under the relentless pressure of Western/global techno-economic advance, the discourse of modernity almost habitually leverages the poor and the disadvantaged as a pretext to reinvent itself – a logic particularly stark in countries featuring substantial socio-economic injustices like India. All the while, the poor and the disadvantaged neither go away nor become less, smartphone in hand or not, and information and communication technology pans out as much to support their democratic citizenship rights as to attack and even erase them.[2]

The idea of the mass media as a warning shield against the galloping risks of modernity, as Ulrich Beck once assumed, is thus itself at risk. One of the early theorists of post-industrialism, Beck saw modernity entering a stage of self-reflexion, i.e. of becoming a problem in itself rather than a means to problem-solving (Beck 1986). Even as he was, like most white Western scholars (and politicians), largely ignorant of the postcolonial dimension of this "modernity problem", he anticipated an increasing cross-societal distribution of the risks that come with the rationalized plundering of natural resources, large-scale environmental pollution, massive waste-production, and growing un(der)-employment and that have now entered debates around the anthropocene and climate change (Latour 2018, Tsing et al. 2017, Zinn 2016). Not quite able to transcend a Habermasian concept of the public, on the other hand, Beck could not conceive of media, both in terms of hard- and software, becoming included in such self-reflexive re-distribution (Ellis 2004, Cottle 1998). As meanwhile being increasingly demonstrated under the personalization and massification of media use and the re-emergence of grand national technology programs, media modernity well inhabits the possibility of a populist avatar of authoritarian politics, of neo-totalitarian surveillance, of ever

more brutal inequalities and of choking on the ecological consequences of its own inventions.[3] Precisely because of its "empty heart", however, media modernity also has the capacity to enable a whole new level of postcolonial democratic negotiation that is more existential in its consciousness, more political in its agency and more egalitarian in its understanding of the themes of differences, assemblages, contradictions and particularities that the 1990s first brought on the agenda. Of such a "reflected modernity", too, there exist many examples. The hashtag-campaign of #metoo during 2017–18 that for the first time got women on a global scale to articulate their various experiences with sexual misconduct, the, often painful, re-negotiation of journalism's role and tasks, and widespread civic engagement for the right to respect of individual and collective life choices, environmental protection and global solidarity are only some instances of a robust under- and countercurrent (see Bhattacharya 2017, Ståhlberg 2006, Wolfgang 2018).

The media themselves have thus become the space and the resource within which and with the help of which antagonistic scenarios are being contested. Consequently, neither the much increased everyday media-savviness nor the amassed scholarly knowledge of media are a guarantee for "Democracy 2.0" to (further) materialize (see Carr, Hoechsmann and Thésée 2018). Rather, as the essays in this Thematic Section underline, the meanings, overlaps and interrelations of different aspects and locations of this modernity, and of their various media(-tions), are both in quality and quantity so diverse, messy and 'liquid', to use Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) concept, that it is hard to imagine how they will ever fit into any one scenario. This is one reason for us to briefly introduce the essays in the following along a string of key words: history, politics/regulation, language, gender/race/caste and community.

An Analytical Geography of Sites and Registers

The authors of these essays, all carrying Indian passports, were first brought together in a panel call during 2016 towards the Swedish South Asian Studies Network (SASNET) conference on 'Modern Matters: Negotiating the future of everyday life in South Asia' (SASNET 2016). These authors live and work, like so many of us, often temporarily at different junctures of the now often precarious global-local connect – Singapore, New Delhi, London, Mumbai – thereby also embodying the ambivalences of the modernity they examine and on whose mediatized character they offer here a small but powerful glimpse.

As we have tried to indicate with our little retrospection above, a critical dimension in the understanding of media modernity is (its) history. Remarkably, this has often become sidelined in the compulsive focus of most current media research on the ever latest technological developments. Sarah Niazi, by contrast,

in her essay on early Bombay cinema, delves deepest among the contributors into colonial times, fathoming the discourses around and the distinctive visualizations of the era's 'white' actresses as responses to the challenge of modernity itself: 'ambivalent, harsh and anxious' (page 348). On the other end of the spectrum, so to speak, Sunitha Chitrapu elaborates on tradition, as a variant of both continuing and invented history: an ancient format of Tamil literary conversation – the pattimandram (debate) – is 'telemodernised', i.e. re-enacted in the form of a popular TV-show, so as to emphasise an unscathed cultural bond with an imagined 'glorious past' (page 363). Concerning the related trope of temporality, the essay by Arshad Amanullah, centralizing a crucial political incident in 2009 and the active involvement of the Urdu press, throws up the question if 2009 is already "history" or still "currency", thus reminding us beyond its actual topic of the speed with which (recent) history is made in media(ted) modernity.

On a different note, both Siddarth Narrain and, even more so, Aasim Khan bring history to bear on the 'constituted contexts" of media regulation (Parthasarathi 2018), especially with regard to the genealogy of Hindutva (Hindu-ness) dominance and the politics of violence. Narrain shows how policies around the circulation of 'objectionable material' on internet-enabled mobile phones have increasingly shifted towards preventive law enforcement. Khan, meanwhile, argues that the long-pending issue of media autonomy has been topped by the ambivalences of individual anonymity, both in terms of evading (government) surveillance and of engaging in online aggression. He argues that emerging digital media activism has an important role to play in closing a historical gap between policy- and technology-expertise on the one hand and critical political culture on the other.

Both in discussing the interpretative range of what constitutes 'objectionable material' and in focusing on hate speech as one crucial component of such material, Narrain also attends to facets of the broad field of language as a condition of mediation and communication that all five contributions at least touch upon in very different ways. While hate speech casts language as a signifier that uninhibitedly denies belonging and legitimacy to designated "others", Chitrapu contends that the televised Tamil pattimandram, through its polite and regulated idiom, is brought to the effect of alleviating acute anxieties over social and economic changes amongst viewers who can identify with that tradition. In a variation of this logic, the press that Amanullah critically engages with was willing, under the directed influence of the Sunni ulama (religious leadership), to use a language – Urdu – that has increasingly been reduced to be the tongue of the Muslim minority, against the public efforts of an even further marginalized denomination within Islam, the Ahmadis. The sober language of technicality and policies, on the other hand, that Khan seeks to digitally reconcile with the expressivity of critical

political culture, finds some resonance in the proposed union of 'the aspirations of the West with those of the East' that Niazi finds in Bollywood cinema (page 347). Significantly, Niazi in her piece dismantles this expression as a lingual code for sexual discrimination against the 'white' actresses in the Bombay film studios of the 1930s.

In evaluating the "moral" vulnerability and the "modern" power of these actresses, Niazi charts a very particular constellation of gender and race, both on and behind the screen, that calls for further research in contemporary contexts. Gender and caste, meanwhile, are brought into relation by Chitrapu who unravels the traditional idiomatic comfort zone of the TV-pattimandram as hardly questioning its ostentatious Hindu Brahmin provenance and as pricing the inclusion of women's voices with a solid patriarchal framing. In a more concealed fashion, we find the dimension of caste also where South Asia scholarship still too rarely even suspects it, namely amongst the readers of the Urdu press, i.e. within the Muslim minority. As Amanullah shows, the religiously "deviant" group of the Ahmadis represents only one amongst other marginalized and low-caste groups within the Muslim community who find themselves up against a hostile alliance of Urdu media and the Sunni upper-caste ulama when they try to mediate independent religious or critical political agency.

From a very different angle, Narrain equally breaches the conventional and homogenising angle on Hindu majority-Muslim minority, without denying its centrality in the current political scenario. He underlines, however, the self-organising of violent/vigilante groups, particularly via WhatsApp, along short-termed political and topical lines. Similarly, Khan elaborates on the shifting formations of digital activist groups in correspondence with evolving technologies and policies. Overall, finally, the regionality of the approaches assembled here is one distinctive feature that both transcends and variegates the "India" in our title. While most pronounced in Chitrapu's focus on Tamil as a historical, social and lingual location of contemporary television production and in the prominence of the film city of (erstwhile) Bombay in Niazi's essay, Narrain follows aggressive digital action in its repercussions between the South of India and the North-East. Completing this geographical spread, Amanullah and Khan focus, implicitly and explicitly, on North India.

Together, while leveraging a spectrum of empirical settings and analytical standpoints, the contributions to this thematic section underline the intrinsic connection between modernity and media and demonstrate the genealogy of media modernity as an open concept, a permanent interplay, and a lived ambivalent reality. Its further critical exploration, it is to be hoped, will open ever more avenues leading away from the often unquestioned authority of modernity over both communication policy and media studies in India and beyond.

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Notes

[1] https://www.weforum.org/press/2018/10/world-economic-forum-opens-centre-for-the-fourth-industrial-revolution-india/ ; the term "fourth industrial revolution" has been invented by the World Economic Forum itself.

[2] The potential refinements of politically motivated surveillance through the implementation of the biometrical registration of all Indian citizens (the Aadhaar – 'Fundament' – System) may serve here as only one example.

[3] India is already the fifth largest producer of partly toxic electronic waste, with a growing tendency, while also serving as a dumping ground from large amounts of electronic waste from the West (https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/waste/can-india-manage-its-toxic-e-waste—60891). Particularly the smartphone and the culture of its fast replacement with the latest model has been identified as one of the ecologically most detrimental communication devices (https://www.fastcompany.com/90165365/smartphones-are-wrecking-the-planet-faster-than-anyone-expected).

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White Skin/Brown Masks:
The Case of 'White' Actresses From
Silent to Early Sound Period in Bombay

By Sarah Rahman Niazi

Abstract

My paper explores categories of gender, ethnicity, modernity and performance through the figure of the 'white' actress in the early years of Indian cinema (1920-1940). Film was a lucrative site of business for intrepidly ambitious individuals in search of reinvention in Bombay. For women from 'white' backgrounds, cinema became a means to recast their identity; helping them reclaim the public sphere in new and radical ways. The trace of 'white' actresses in the history of Indian cinema configures and transforms the status of performers and performance from the silent to the early sound period. The industry attracted a large number of Anglo Indian, Eurasian and Jewish girls, who became the first group of women to join the industry uninhibited by the social opprobrium against film work. I use hagiographic records, film reviews and stills to map the roles women from the Anglo Indian and Jewish communities were dressed up to 'play' in the films. These roles helped perpetuate certain stereotypes about women from these communities as well as impinged on the ways that their identity was configured. Through the history of the Anglo Indian and Jewish women in the larger public sphere I lay out and highlight the field from where individuals and personalities emerged to participate in the cinematic process. I see the community as marking and inflecting a system of signs on the body of these women through which identity was constructed and their attempts at reinvention were engendered – a process of individuation, of 'being' and of being framed within a particular logic of the popular imaginary frames of representation.

Keywords: cinema, Bombay, reinvention, Anglo Indian, Jewish, actress, gender, race

White Skin/ Brown Masks: The Case of 'White' Actresses From Silent to Early Sound Period in Bombay

This article explores the categories of gender, ethnicity, modernity and performance through the figure of the 'white' actress in the early years of Bombay cinema in India.[1] Film was a lucrative site of business for intrepidly ambitious individuals in search of reinvention. For women from 'white' i.e. Anglo Indian, Eurasian and Jewish backgrounds, cinema became a means to recast their identity; helping them reclaim the public sphere in new and radical ways. The trace of 'white' actresses in the history of cinema in India configures and transforms the status of performers and performance from the silent to the early sound period. The Bombay film industry attracted a large number of Anglo Indian, Eurasian and Jewish women, who became the first group to join the workforce uninhibited by the social opprobrium against film work most Indian women faced. In the period between the 1920s and 1940s many Anglo Indian, Eurasian and Jewish women worked in the film industry: Sulochana (Ruby Meyers), Ermeline Cordozo, The Cooper sisters: Patience, Violet and Pearl, Madhuri (Beryl Claessen), Seeta Devi, Sabita Devi (Iris Gasper), Rose, Manorama (Winnie Stuart), Indira Devi (Effie Hippolite), Iris Crawford, Kumudini (Mary), Lalita Devi (Bonnie Bird), Mumtaz (Queenie), Nadia, Pramilla (Esther Victoria Abraham) and Romilla (Sophie Abraham) were some of the popular stars of the time.

Film practice in India from the 1920s to the 1940s underwent rapid transformations, from stray entrepreneurial efforts to interventions by businessmen with capital and foresight. Cinema is a melting pot of communities and cultures; and this diversity is reflected in the film practitioners in India. The early silent films by Dadasahab Phalke, Hiralal Sen, R. Nataraja Mudaliar, Fatma Begum, Jamshedji Framji Madan and sons among others, enabled the creation of a diverse cinematic public sphere in India (Shah 1950, Barnouw & Krishnaswamy 1963, Ramachandran & Rukmini 1985, Bhaumik 2001). 1930s was marked by the shifting terrain of technology and the emergence of studio system, specifically the introduction of sound to cinema led to the expansion of the film business as well as its form and aesthetic. While new studios and production houses cropped in different cities, old dominant studio like Madan Theatres closed down. Founded already in 1902, Madan Film enterprise was dominating the Indian film business, from production to exhibition and distribution, for several decades. However, the inability to successfully convert theatres to sound along with acute problems of profits being syphoned off and declining revenues led to its demise (Barnouw & Krishnaswamy 1963: 61-62). Instead new giants emerged: Imperial Film Company, Bombay Talkies in Bombay, New Theatres in Calcutta and Prabhat Theatres in Pune. Other studios like Ranjit Talkies, Sagar Movietone, Wadia Movietone,

Minerva Movietone in Bombay, East India Film Company and Aurora Film Corporation in Calcutta, Madras United Artistes Corporation ensured that cinema business was thriving and expanding (Bhaumik 2001, Mukherjee 2009, Gooptu 2011, Chatterjee 2011, Thomas 2013).

Any work on early cinematic practice and experience in India has to battle with the deficiencies of the archive, in this article I look at extant hagiographic records, the Indian Cinematograph Committee Report and Evidences, film reviews and advertisements to piece together the story of the Anglo Indian and Jewish presence in early cinema. The Indian Cinematograph Committee (ICC) was set up in 1927 in order to survey the organization of film business and investigate the adequacy of censorship in India. One of the central impetus of the committee was to assess and encourage the circulation of British empire films in the wake of threats from the American film companies (Chowdhry 2000, Jaikumar 2006). Though not without its limitations and errors, the report and evidences help understand the 'official' position held by the film practitioners, exhibitors and audiences on the 'white' actresses. The ICC remains as one of the most comprehensive study of the material conditions of early cinematic practice in India.

This article maps the roles women from the Anglo Indian and Jewish communities were dressed up to 'play' in the films from 1930s- 1940s. These roles helped perpetuate certain stereotypes about women from the Anglo Indian and Jewish communities as well as impinged on the ways that their identity was configured. The attempt is in no way to homogenise or coalesce in an (un)problematic way the history of these communities and the *bazaar* oriented nature of film culture, film production and filmic performance.[2] Through the history of the Anglo Indian and Jewish women in the larger public sphere I try to lay out and highlight the field from where individuals and personalities emerged to participate in the cinematic process. I see these communities as marking and inflecting a system of signs on the body of these women through which identity was constructed and their attempts at reinvention were engendered - a process of individuation, of 'being' and of being framed within a particular logic of the popular imaginary frames of representation.

The Public Sphere and the Modern Woman

> Chairman: You said a lot of Anglo-Indian girls and others have made inquiries from you about this, profession, Do you think it is really very difficult for an Anglo-Indian girl—I am not talking of the European for the time being—to adapt herself to Indian ways and interpret Indian ideas?

Sulochana: It is not very difficult if she has got the knack of walking and behaving like an Indian—just as I do. (Indian Cinematograph Committee Evidence V: 4.)

Q. But is it not a little bit difficult to induce Indian ladies to come forward and take part in theatres?

A. They are rather shy, but I think some of them are getting over it. (ibid.: 6.)

Sulochana's comments set up the contrast between the habituation of Anglo Indian and other Indian women. The familiarity with urban space was crucial to adapting to modern modes of employment and entertainment, where publicness and performativity were crucially tied together. Through a 'corporeal stylization of gender' (Butler 1990: 33), the codes of behaviour and gestures of the 'Indian woman' were performatively enacted and (de)/stabilized by the Anglo Indian actress as acts of reiteration and re-citation. Gender was performed not through any interior logic of coherence but through codes written on the body of the 'white' actress. The success of the 'white' actress lay in the polysemy of her image. Her polysemic image allowed for multiple, ambiguous and varied possibilities of meanings and associations. The 'white' actress could be cast in a variety of roles and appear to be 'Indian' in the absence of 'shy Indian' women. The suggestion by T. Rangachariar, Chairman of the Indian Cinematograph Committee, that 'Indian ladies' were difficult to persuade to work in cinema is rather misleading. While it took 'shy' 'educated' 'Indian' ladies under stringent norms of decorum and propriety almost two decades after the birth of cinema in India to appear on screen, women from performative traditions of stage like the folk operatic *nautanki* or the public parlours/ *kotha*³ were already part of the constellation of stars. However, their presence was a source of discomfort for the film industry striving for social acceptability. Thus, cinema exploited the possibilities opened up by the greater degree of freedom of dress, action and respectability that the 'white' actresses allowed.

The excitement generated by the presence of women in the public sphere from the late 19th century was already activating a series of discourses in the 1920s and1930s. Cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Lahore had become important spaces where public life acquired new cultural, social and technological dimensions. The metropolises were dotted with sites and sights of modernity like motorcars, trains, trams, telephones, industrial sites like mills, film studios, but

also the glamorous spectacle of fashion and modern lifestyles could be spotted on the city streets (Bhaumik 2001). Women were taking an active part in the processes of production, consumption and exchange. However access to the city and the use of urban spaces by women was not always easy. Their ways and movements in the street remained structurally organised and socially oriented along boundaries (invisible or otherwise), redirecting and restricting their forays through the metropolis.[4] Despite impressive reforms in the social sphere, *purdah* and an increasing seclusion of Hindu and Muslim women was perceived as a sign of respectability. The publicness and the professionalism of women was marked with moral distress (Forbes 1999).

Women from Anglo Indian and Jewish backgrounds grew up in homes unlike those of other Indian women. According to Alison Blunt, the Anglo-Indian home led an everyday life that was more similar to the British than to other Indian homes (Blunt 2002: 63). They were perceived and imagined themselves as 'different': more European than people of other Indian communities. They were groomed in particular ways of the modern. The Anglo-European ancestry of the Anglo Indians was inscribed by cultural markers such as language, dress, and a different domesticity (Blunt 2002). And these markers continued to shape a distinctive community identity that was bound to England and Europe as home. Jews, on the other hand, were known to tenaciously cling to their Jewish identity. Baghdadi Jews and the Bene Israel of Bombay and Calcutta lived for the most part socially segregated but in close proximity to other Jewish families, studying in Jewish schools and attending Jewish social functions.[5] The Jewish actresses Pramilla (Esther Victoria Abraham) and her sister Romilla (Sophie Abraham) studied in Christian institutions like the Calcutta Girls' High School and St. James's College. As an exceptional case, the Abraham family was sutured into the Indian social fabric. Their father's side of the family consisted of Hindus and Baghdadi Jews (though some biographical accounts suggest a Bene Israeli lineage). Jews drew impermeable borders between themselves and other Indian communities to prevent assimilation and a feared miscegenation. In contrast to other groups, the trace of inter-racial sex and illegitimacy continued to identify Anglo-Indian women as more licentious than other European and Indian women. In their lives within and beyond the home, Anglo Indian women were seen as admirably emancipated and yet dangerously transgressive. Their ability to mix socially with men and chose whom to marry was seen as another marker of their supposed autonomy and freedom.

Even if women's claim to the city were contrived; Anglo Indian, Eurasian and Jewish women were visibly present in the public domain and entered the workforce in large numbers as early as the nineteenth century. Many of the women were trained and employed at first in the civil nursing service, established in the early 1870s.[6] At the turn of the century they formed a large majority of the staff

in government and civil hospitals as well as in the railways.[7] They were also hired as teachers in English medium schools. Pramilla was a teacher at the Talmund Torah Jewish Boy's School in the primary section in Calcutta before a visit to her cousin Rose in Bombay changed the course of her life. Rose had started as an actress with Madan's Corinthian Theatre in Calcutta in the 1930s. She also acted in a number of Madan films like *Fake Doctor/ Naqli Doctor* (d. Jeejeebhoy Jamshedji Madan, 1933) in which she appeared alongside Patience Cooper and *Poisonous Snake/ Zehree Saanp* (d. Jeejeebhoy Jamshedji Madan, 1933) with Jahanara Kajjan. Later she went to Bombay and joined the Imperial Film Co. In 1935, Rose was on contract to play the lead in *Return of Toofan Mail*. A nineteen year old Pramilla came to visit her on the sets. According to Pramilla's account, when director Rama Shankar Choudhury saw her, he told producer Ardeshir Irani that this was the girl he wanted for the film. A quick screen test and she was signed up. The film however never saw the light of the day and remained unfinished. Pramilla's first film was Kolhapur Cinetone's talkie *Bhikaran* (d. Premankur Atorthy, 1935) with Master Vinayak and Rattan Bai.

New avenues for employment for women emerged as modern systems of commerce were institutionalised. Many Anglo Indian, Eurasian and Jewish girls were hired as shop assistants in European owned retail firms and employed in offices as typists, stenographers, secretaries and telephone operators in the major commercial centres of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. These spaces of employment habituated their senses and bodies to the kinesis of the urban experience. It immersed them in a sensuous world of consumption and exchange. However, there were recurrent complains about long hours, low wages and ill-treatment by customers. Actress Sulochana too had tried her hand at these before she joined the movie business (ICC Evidence V: 9). In fact her early films like *Telephone ni Taruni/ Telephone Girl* (d. Homi Master, 1926) through their staging of her former occupation as a telephone operator created an autobiographical citation which fed into her star persona, anchoring and reiterating her cosmopolitan image that the studio was building up.[8] *Telephone Girl* can be placed within the corpus of other Sulochana films like *Typist Girl aka Why I Became a Christian* (d. Chandulal Shah, 1926) or *The Secretary* (d. Chaturbhuj Doshi, 1938) that located the 'white' actress within stereotypical frames of reference identifying communities with specific patterns of employment.

The Indian Cinematograph Committee Report 1927-1928: 'Official' Narratives and 'Supplementary' Bodies

> Owing to the difficulty of obtaining suitable Indian actresses some Anglo-Indian girls have adopted the profession and several of them play Indian parts with considerable success and are among the most popular 'stars'. (ICC 66: 33- 34)

Throughout the ICC report and evidences, the moot point with regard to performers in cinema is the presence/absence of 'respectable' educated Indian women. In its emphasis on the lack of 'suitable Indian actresses', the statement almost appears as an apologia for the success of Anglo Indian actresses. It exposes the discomfort of the committee in acknowledging the sense of frisson that the Anglo Indian performers stirred through their various roles on screen. The statement reduces their work to circumstance and completely denies cinema's shrewd capitalisation of the publicness and enabling presence of the Anglo Indian and Jewish actresses. Another act of omission is the wilful negation of 'other' public women from the ambit of cinematic performance. The *tawaifs* courtesans[9] and the common prostitutes were liminal characters whose overt sexual and transactional nature threatened to cast aspersions on a nascent industry in the process of legitimacy. On the other hand, the Anglo Indian, Jewish actresses were figures who could in some measure be co-opted into a mould of 'respectable' appellations and could be groomed to 'play Indian parts' through a series of disavowals, ambivalences and masquerades.

Within the ICC narrative, the 'white' actress is a mere supplement, an adjunct replenishing a 'lack' and reinforcing the urgent need for the presence of 'suitable' performers. It would be quite constructive to view this notion of supplementarity through the Derridian concept of the 'dangerous supplement' (Derrida 1997: 141-164). The 'supplement', even though characterised as being an addition, functions as an extra surplus to the self-sufficient system of the 'natural' presence, even as it underlines the presence of a 'lack'. Derrida expounds the idea of the 'supplement as substitution':

> [b]ut the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which takes-(the)-place. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness... (to) fill up/ accomplish by allowing to be filled through sign and proxy. (Derrida 1997: 145)

Thus, the supplement adds itself to enrich and accumulate the abundance and completeness of the presence so that the presence can be recognized and identified as the absolute and transcendental signified. The image of 'white' actresses can be seen as adding force and solidity to the trope of ideal Indian womanhood through representation. The *Telephone Girl*, according to Sulochana was "about an Anglo Indian girl who ultimately turns out to be an Indian girl." (ICC Evidences V: 3.) There was a constant play with meaning through processes of signification; meaning persistently oscillated between the effects of immediacy and deferral. Even though the 'white' actress appeared on screen with Hindu names and Effie Hippolite became Indira Devi or Winnie Stuart became Manorama and so on, their image created a visual discrepancy of ethnic difference . Their light skin and hair were clear indication of their difference but these were masked by the use of Indian style clothing and jewellery. These processes of disavowal re-invented their image on screen, but at the same time, the supplementarity of 'white' actresses broke out of its ancillary and affixed signage adding an element of exotica to the play of modern fantasy.

The Anglo Indian and Jewish actress was representative of the quintessential modern woman. Sulochana's 'exotic' features – dark eyes, light skin tone and hair –allowed technicians to experiment with different techniques of lighting and achieve the 'Hollywood look' (Ramamurthy 2006: 207). Sulochana's films *Cinema Queen* (d. Mohan Bhavnani, 1925), *Wildcat of Bombay* (d. Mohan Bhavnani, 1927) and *Indira B.A* (d. Rama Shankar Choudhary, 1929) helped in constructing her unique star appeal. Film journals and newspapers carried images of her dressed in the contemporary Western fashion, sporting the latest hair styles and make up. The 'Hollywood look' was aspirational but 'white' actresses were able to incorporate desi style elements like saree and bindi.

The ICC report's emphasis on the 'supplementarity' of the 'white' actresses was merely a function of the 'official' discourse seeking legitimacy for cinema. In reality, these actresses provided cinema with urbanely mobile bodies that could be recast and remodelled. The 'white' actresses' presence in the public sphere brought a cosmopolitan charge to their images on screen and added the seductive allure of modernity to a variety of entertainment forms on the stage and films.

Recasting Bodies: Early Theatre and Silent Cinema

The journey of the 'white' actress began on stage as they became prominent players in the theatre at the turn of the century. The modern commercial stage called the Parsi theatre (owing to the fact that many of the businesses were owned by individuals from the Parsi community), produced plays in a variety of languages (Gujarati, Urdu and Hindi) and popularised the proscenium style theatre in India

(Kapur 2003: 87-118). Many of the Parsi stage companies employed 'white' performers which added novelty to their production just as it did to early cinematic frames. Kathryn Hansen in her seminal work on Parsi theatre suggests that the presence of Anglo Indian actresses on the Parsi stage served as "expedient surrogates", circumventing the problem of respectability and enabling theatre managers to capitalize on the appeal of the actresses (Hansen 1991: 128). The Anglo Indian actress marked as racially 'other' and was thus exempt from social taboos on female performance, managed to provide "an acceptable alternative to those Indian actresses whose social position (or lack thereof) prevented their reception as suitable objects of spectatorial pleasure" and thus added "the spectacle of racial passing to the play of gender identities" on the Parsi stage (ibid.: 141). For Hansen, the presence of Anglo Indian women effected a transformation of colonial gender hierarchies. The Anglo Indian actress enabled a "fluidity of spectatorial positions" shifting, in the viewer's gaze "between the fantasized English memsahib, the material Anglo Indian actress, and the fictional Indian heroine" (ibid.: 146). And thus through his gaze, the male Indian viewer could "possess the English beauty and enact a reversal of power relations that prevailed in British dominated colonial society" (ibid.: 144). Citing, playwright Betab's comments in his autobiography: "[I]f the dramas of the time didn't have a fair mistress (*gori bibi*) and a black master (*kale miyan*), they were not plays at all", Hansen reads this as an illustration of how colonial "inversion was an integral part" of the narratives (ibid.: 144).

While it is difficult to map and assess the reactions of contemporary audiences, another possible reading of this desire/ fantasy can be traced to Indo-Islamic culture. Urdu popular culture is full of references to fair skinned women from central Asia or the exotic fair beauties from the royal harems or the *purdah nasheen gori bibi* (the veiled fair mistress) which were potent tropes in *masnavi* poetic form. Thus Betab's use of the Urdu word '*gori bibi*' could gesture to an earlier literary tradition. This reading becomes even more significant as often 'white' actresses were cast in oriental costume dramas. Actress Ermeline acted in an Imperial costume film called *Gulshan- e-Arab* directed by K.P Bhave with Gohar Jr. and Zilloo. Sulochana acted in the Arabian nights fantasy *Alibaba Chalis Chor (Alibaba and the Forty Thieves)* directed by Bhagwati Prasad Mishra in 1927 for Imperial Film Company. Patience Cooper acted in the film *Toorkey Hoor* (d. J.J Madan, 1924). While these films are lost, there is publicity material and advertisements which suggests that these costume dramas were located in an imaginary orientalised Islamicate land. For *Toorkey Hoor*, Patience Cooper appears dressed in an ornate oriental costume, the publicity images of the film reiterate a fascination with masquerade and transformation. The film was "banned in several Provinces on ground that it depicted a scantily clad European girl" (Chabria 2013: 171), although it is unclear which "European girl" in the film caused the furore as the cast

also included Miss Williams and Lilian Fox. It is clear that the body of the Anglo-Indian actress produced myriad emotions, anxieties and desires. A significant dimension of the performance emerged in the necessary discrepancy between the coded and direct enactment of a role and the specificity of Anglo Indian actress' indexically registered 'white' presence.

The desire for the 'white' actress was expressed not only in genres like the costume/ oriental fantasy film, but also circulated within the public domain through journalistic discourse that responded to the allure of the star-body in hyperbolic praise. Neepa Majumdar has analysed the role of film journalism in the production of stardom in India. The bulk of extra cinematic information that circulated in the magazines was limited to sketchy biographical details, filmography and a paragraph describing the actresses face. This 'profiling of the face', according to Majumdar, can be seen as "colloquial expressions of Indian aesthetics" (2009: 35). Reviewers wrote about the stars as emotional types borrowing from vernacular literary traditions of description of heroines like the poetic form *Roop Varnana*. Bijli Jampuri's *Filmi Titliyan* (Film Butterflies) published in 1945 is a fascinating compilation of description of contemporary actresses. Jampuri wrote the entire book in the *sarapa* form. Within Urdu poesis, the genre of *sarapa*- 'from head to toe' is devoted to the detailed praise of the body of the *mashuq*/beloved. Her/his physical charms and sartorial adornments are described in a frank playful manner allowing the readers to visualise the beloved through the gaze of the poet/ lover/ *ashiq*. Often in the poetic imagination the elusive, aloof *mashuq* is described as a fair *hoor* (nymph) from paradise. An example in praise of Madhuri (Beryl Claessen) is as below:

> Well-proportioned but extremely beautiful body, a moving statue of beauty, pure and translucent complexion like snow, black long tresses that smell of musk, forehead like the moon, eyebrows like the crescent, intoxicating eyes, apple like cheeks, red and soft lips like the bud of pomegranate, teeth that shine like pearls, bosom that creates unrest...restless like the butterfly. (Jampuri 1945: 119)

Jampuri description of Madhuri's body and his choice of metaphors are significant. The association of her 'white' body to snow (*barf*) and her complexion as pure (*saaf*) and translucent (*shaffaf*) plug into prevailing notions of the beloved within Urdu poetic conventions. Early theatrical stage drew heavily from the romantic *masnavi* tradition that had already popularized the imagination of the Central Asian beauty creating desires that fluidly identified the 'white' actress with the beauties of *masnavi* lore. The writers also borrowed liberally from Indic stories at hand and added Persian and Arabic flavour to give the tales a new spin. The

love stories imported were those of Laila and Majnun, Shirin and Farhad, and Yusuf and Zulaikha. Local Indian characters and stories like the story of Heer and Ranjha, Sohni and Mahival, Mirza Sahiban and Sassi Punno in Punjab were also among the *masnavi* poets' favourites (Orsini 2007). These offered standard ways of plotting the body of the *mashuq* (lover) which bred familiarity in the audience with characters, tropes and motifs that popular entertainment forms like the Parsi theatre eagerly drew upon and these idioms were carried into early cinema.

The pervasive influence of Parsi theatre on early silent cinema allowed many actresses to make the transition from stage to films. Patience Cooper began as a dancer in a Eurasian troupe, the Bandmann's Musical Comedy, before joining Jamshedji Framji Madan's Corinithian Stage Company as an actress. In the 1920s, song and dance item numbers by groups of young women had caught theatre goers' fancy in a big way. The Madan Corinthian Company had a group of 12 Anglo-Indian girls groomed by the company's dance teacher master Champalal; Cooper was one of them. She soon became a rage all across north India where the company presented its plays. J.F Madan of Madan Theatres ran the two businesses simultaneously, where performers were interchangeably used (ICC Evidence II: 829). Cooper became the leading Madan star after her success in the mythological *Nala Damayanti* (d. Eugenio de Liguoro, 1920). By the late 1920s, along with Sulochana, Patience Cooper was a sought after star and their stardom was crucially tied to the trajectories of the dominant studios they worked with; Kohinoor and then Imperial in the case of Sulochana and Madan in the case of Cooper. The circuits of production, distribution and exhibition were significant in harnessing their claims to stardom.

Stars like Sulochana, Patience Cooper and Ermeline acted in a variety of genres. The silent period was characterised by this creative engagement with genre and stars. Studios tried all kinds of new tactics to mobilise their stars' aura in the most effective way possible. Star bodies were not fixed to generic specificity yet. This becomes apparent from the variety of films that the actress performed in. Ermeline, for example, played a range of characters from the vamp to the damsel in distress. Her star persona oscillated between various signs of signification. The performances did not code her rigidly because of which her work during this period was characterised by a risqué charm and an unabashed sense of body and being. According to S. Ramamurthy, "[A]part from her qualities as a beautiful and talented actress, she was well versed in certain manly arts like horse riding" and was at her best in "strong cowboy roles and vampish parts" (Ramamurthy 1933: 9). In another contemporary article, Baburao Patel observed that "[D]uring the silent days she has done some excellent work...all the parts played by her so far have gone on well." (Patel 1935: 12). What is remarkable is that while her on-screen image in the silent period was multi-layered, in the sound period it gets fixed as a

vamp and was buttressed with stories of her off-screen brashness and tempestuous behaviour. The *Times of India* reported that Ermeline was fined Rs. 65/- for rash and negligent driving and for striking a police constable. "She admitted that she has quaffed a glass of toddy on the day of the occurrence and slapped a policeman" (*Filmland* 1932).

The affective regime of speed and physical action was best embodied within the generic corpus of urban films like the stunt (Vitali 2010). The urban stunt film visualised the human body in thrilling new coordinates where the actresses' body was cast in roles that enabled them to adopt gestures and perform movements that exceeded or significantly diverged from prevailing codes of gendered social behavior. The woman's body was embroiled in a heady fantasy of carnal voyeurism through a visual vocabulary that represented her in exciting new scenarios that exceeded the normative registers of decorum and modesty. For example kissing, smoking on screen, or action sequences. The pervasiveness and popularity of the stunt film extended beyond its silent days to the sound period, during which time it acquired a status of a new kind of spectacular attraction distinct in the Fearless Nadia films. Nadia (Mary Ann Evans) was of Australian origin and her roles as a masked adventurer became a signature of Wadia Movietone in the 30s and 40s (Thomas 2005, Wenner 2005). The poesis of the stunt film lies in the use of a new kind of feminine form – agile and modern – that was staged as an eroticized fetish and whose appeal was fully monetized and exploited by the studios. As their bodies were cast in 'new' radical ways through acts of performativity and performance, the experiences of women from Anglo Indian, Jewish and Eurasian backgrounds were radically reinvented. The coming of the sound technology in the 1930s affected another series of reinventions for cinema as well as for the 'white' actresses.

Transition to the Talkies

> When movies were silent, glamour was all important. [T]oday tastes are different. The mike discovered that beauty was only negative-deep… Inevitably, with the Talkies there came to the screen a wider variety of heroines, with more distinctive and many sided appeals. (Chetlur 1943: 25-27)

Film labour and culture at the threshold of a paradigmatic shift embarked upon new forms and idioms of performance and experience in the 1930s. The transition to sound catalysed the mushrooming of new studios and dispersed the field of cinematic experimentation into a new phase. This fervent escalation of film production created spaces to accommodate new genres and stars. Even though older traditions of visuality and pleasure were still in use, the new aurality made pos-

sible by the introduction of sound technology, transformed the landscape of silent cinema, infusing their spectre like forms with vernacular jargon and musicality. In an article titled "The Indian Talkies" B.L Bedam writes of the new conditions of work that 'talking pictures' demanded. The talkies were not merely "speaking silents" but were a new art (Bedam 1932:11). The multilingual and multicultural landscape of the Indian film circuit had ushered in the 'discord of tongues' (Barnouw & Krishnaswamy 1963: 55). It was commonly believed that the rapid transition to the 'talkies' pronounced the imminent demise of the 'white' actress from the screen (Chetlur 1943: 26, Barnouw & Krishnaswamy 1963: 162). Stars of the silent era like Ermeline, Seeta Devi and Patience Cooper could not sustain their former status in the film industry. Failure at a 'sound test' was cited as one of the reasons many studios had to let go of their most valuable stars. Apart from the ability to speak fluently in the Indian vernacular, a practical knowledge of music and an appropriate modulation/ tone of voice were the most crucial requirement for the 'talkies'. The lack thereof accentuated the acute problem of finding suitable female performers for the screen. This spawned off a demand for *tawaifs* and singing stars, who in turn brought to the cinema a reoriented idiom of traditional performance.

Despite claims by later historians of India cinema, that 'white' actresses had 'dropped out' of the industry because of the sound boom, there was enough capital in the market to sustain the careers of glamour queens like Sulochana (Barnouw & Krishnaswamy 1963: 162). 1n 1934, Sulochana acted in the Imperial costume drama *Piya Pyaare/ My Man* (d. Rama Shankar Choudhury), *Anaarkali* (d. Rama Shankar Choudhury) and the fantasy film *Magic Flute* (d. Homi Master, 1934). According to the *Hindi Film Geet Kosh*, *Magic Flute* was a remake of the 1929 silent film by the same name. The story was based on the work of Munshi 'Nashtar'. In 1935, Sulochana acted in the social *Do Ghadi ki Mauj* (d. Homi Master) which was exhibited at the Imperial Talkies. According to a review of the film, "Sulochana's work is not convincing...Good Box office attraction with Sulochana... Will run well in cities all over." (*Filmindia* 1935) This review highlights that even though Sulochana's performance was not appreciated by the critic, she was considered to be the main "Box office attraction". In the same year she also acted in the talkie remake of *Bambai ki Billi/ Wildcat of Bombay* (d. Nandlal Jaswantlal) with Dinshaw Billimoria (known as the John Barrymore of Indian cinema) and *Pujarini/ Dancer of the Temple* (d. Nandlal Jaswantlal). In 1936, she acted in the social *Shaan-e- Hind/ Pride of India* (d. Rama Shankar Choudhury) and costume drama *Jungle Queen/ Jungle ki Rani* (d. Nandlal Jaswantlal). In the year 1937, she worked in three films: costume drama *Jagat Kesari* (d. Homi Master), *New Searchlight* (d. Homi Master) and *Vaahri Duniya* (d. Gunjal). It is unclear what she does in the year 1938, whether she performs at all. In 1939, she acts in a social *Prem Ki Jyoti/*

Do Dost (d. Gunjal).

The transition to sound did not hinder other starry eyed 'white' girls from across the country seeking employment in the industry. In her evidence to the committee, Sulochana mentioned how often she got letters from girls seeking advice on possibilities of work in the film industry during the silent era. She said, "I receive many letters from up-country asking to join…from their letters they must be a very good class. From Muhammadans mostly, and I have had one or two Anglo Indian girls who wanted to join." (ICC Evidence V: 2.). New 'white' stars emerged in this period like Sabita Devi, Madhuri and Nadia. Even though they faced stiff competition from singing stars like Jahanara Kajjan, Kanan Bala, Jaddan Bai and actresses like Devika Rani, Durga Khote, Shanta Apte, the 'white' actresses who remained were still the highest paid actresses until the late 1930s and worked well into the 1940s.[10]

Contemporary narratives of improvement and reform of the film industry, delineated the need for new personnel, both educated and skilled. N.N. Guha Chowdhury stressed in his article "Should Respectable Ladies Join the Films?" that the purity within the studio can only be made possible if the studio authorities show greater attention to details and keep a closer eye on the natural pitfalls of young actors falling in love or the presence of "female artistes from degraded class of society" (1933: 12). He further wrote, "Unless this be done we cannot expect intelligent women to come up to the studio for a profession" (ibid.: 13). The industry sought to align cinema with the social status of its labour in a bid for cultural prestige and legitimization within the framework of nationalism and reform (Bhaumik 2001, Majumdar 2009). However this demand for the reconfiguration of the existing constellation of stars coexisted with the expansion of the limits of participation which went beyond this very logic of cultural assemblage. Testament to this is the variety of backgrounds that men and women who worked in the film industry belonged to. Thus there was always a tension in the field between contesting desires for respectability and the presence of apparent elements of disrepute.

The 'white' actresses treaded the middle ground between being 'white' and not 'white' enough. In the silent period the polysemic nature of her image was mobilised by the studios to bypass the skirmishes of the repute/disrepute dyad. However the transition to the talkies brought with it a series of complications. Even though attempts were made in the silent period to flatten the processes of racial signification through make up and costume, in the 'talkies', sound threatened to shatter many of the ambiguities and disavowals. The masquerade needed to be embedded within a different set of codes. As suggested by Chetlur, sound had split the visual field between the face and the voice (1943: 25). One wonders if the creolized tongue of the 'white' actress was an impediment to the fantasies of ideal Indian womanhood that had been so painstakingly constructed. The editor of *Filmland*

in the June 1932 issue gives credit to Seeta Devi, Sulochana and Patience Cooper for having "taken great pains to learn Urdu and Hindi dialogues for appearing in the talkies." Seeta Devi, we are told, learnt Urdu songs with such perfection that she was able to earn the approbation of experts who saw her talking on the screen at Hyderabad at a private show. The editorial did however wish that "Madhuri in Bombay and Sabita Devi in Bengal would follow suit as quickly as possible." (*Filmland* 1932)

Many of Sulochana's silent films like *Wildcat of Bombay* (1927), *Madhuri* (d. Rama Shankar Choudhury, 1928) and *Indira B.A* (d. Rama Shankar Choudhury, 1929) were remade in this period. *Indira M.A* (d. Nandlal Jaswantlal, 1934) proved to be a huge success. However the image of Sulochana was realigned with dominant national and reform discourses in the talkie period, and she was recast as the ideal Indian woman, "marked by filial piety, sartorial modesty and contained sexuality" (Majumdar 2009: 98). According to Majumdar, Sulochana represented the high-brow spectrum of the star discourse in the 1930s. The cosmopolitan charge of her image identifiable through films like *Cinema Queen* and *Telephone Girl* was reworked through a "narrative of transformation" in *Indira M.A* (ibid.: 98). Majumdar argues that the way in which the "moral trajectory" of the film, from the "flapper" girl to her eventual return to "Indian roots and her recognition of her Indian suitor, Kishore" recast Sulochana in more ambiguous terms (ibid.: 98-100). While the "flapper" allowed for the vicarious display of modern fashion and glamour, the transformation aligned her to the new idea of womanhood promoted by the discourse of improvement and respectability in the film industry.

As indicated throughout film magazines in the 1930s-40s, the legitimizing call for respectability created an overarching impetus for reform and improvement. Studios were frenetically trying to reinvent their 'sullied' image and mobilised the image of their stars for the purpose (Chowdhury 1933: 11-14). While there was a demand for 'respectable' and educated women to join the film industry, the studios tried to fashion the image of their new 'white' stars through a series of ambivalences. Sabita Devi (Iris Gasper) persona is a classic example to illustrate the manner in which the film industry reconfigured the image of the 'white' actress in order to respond to the anxiety around 'respectability.' Sabita Devi made her debut in the British Dominion Films' historical *Kamanar Aagun/ Flames of Flesh* (d. Dinesh Kumar Bose, 1930). Her successful career in Calcutta and then at Sagar Movietone in Bombay established her status amongst the leading ladies of the time. At Sagar, Sabita Devi as the lead performer acted in three-four films per year. There was a lot of hype regarding her educated and respectable background. This was strengthened by the fact that she wrote articles urging other 'respectable' women to join the film industry and promoted the image of the studios as a professional space of work. In the article, "Why Shouldn't Respectable Ladies Join

the Films" (a response to the article "Should Respectable Ladies join the Films?" by 'A Lady Artiste'), published in *Filmland*, Sabita Devi clearly stated her position on the conundrum of film studio as viable spaces for work for women. The article gives a lucid sense of the manner in which the actress participated in and consolidated the drive towards establishing the studios as 'clean' working environments that was so important to the 1930s. Sabita Devi wrote,

> I have always been treated with the greatest respect and courtesy...and in contributing this article I am doing so not as propaganda, or with any ulterior motive, but for the purpose of defending myself and the good name of many fine gentlemen and friends I have had the pleasure of meeting and working with in the film world. (Devi 1931: 4-5)

The 'fine gentlemen' who she defends embodied "the aspirations of the West with those of the East" and held to "the traditions of the East in respect of their attitude to women" (ibid.: 4). By placing her emphasis on the "tradition of the east" as a site of superior values, Sabita Devi aligns herself to the nationalist discourse. Her image was carefully constructed by studios like Sagar where the charge of the 'modern' coalesced with figure of the ideal educated Indian woman. In another article titled "Garbo as 'Susan Lenox'", she claimed to write "not as a film struck Garbo 'fan' but merely as an appreciation of a humble sister artiste" (Devi 1932: 4). She aligned herself with the transnational order of stars, adding fuel to fire to the constant rumours that she was going away to Hollywood.[11] These speculations fuelled the notion of Sabita Devi as a star of 'international' stature and positioned the ethnic coordinates of the 'white' actress with Hollywood, which was seen as the greatest form of recognition and popularity.

Apart from Sagar in Bombay, another studio that emerged in this period with a dominant 'white' star was Wadia Movietone. The Wadias were most popular for their stunt films especially their Fearless Nadia films. While the stunt films had been a popular form since the 1920s, in the sound period, the Wadias "reinvented the genre by experimenting with formal and publicity mechanism...locating the change specifically in the type of stunts" through an element of "realism" and a wider acceptance and participation in the "discourse of physical culture" (Majumdar 2009: 104). In this period, Nadia was scandalously absent from most of the contemporary journals and was 'recovered' in the 1970s through a series of networks.[12] The work on Nadia has read her image variously as a "virangana"[13] (Thomas 2005: 23) and as a "radical feminist actress" (Wenner 2005: ix). It is her hybrid engagement with the kinesis of modernity and affective alignment with Indian cultural traditions that positioned her uniquely within cinematic imagination. Figures like Sabita Devi, Madhuri and Nadia were recast in the sound period in a variety of alignments and one crucial consistent referent was their polysemous modern self.

Conclusion

The response to the 'white' actresses was like the response to the experience of modernity: ambivalent, harsh and anxious. In 1938, Baburao Patel, editor of the popular English language film journal *filmindia*, lamented the 'degeneration' of Indian pictures and the onus lay with the Anglo Indian girls who worked in the films as 'extras'. He wrote:

> The number of these girls is hardly thirty... Goaded by the impulse of supplying sex appeal ...some of the producers departed on the disgusting practice of engaging these girls as 'extras' for community dances and as maids in scanty costumes...Perfectly hermaphrodite, they neither appeal to men nor women. For a tenner a day which they get, they come with rouge and lipstick, shake their hips and legs, pocket the money and go away... Some of these girls misbehave so badly in the Studio while working, that to kick them in the face would be a mercy... We have no objection to a few good girls from the Anglo Indian community seriously taking up screen as a career... there are already some really useful top liners from this community. But the material we have described above must not be admitted in our studios to suffer a stain of utter debasement in our pictures. (Patel 1938: 3–4)

Patel's offensive and vitriolic comments indicate a tension, where the 'white' actresses were both desirable and disreputable because of the nature of their freedom and publicness. By the 1940s, the 'white' actresses faced stiff competition from other actresses and began to be cast in secondary roles. Their gradual effacement from the top order of stardom in the film industry was related both to the "supplementarity" of their bodies and to the discourse of respectability that was at its pinnacle during this time. The publicness of 'white' women was central to their initiation into modern modes of employment and entertainment. Many 'white' women were already working professionals, but as the pay scale in cinema was higher compared to other jobs, it provided them with an alternative source of earning. Cinema opened up the possibilities of self-fashioning for women from 'white' backgrounds, through the performativity of gender and the stylization of bodies. In these processes of reinvention, cinema too was transformed by the presence of these beautiful women. Their urbanely mobile bodies were enabling and allowed cinema to use them in ambivalent modes of address. The charge of the 'white' actresses lay in their affiliations to modernity than in their ethnic difference. Masquerading variously as the ideal Indian women, the *gori bibis* or the hybrid *virangana* woman. Their entry into cinema in the 'official' discourses was based on an imagined sense of 'lack'; however, their 'supplementarity' added force to the

constructions and play of characters. Sulochana, Patience Cooper, Ermeline, Sabita Devi, Madhuri, Nadia among others transformed cinematic performance with their cosmopolitan verve, allowing cinema to capitalise on their seductive charms well into the early sound period.

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Notes

[1] Born out of the colonial encounter, the terms used in this paper- Anglo Indian and Eurasian refer to individuals of mixed parentage, in the case of Anglo India (British and Indian) and Eurasian (European and Indian). I use the term 'white' to denote ethnic configuration of actresses from varied backgrounds such as Anglo Indians, Eurasians, Jews and other mixed races in early Indian cinema. 'White' here works as a metaphor to denote typology of skin which is marked in comparison to 'brown' Indian skin and is a binding factor with respect to the categorization of Anglo Indian, Eurasian and Jewish actresses within the film industry. Many accounts of the actresses interchangeably refer to them as Anglo Indian, Eurasian, or Jewish. The term 'white' here is not charged with the modern western discourse on race- oppositions with 'black'.

[2] The *bazaar* or the commercial marketplace was the physical and social location of cinema. According to Kaushik Bhaumik, "cinema grew as a disreputable bazaar institution…the industry in the mid-1930s had its antecedents in classes that resided in the bazaar which produced and consumed this disreputable cinema. Correspondingly, much of the industry and its audiences of the 1930s was a product of the process by which the bourgeoisie distanced itself from the *bazaar* and its performative modes." This was, however, also a period when a hybrid form emerged that mixed the style of bazaar and bourgeois cinema in India (Bhaumik 2001: 7).

[3] It is really difficult to translate this term. A *kotha* was a space of performance and entertainment. In colonial times, it gets a poor reputation, especially after the anti-nautch movement. Even then the *kotha* used to be quite different from the brothel. By the 1920s and 30s, it remained an ambiguous place somewhere between repute/disrepute. Many women from the *kotha* tradition moved to theatre and cinema as new opportunities came their way. (Oldenburg 1990)

[4] Anke Gleber has made these observations in the case of European women's spatial experience of the city. This comment, however, is equally applicable to women's experience in Indian cities, where women's mobility was part of a social debate and the restrictions were perhaps sharper and more incontrovertible (Gleber 1997).

[5] The Jews in India were divided broadly into three groups- the Baghdadis, the Bene Israel and the Cochin Jews (Strizower 1971, Silliman 2001). It is beyond the purview of this article to discuss each group. For the sake of the argument, I will concentrate only on the Baghdadi and the Bene Israel as they were both largely concentrated in Bombay and Calcutta.

[6] Lionel Caplan, however, does not mention entertainment as a major site of employment of Anglo Indian women. Both the theatre and cinema were important areas of employment for young women from the community. (Caplan 2000).

[7] The British gave the smaller religious minorities a position of privilege, who found it easy to step into petty jobs in offices and workshops. The customs, railways, and posts and telegraph service were departments which were known to be the preserves of favoured minorities like the Anglo Indians and the Jews. (Bear 2007).

[8] According to Neepa Majumdar, it is after Sulochana is "reified as the most popular Indian star" in the 1930s that such a biographical connect worked in retrospect as a privileged offering into her private life. (Majumdar 2009: 98).

[9] The 'Tawaif' was a professional entertainer, a courtesan. During the time of the Mughals, the tawaifs were influential cultural elite before they were beleaguered and pushed to the margins of society in the late colonial period under the impact of social reform movements. Veena Oldenburg in her seminal work on the courtesan tradition has called their lifestyle "resistance" (Oldenburg 1990: 261-263). Film scholars locate the tawaif as a central figure within the Islamicate tradition of Bombay cinema (Kesavan 1994: 244-57, Bhaskar & Allen 2009).

[10] Sabita Devi was paid Rs. 2000 per month which was a princely amount for its time. *filmindia*, December 1938, 4: 8, 22. Citing the ICC Evidences, Barnouw & Krishnaswamy suggest that "A Bombay company was paying actors from Rs.30 to Rs. 1000 per month. The 30-rupee salary was for "a coolie, a super, an extra"; average actors got Rs. 200-250 per month. A normal star salary was Rs. 600- 800 but a few received more." (1963: 46)

[11] Sabita Devi's mother played an important role in managing her film career. Much like the *filmi* mummies of today, she shrewdly managed her daughter's career and was present at the studios to keep an eye on the happenings. According to a contemporary gossip column, Sabita Devi's mother was negotiating contracts with foreign studios. See, "Howlers of the Month" in *filmindia*, August 1938, 4: 4, 56

[12] According to Majumdar, Nadia represented the low-brow spectrum of stardom. Majumdar further argues that "in the hierarchies of star discourses, the popularity of actors associated with low-brow genres was registered almost exclusively in the unofficial star discourse that was marked by silence." (2009: 105).

[13] The *virangana* literally translates to the woman who manifests the virtues of heroism (*virya*). Within the large corpus of Indic literary paradigm, the *virangana* possess the qualities of wisdom, courage and power. (Hansen 1988, Thomas 2005)

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Tamil Takes Centre Stage: Tradition and Modernity in Indian Television

By Sunitha Chitrapu

Abstract

This paper draws attention to the role of language in mediated modernities in India through an analysis of *Sirappu Pattimandram* (Special Debate), a Tamil-language debate show on the politically-affiliated corporate Sun TV network in the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India. The show provides an opportunity for the articulation of anxieties over how social and economic changes affect the private lives of Tamil speakers. These anxieties are contained through the use of Tamil-language oratory which recasts quotidian everyday problems in an ancient literary idiom that provides reassurance through imagined continuity with a glorious past.

Introduction

In the closing remarks of the Independence Day 2017 episode of Tamil TV show *Sirappu Pattimandram* (Special Debate), the moderator Professor Solomon Pappaiah says,

> "*Puram kettru ponal, akamum kettru pokum. Arasiyal maattrankal, poruladhara maattrankal evai ellam serndhu samūhathai maattri irukirathu. Enakkullum prachanai, en naatukullum prachanai.*"

> ("When my outer world is ruined, so is my inner world. Political and economic shifts have changed society. I am facing difficulties, my state is facing difficulties.")

While this is a sentiment that may be universal, it is presented in the *Sirappu Pattimandram* show in uniquely Tamil terms, using the ancient literary tropes of *akam* (interior) and *puram* (exterior), presenting a performance of Tamilness for the audiences and building a community with other Tamil speakers.

Sirappu Pattimandram (Special Debate) is a mainstay of festive holiday programming on Sun TV, the leading Tamil-language television channel in India. At a time when fast-paced news and fiction dominate film and television screens, the *pattimandram* is a studio-based talking heads format, devoid of the glittering visual spectacle that many other shows offer. Despite the availability of newer types of shows, *Sirappu Pattimandram* enjoys continued popularity. The *pattimandram* is uniquely a Tamil-language phenomenon, using formal and literary language and relying on literary tropes from over two thousand years ago.

In this paper I present an empirical case of *Sirappu Pattimandram* to uncover the particularities of a mediated modernity that is embedded in this specific linguistic location, to better understand the relationship between language and mediated modernities or 'telemodernities' as defined by Lewis et al. (2016). According to them, 'telemodernities' are spaces where commercial and regulatory logics come together, alongside identities that focus on consumption as well as civic activism, and foreground issues related to cultural identities, socioeconomic divides and a longing for the good old days in a changing world.

Language plays a key role in the political, economic and cultural life of Indians, perhaps to a greater extent than in many other places because India exhibits a great linguistic diversity. The Indian Constitution recognises 22 official languages, which taken together are spoken by approximately 96% of the Indian population, and the last census in 2011 counted a total of 121 languages (including the 22 official languages)[1]. The undeniable pressures exerted by linguistic forces on the political and economic lives of Indians can be seen in the fact that within a few

decades of Indian independence in 1947, India was reorganised into states on the basis of language. Language and identity are closely intertwined in India (as in many other places), with languages and the states in which they are spoken revealing complex and varied historical trajectories.

The liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991 is widely recognised as the event that triggered a remarkable growth in the Indian language media, in terms of both volume and variety of output (Athique 2009; Kumar 2014; Mehta 2015). The rise of television channels in several Indian languages is considered to have ushered in "an era of polyphony" paralleled perhaps only by the advent of sound in motion pictures in the 1930s, which was considered to be the impetus for the growth of film production in multiple Indian languages (Athique 2009: 163). In recent years, media production in regional Indian languages or "regionalisation" has come to be viewed as a useful framework for theorising media audiences and industries (Kumar 2014: 22). Neyazi (2010), for instance, through his examination of Hindi language newspapers, argues that technological innovation and a sensitivity to local cultural values has led to the creation of hybrid content and a vernacular modernity. The "regionalisation" of Indian media thus offers a rich variety of unexplored avenues for researchers interested in modernities and their media representations in specific local contexts.

I begin by providing the historic context for linguistic community building in 20th century Tamil Nadu and the role played by Tamil oratory, followed by a brief background of television programming in the Tamil language and the development of the *pattimandram* as a television show. I then present some arguments about the modernity presented in *Sirappu Pattimandram* and the conclusions that they lead us to.

The Tamil language and the Dravidian identity

Tamil is the official language of the Tamil Nadu state, geographically located on the south east coast of the Indian peninsula. It is the native language of a population of approximately 69 million people (according to the last decennial census conducted in 2011). Tamil is also the oldest among the Dravidian languages with a literary tradition and has a known history dating back to approximately 100 B.C., although commentators mythologise a much longer history stretching back hundreds of centuries "with much of it lost in the great flood of time" (Ramanujan 1985: xiv). In 2004, Tamil was declared to be a 'classical language' by the Government of India because it had a recorded history longer than a thousand years with an original literary tradition

Although the state of Tamil Nadu officially came into being in 1969, its birth was preceded by the development from the 1940s onwards of a language-based

Tamil identity and consciousness, often known as a "Dravidianist political paradigm" (Bate 2013). Tamil-language speakers of diverse political affiliations were united from the 1930s onwards in their opposition to the growing importance of the Hindi language during the freedom struggle against British colonial rule. According to Ramaswamy (1997):

> Dravidianism's driving imperative was a vision of the Tamil community as an autonomous racial and political entity (inam), even nation (nātu), whose sacral center is occupied solely by Tamil, from which all its members claim shared descent. (Ramaswamy 1997: Language of the Nation: Dravidianizing Tamil, para. 3)

The Tamil language was used to bring its speakers together as a unified voice within the Indian nation. Tamil oratory played a crucial role in this politically-driven identity formation project, through the use of a literary style of speaking that emphasised the historic importance of the language itself which symbolised "an ancient and original Tamil-speaking civilization, independent of what was considered the relatively more recent Sanskrit-speaking, Indi-Aryan, North Indian, and Brahmin-dominated civilization" (Bate 2013: xv).

Oratory and Tamil modernity

Bate (2013) observes that prior to the 1940s, political orators used a colloquial form of Tamil (also referred to as 'nadaimurai' (ordinary), 'kodun' (bent), or kochai (vulgar) Tamil); after the 1940s, a more literary form of Tamil, referred to as 'centamil' (fine) Tamil, began to be used in oratory. Bate argues that through the use of this literary form, the 'centamil' form of the Tamil language in their oratory, Tamil politicians emphasised the ancientness of the language and the great civilisation it represented, and that this transition to an older form of speech was an important part of a modern imaginary in which Tamil-language speakers were forging a new identity as "a people" (Bate 2013: xv). The centrality of the use of a particular form of the language in this identity project offers an illustration of what Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) describe as an invented tradition:

> …a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (9)

I argue that this use of literary Tamil resurfaced on television and achieved prominence in another, more recent time of transition, when liberalisation in the 1990s triggered sweeping economic and social changes that affected the daily lives of most Indians (including Tamil-speakers) when it played a role in cementing together community ties among Tamil speakers not just in India but in the Tamil-speaking diaspora across the world and provided a reassuring continuity with the past. To better understand the use of language in the rapidly growing medium of television, the next section presents some developments in Tamil-language television.

Tamil-language satellite television programming

The earliest satellite Tamil television channels, including Jaya TV and its rival Sun TV, were launched in 1993 (Athique 2009). These television channels are affiliated with the leading political parties in Tamil Nadu, the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). Jaya TV is named for a former Chief Minister, the late J Jayalalitha, and is owned by her AIADMK associates. Sun TV is owned by family members of another former Chief Minister, the late M Karunanidhi of the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) party, which is the older of the two parties. Moorti (2004) underlines the effect that this ownership and its commitment to the Dravidian ideology has on the programming of these channels when she observes that: "The insistence on a pure Tamil draws attention to the Dravidian politics that are the underpinning ideologies of the channel owners and their political affiliations." (557)

The main Tamil-language television channels then, because of their ownership and close relationship with political parties, are a part of tradition that emphasises the use of the Tamil language to create an imagined Tamil community where audiences consume mediated performances of 'Tamilness'. This mediated Tamilness has been known on occasion to embrace diversity of caste and religion (see Harindranath 2013) and has "facilitated the articulation simultaneously of a cosmopolitan and a vernacular sensibility, and thereby permitted the inscription of a particular regional identity" (Moorti 2004: 551). Sun TV and Jaya TV are only two of the many Tamil-language television channels in existence today. Tamil Nadu's strong economy supports the second largest gross state domestic product in the country[2] and it is home to flourishing film, television, print and online media industries.

Sun TV's *Sirappu Pattimandram* (Special Debate)

The *pattimandram* (debate) show format is popular and most Tamil television channels have their version of it, some even overlapping with the telecast of each other, generally on holidays to celebrate Hindu festivals or national holidays such as Independence Day or Mahatma Gandhi's birthday. This home-grown format features two teams of about three speakers each and a moderator (called a *naduvar*). The speakers from each team alternately present their views, rebutting the views of those from the opposite team who have spoken before them, and finally the moderator presents a judgement (*theerpu*). The show is taped in the presence of a studio audience in a large auditorium and the topics are of general interest, although some specialised debates do take place.

*Pattimandram*s, especially in their televised form, are almost synonymous with Professor Solomon Pappaiah, an eighty-two-year-old former professor of the Tamil Department at the American College, Madurai. Professor Pappaiah is the best-known moderator of the television *pattimandram* and has been a moderator for over four decades. He moderates *Sirappu Pattimandram* (Special Debate) on Sun TV. For the purpose of this study, I interviewed Professor Pappaiah at his home in Madurai. He notes that while the *pattimandram* enjoyed a long history in religious and scholarly circles as a deliberative exercise aimed at reaching "the truth", it became an oratorical performance when it moved out of these rarefied environs onto the urban street corner where migrant rural labourers celebrated their annual religious festivals and welcomed cultural performances that would engage their communities. While the earlier form would have had religious or academic premises for deliberation, the *pattimandram* form underwent a change in its focus. The statements to be deliberated now were the social issues of the day, especially centred around the family. This made it popular at a time when the Dravidianist political paradigm placed value on literary Tamil oratorical performances and ensured its longevity and eventual transition to television in its present form (interview Solomon Pappaiah).

The show presents a multiplicity of views which are eventually weighed and 'judged' in the court of public opinion. This not only makes these opposing views easily accessible, but also offers us the opportunity to observe the value placed on each view by the producers and to identify those views that enjoy the corporate and political support of the channel owners, advertisers and audiences. This unique format has not been replicated in other Indian languages, and therefore represents an opportunity to examine a specifically 'Tamil' response to media production and consumption, embedded in Tamil linguistic traditions thereby embodying a Tamil modernity.

For the study I also interviewed Bharathy Bhaskar, the leading female speaker on the show and Vice-President at Citibank, Chennai. A representative of

Sun TV at the Sun TV headquarters in Chennai was also interviewed. I examined 12 consecutive episodes of the show over a two-year period beginning with the *Deepavali* episode in November 2015 and ending with the *Deepavali* episode in October 2017. Between five and seven episodes are telecast each year[3].

Sirappu Pattimandram on Sun TV is aimed at an older audience. Speakers are rarely below the age of 45 years, and most are in their fifties or sixties. The moderator also refers to this when he says, "Most of us here who are over the age of 50" in the *Ayudha Poojai* 2017 episode. The generational divide is further emphasised when he narrates an anecdote about Socrates describing the last days of democracy, that they will occur when a father fears his son and a teacher fears his pupil.

The speakers are for the most part professors (as evidenced by their titles such as *perasiriyar, munnaivar, pulavar*) like Tha Ku Subbramanian or *Pulavar* Ma Ramalingam. Most speakers are Hindus with the exception of the moderator who is a Christian. Some speakers have been performing on the show for many years. Young talents who gain popularity as speakers in other forums such as college speaking contests or older speakers from academic and literary backgrounds are occasionally introduced and continue on the show if they are popular with audiences. Team formation is based on the topic, so speakers who were on opposite teams in one episode might well be on the same team in another, except for the final speakers in each team. The most popular speakers get to go last, so that they have an opportunity to rebut all the speakers of the other team who have gone before them. For the last few years, audiences have enjoyed the pitched battles between the final speakers in each team, Bharathy Bhaskar and S Raja, whose views on most issues are presented as being diametrically opposite. Bharathy Bhaskar, often the only female speaker on the show, observes that her on-screen rivalry with the final male speaker, S Raja, appeals to viewers because they represent two seemingly opposing viewpoints, with Bhaskar's arguments appealing to more liberal viewers while Raja's arguments are representative of viewers who may be more conservative (interview Bharathy Bhaskar). Their interplay in many ways reveals the Tamil linguistic community's conflict over the anxieties over the changes that globalisation has wrought in the lives of its members and their aspirations to benefit from it.

Traditional, formal and restrained

The debates on *Sirappu Pattimandrams* are marked by formality and cordiality, unlike the 'debates' that are presented on English-language television news shows which feature loud and aggressive screaming matches. The costuming shows a self-conscious restraint to be traditional, so that the focus is on the debate itself. The male speakers are traditionally dressed in shirts and spotless white *veshtis*

(traditional male attire consisting of off-white fabric draped over the lower half of the body from the waist downwards). Very occasionally a male speaker may wear trousers instead of the *veshti*. If they are female, they are dressed in silk *saris* but are not heavily made up or bejewelled, quite unlike the characters in soap operas on the same channels who wear conspicuous jewellery that forms a part of the soap opera's spectacular visual trope. Prof Pappaiah insists on this dress code because he says that the *pattimandram* is for all viewers, including those who may be economically underprivileged (interview Solomon Pappaiah).

The show begins with classical instrumental music (featuring the traditional *nadaswaram* and *mrudangam* instruments) similar to what one would hear at a Hindu temple or wedding, playing over show opening graphics that feature popular visual symbols of the festival being celebrated (so the *Deepavali* episode features an earthen lamp design, the *Pongal* episode features a clay pot and sugarcane, and so on). So while modern computer graphics are used, they are used to depict traditional visual elements and are accompanied by traditional music.

The moderator introduces the speakers and formally invites them to speak. Each speaker rises and goes to the lectern and speaks in the high fine *centamil* with quotations from Tamil poetry, literature and mythology along with references to current events and specific news items as well as other anecdotes and pop culture references. Veiled and sometimes not so veiled references are made to the trials of the political party which is currently in power. At the time that this study was conducted, the AIADMK party (which is the main political rival of the DMK party with which Sun TV is affiliated) led the state government in Tamil Nadu. We hear light-hearted comments and interjections from the moderator. Speakers who are awaiting their turn or have completed their turn are seated and follow along or make notes. We see them smile when they are gently ribbed by the speaker at the lectern or by the moderator. The conversation, whether it is light-hearted and humorous, or whether it is forceful and passionate, remains civil throughout. The moderator winds up and sets off a large timer at the end of the allotted few minutes and sometimes speakers may take a minute or two longer to complete their piece. Each piece always begins and ends with formal greetings, sometimes specifically addressed to Tamil speakers (*En arumai Tamizhare*).

The moderator always has the final word. Sometimes the 'judgment' is a tie and he accepts the importance of both sides' arguments as in the case of the debate on *Women's Safety: Stronger Laws or Attitude Change* when he concluded that "*Ondru ondrukku pagai allai*" (one is not the enemy of the other). On other occasions, as at the debate on *In the present time: Increased selfishness or selflessness*, he concluded that, "The forests of selfishness had overtaken the small sprouts of selflessness." This seemingly nuanced position taken by the moderator, which generally leans towards a conservative position, is not unique to this format and

has been observed in television shows with other formats and in other languages where more liberal views are aired but contained through the voice of the anchor or host. (See for instance McMillin 2003.)

A deliberative space

Through its self-consciously formal structure, *Sirappu Pattimandram* showcases the deliberative process, where arguments are presented and heard out without interruptions. While the topics of the debates on this show do not directly address burning political, economic and social issues of the day such as deprivation, caste discrimination and religious violence, the performance of the deliberative process cannot be undervalued in a democracy where riots and violence are endemic.

The importance placed on deliberative, "talk-centric rather than vote-centric" approaches to democracy has risen in recent times both with political theorists and in the practice of democratic institutions (Elstub and McLaverty 2014). Deliberation is widely accepted to have historically existed in India, and to have taken place in a variety of fora including religious and scholarly gatherings (Sen 2005). In the last few decades village level deliberative gatherings or *gram sabhas* have received constitutional sanction and in some cases have proved to be effective in ensuring better governance (Parthasarathi and Rao 2017). Even when deliberation is aimed at opinion formation rather than decision making, as it does with 'weak publics', it has been observed to be of value (Fraser 1990).

For instance, the show offers a space, albeit patriarchal, for the expression of women's views. While the show features female speakers, they are seldom equal in numbers to male speakers and the moderator has always been a male. They give voice to the enormous burden that women, especially working women, carry in families. The only occasion when an entire team consisted of female speakers was on the occasion of the Independence Day 2016 episode on women's safety. Overtly patriarchal statements are regularly made on the show, such as one male speaker who referred fondly to a time when women did housework without gadgets and when not having a refrigerator meant that every meal was freshly cooked. He also expressed pity for working women who eat with an eye on the clock rather than caring about the taste of what they are eating. While some of these arguments use stereotypical tropes of women as martyrs to the cause of their families, the show offers a space where primarily unspoken cultural codes are stated and questioned with great enthusiasm.

While Bhaskar is a strong speaker, she rarely gets to be the last speaker who has the opportunity to rebut all other speakers. She is placed regularly as the penultimate speaker whose arguments can be mocked by the final male speaker. The summing up and 'judgement' is also always presented by the oldest male on the

show, the moderator. Despite all these caveats, this is a rare space where a few women speakers are able to speak uninterrupted due to the formal timed structure of the show, and when the opposing team argues, the arguments do not take the form of personal attacks, as they do in online fora. In this sense, the *pattimandram* is a modern space, offering civil, democratic deliberation and debate and attempting to give women a voice, however limited that might be. It does this, however, through its self-conscious use of a literary style of language that dates back many centuries.

Tamil-language oratory as reassurance and quotidian problems recast in the literary idiom

Quotidian anxieties are recast in the literary idiom through the debates on the *Sirappu Pattimandram* show as anxieties of the *akam* and the *puram*. These are terms familiar to Tamil speakers and arise from Tamil poetry of the *Cankam* age (100 BC to 250 AD) to denote interior/private worlds and exterior/public worlds, thus love poems are *akam* poetry while war poems are *puram* poetry (Ramanujan, 1985).

The social changes that took place in the wake of economic deregulation have been documented to have generated enormous anxieties in Indian media audiences (see Mehta 2015; Mazzarella 2003). As Mehta observes,

> The transition to the new order was incomplete and the deep regulatory crisis that continues to plague the post-reform landscape has had serious consequences for the state of the industry, the nature of content it produces and ultimately for the public sphere and health of democracy. (Mehta 2015)

Mehta makes this point in the context of broadcast legislation in India, but his argument is just as valid for the broader changes and anxieties generated in the wake of liberalisation and globalisation. Mazzarella (2003) also highlights the types of panics that arose at that time when he observes that, "…the mid- to late 1990s was a time of heightened anxiety about the meaning and value of 'Indianness' vis-a-vis a global field" (34). Television shows picked up these anxieties and addressed them after a fashion, one of which was through a reassuring reflection on heritage (Rajagopal 1996).[4]

In this regard, the *pattimandram* with its Tamil-language oratorical performances that invoke the rich literary heritage of the Tamil language offers reassurance through its very use of the literary style of the language and the continuity that it offers with the past. The Tamil language itself is symbolic of the greater

Tamil imaginary that is summoned through its use.

Whether the topics are *The Main Reason for Today's Problems: Changes in the Home or Changes in Society* or *The Main Challenge for Today's Parents: Their Children's Education or Marriage*, where the statements made by speakers show that individual responses to the government's decisions such as the imposition of new taxes or the uncertainties due to changes in rules regarding college admissions to professional medical education programmes give cause for anxiety to families, they are discussed using literary tropes such as *akam* and *puram.* Even when the discussion turns to seemingly mundane issues such as what is to be done in the case of mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue, these tropes are used: "What am I to do if despite all my best efforts in my home (which belongs to 'akam', i.e., the interior world), mosquitoes from the street (which belongs to the 'puram', i.e., the exterior world) swarm into my home because of the lack of an adequate response from the authorities?" asks the moderator in one episode. Through its reliance on literary Tamil, *Sirappu Pattimandram* creates a continuity with the past and recasts modern day problems as problems perennial to Tamil speakers down the ages and creating a reassurance that changes have been a part of Tamil lives for centuries and, like their ancestors, they too will prevail over the challenges they face.

Conclusions

We find spaces in Indian regional language television that have been created by global flows of capital and sustained by the overlap of political and corporate power to contextualise viewers' anxieties and shape public opinion.

The *Sirappu Pattimandram* show offers its primarily older audience members a space for the articulation and containment of their anxieties over the sweeping economic – and in their wake, social – changes that have taken place in the last three decades. It does this through the creation of a mediated space that is traditional, formal and restrained. While this is a gendered space where the humour is sexist on occasion, it is a space that contains anxieties through the use of Tamil-language oratory and recasts quotidian problems in a literary idiom that offers continuity with a glorious past. The use of literary tropes such as *akam* (private)/*puram* (exterior world) provides a reassuring context to anxieties at a time of great economic and therefore social inequality when viewers might find that while GDP growth rates are being touted, rising inflation makes balancing the family budget harder.

As a show on a commercial television channel owned by the close affiliates of a powerful political party, it helps maintain the status quo by emphasising that all is not well in the *puram* and therefore *akam* difficulties are only to be expected.

While women are given the space to speak up, patriarchal sentiments are expressed often, and more often than not a male speaker has the last word. So while a cordially deliberative space is created, it is also a space where conservativism has the final word.

The deliberative atmosphere of *Sirappu Pattimandram* is also rare, democratic and progressive since it presents a space for reasoned debate, a space for eloquence and well thought-out opinions. Speakers marshal facts and figures as they make their case. While the speeches may be impassioned, the atmosphere remains formal and speakers, both male and female, are able to express views that disagree with their opponents' views. Male speakers appear to be consumed by nostalgia for a patriarchal past, while the female speakers aspire for the opposite. *Centamil* takes the centre stage, addressing Tamil-speaking viewers around the world at a time when their lives are changing due to urbanisation and other effects of globalisation, reminding them of a glorious Tamilian past and reassuring them that they too will prevail.

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Notes

[1]http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language-2011/General%20Note.pdf
[2]According to statistics released by the Central Statistical Organisation, Government of India, New Delhi, available at http://www.esopb.gov.in/Static/PDF/GSDP/Statewise-Data/StateWiseData.pdf
[3]Generally the first episode of the year is on 14th January to celebrate the harvest festival of Pongal, then on 14th April to celebrate Tamil New Year's Day Varsha Pirappu, followed by an episode on 15th August for Independence Day and finally an episode each for Vinayagar Chaturthi (the festival dedicated to Lord Ganesh) and Deepavali (the festival of lights). The last two festivals are celebrated according to the Hindu calendar so their dates vary each year. The former occurs in August/September and the latter in October/November. In some years, episodes have been telecast on a few additional dates such as Oct 2nd (the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi) or on Ayudha Poojai

(the festival of weapons and instruments) which occurs in October/November. (These episodes were available on youtube.com at the time of the study, although it is not rare for them to be taken down due to copyright violations by the posters.) The show only airs on national holidays such as Independence Day or Gandhi Jayanti and on Hindu festival days such as the ones named above, and not festivals of other religions.

[4] Indian heritage, as Arvind Rajagopal points out, was "…that of a lost utopia" (Rajagopal 1996: 459), especially at a time of transition in Indian society, and was perceived by Indian audiences as a way to cope with rapid and deep-rooted changes. While Rajagopal was referring to the success of the televised version of the epic Ramayana that was telecast on the Indian national broadcaster, Doordarshan, in 1987–1989, a few years before the start of liberalization, we will not be remiss in considering the reassurance offered by a return to tradition.

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Minorities in Indian Urdu News: Ahmadis, Journalistic Practices and Mediated Muslim Identity

By Arshad Amanullah

Abstract

A case study of a protest campaign against the Ahmadiyya community in Punjab and its coverage in Urdu language news media of India, this paper locates its narrative at the intersection of media, politics and religion. It seeks to advance the field theory project beyond western media systems by applying it to Indian Urdu news. It demonstrates that the religious field is a neighbouring field of Urdu news and the former wields powerful influence over the latter. Moreover, the religious field with the help of news media uses politics to have its voice heard.

The paper specifically reads into the manner in which Urdu dailies covered Majlis Ahrar-e Islam Hind's (a Muslim interest group) protest campaign to cancel Pranab Mukherjee's (then Finance Minister of India) visit to Qadian, Punjab in 2009. He was set to participate in an annual function of the Ahmadis who are a persecuted minority group among Muslims. The protest campaign, with an active support of Urdu dailies, got transformed into a media campaign against the Ahmadis and was successful in getting the Minister's visit cancelled.

The paper investigates the dynamics of collaboration between Urdu news and the ulama that made possible transformation of anti-Ahmadi campaign into a media campaign. It attempts to elucidate the uncritical support that Majlis Ahrar-e Islam Hind received from Urdu dailies. For this purpose, it delves into normative structure of Urdu news field and its journalistic practices. It draws attention to their implications for Indian Muslim identity.

Introduction

In 2009, Pranab Mukherjee (then Finance Minister of India) agreed to attend the annual convention *jalsa salana* of the Ahmadis on 27 December (IANS 2009). *Jalsa salana* occupies an important place in the calendar of the Ahmadis (members of the Ahmadiyya community) and was scheduled to be held from 26-28 December in Qadian in the Indian state of Punjab. After learning about Mukherjee's visit, Majlis Ahrar-e-Islam Hind (MAIH) which is an *ulama* (Muslim clerics)-led Muslim interest group, launched a campaign in Punjab against it. Urdu-language newspapers, especially the three that are studied here, transformed it into a media campaign against the Ahmadis, and thus helped MAIH get Mukherjee's visit cancelled.

According to Census of India 2001, Muslims constitute the largest religious minority group (13.4 per cent of the total population) of India. Urdu news which is overwhelmingly produced and consumed by Muslims in India, has a self-image of being the champion of rights of this minority community. It is always replete with stories about marginalization of Muslims in almost every walk of life and opinion pieces that critique Hindu majoritarianism as chiefly responsible for the same. The partisan coverage that the community receives in non-Urdu news has been one of concerns of Urdu news.

Ironically, *ulama*-led interest groups and Urdu news do not recognize Ahmadis's rights to fair media. The latter are a marginal and persecuted group amongst Muslims of South Asia (Smith 1943, Valentine 2008, Khan 2015). In other words, the Ahmadis, who form a minority group within a larger minority group i.e., Muslims, do not get fair representation in Urdu news that considers itself a champion of minority rights. It is this paradox that the paper attempts to capture through a case study of the unrealized visit of Mukherjee to Qadian. To unravel this paradox, the paper will try to understand the following: How does success of an interest group's media strategy reflect on the relationship between normative structure and journalistic practices of Urdu news field?

The paper seeks to advance the field theory project beyond western media systems by applying it to Urdu news media of India. It draws on Bourdieusian concepts like social fields, habitus and capital and Oscar Gandy's concept of information subsidies to investigate the MAIH's use of Urdu news to influence the leadership of Indian National Congress Party to prevent its minister Mukherjee from participating in *jalsa*. With a focus on inter-field relations, it tries to understand facets of successful collaboration between MAIH and Urdu news and its (collaboration's) implications for Urdu journalistic practices and Muslim identity.

Field theory and news media

Bourdieu understands the social world as divided into various fields that are semi-autonomous and increasingly specialised spheres of struggle, and in these fields "individuals and organizations compete, unconsciously and consciously, to valorize those forms of capital which they possess" (Benson 2006: 190). The media field, like other social fields, is constituted through the struggle between the autonomous pole (represented by the cultural capital) and heteronomous pole (represented by the economic capital) (Benson & Neveu 2005: 4-6). The former represents specific capital unique to the media field while the latter forces which are external to the field. The media field is a part of the field of power, and within the latter, it falls within the dominated field of cultural production. The fields of restricted cultural production, on the one hand, and large-scale production, on the other, flanks it. Hence, it is characterised by high degree of heteronomy and low degree of autonomy. In other words, the media field is a "very weakly autonomous field" (Bourdieu 2005: 33).

The inter-field relationships in the context of media field turn out to be the same between the latter and the field that it covers. Marchetti (2005: 76-79) proposes four variables to analyse relationships among different social fields: interdependence of a field's economy with that of the field of activity being covered; degree of control the field has on its own coverage; the degree to which the media field imposes its own logic and internal hierarchies upon the field it is covering; and the social characteristics of social actors. The religious field, as this paper will demonstrate, appears to exercise a good measure of control over its coverage by Urdu news while the latter emerges as the collaborator with actors of the religious field.

It is through these inter-field relationships that all social fields are subject to external pressures or shocks and the media field tends to be more prone to them because of its very weak autonomy. Any of these shocks can alter the existing relationship between the autonomous and the heteronomous poles that is the source of inertia, the status quo, and bring about changes in the field. For example, in the case of the relationship between journalists and their sources of information, it is important to think of it as "meetings between different habitus and different positions in the field" (Marchetti 2005: 76). If sources are located in the neighbouring field, external pressures can present themselves as pressures from the sources and the same can influence the journalists' decisions about the information shared by the former.

Like the concept of capital and its various forms, the notion of habitus is integral for a complete analysis of inter-field relations. Benson (2014: 27) draws on Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 115-140) to define habitus as "an individual's habitual way of being—encompassing ideological dispositions, judgments of taste,

and physical bearing—shaped by family, education and profession". Marchetti (2005:78) also reminds us to take into account "the educational and social trajectories", i.e. habitus, in addition to "the professional trajectories" for a comprehensive understanding of inter-field dynamics with reference to the production of news. Nature of relationship between the habitus of journalists and their sources is a key factor that shapes the relations between the media field and the field it covers. They can have similar or different habitus and their social background, professional education and professional trajectories can provide an explanation for the difference or similarity. Benson uses concepts of 'habitus affinities' and 'habitus gap'/habitus disaffinities' to describe similarities and differences respectively in the habitus of social actors. It follows from this line of reasoning that "those with similar habitus are likely to share a confluence of interests and tastes" (Benson 2014:27). To him, these concepts not only capture the relationship between the habitus of individual journalists and their sources but also "express a structural relation" (Benson 2014: 127) of various fields.

With these analytical insights about workings of habitus in defining inter-field relations in mind, Benson mobilizes these concepts ('habitus affinities' and 'habitus gap'/'habitus disaffinities') to capture the role of habitus in disguising the influence of the domain of international NGOs on news field. He demonstrates that due to 'habitus affinities', immigration beat journalists are predisposed to uncritically accept the frames advocated by the leadership of international NGOs working on the immigration issues in the United States because both these groups of professionals got their education in prestigious universities/institutes of the US. Conversely, "a significant 'habitus gap' between elite journalists and immigration restrictionist groups ….. contributes to more negative, denigrating coverage of restrictionist groups…. and lesser media visibility of these groups" (Benson 2014: 127) than for humanitarian (pro-immigration) activist groups.

This study suggests that religious field was successful in distorting the professional practices of journalism in the independently owned Urdu press. The influences of the neighbouring fields on the journalistic practices in the form of distortions of the established norms within news production have far-reaching implications. The media field occupies central position within the larger field of power and is closely entwined with other social fields. Hence, the media field plays the role of "crucial mediator" amongst all the fields. In the context of this paper, Urdu news emerges as a mediator between the religious and political fields.

Urdu news in India: The field and its normative structure

Vernacular languages newspapers have often been looked upon as "problematic" unlike English-language press of India that is generally regarded as a model by the media watchdogs like Press Council of India (Ståhlberg 2013: 22). The Hindi press (the largest vernacular press) is criticised for biased reporting, inciting violent conflicts between religious groups and paying low salaries to journalists (Ståhlberg 2002: 217-218). One of the reasons for this is that it has been overwhelmingly supportive of the politics of power and culture of Hindu nationalist groups (Engineer 1991, Rajagopal 2001) and critical of state-initiated affirmative action programmes for lower caste population.

In the 1980s, rapid changes took place in Indian language print news media that contributed to the growth of vernacular press in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Robin Jeffrey (2000) describes this blooming of vernacular press as India's *newspaper revolution* and identifies five factors that contributed to the making of this revolution : (i) improved technology in producing and distributing newspapers; (ii) higher literacy rates; (iii) better purchasing power among the people; (iv) adoption of market-oriented outlook by publishers and (v) political awareness has spread to a large section of the population who are eager to know more (Jeffrey 1993: 2004).

Several changes that this newspaper revolution has brought about in the Urdu press, albeit with a delay of almost a decade, are illustrated well in the success of two multi-city edition dailies, namely *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* (RS) and *Inquilab* (see for the former's case study, Amanullah 2009). Although anthropologists (Stahlberg 2013, Rao 2011) have closely observed the changes in other vernacular language press, there is a dearth of scientific work on Indian Urdu news. This lack of scholarly literature has contributed to a sort of ambivalence regarding its politics of power and culture as well as its journalistic practices.

Majority of Urdu reading public are either *Ajlaf* Muslims whose ancestors converted to Islam centuries ago from *shudras* (the lowest order in the caste hierarchy engaged in occupations like weaving, carpentry, etc.) or *Arzal* Muslims whose ancestors converted from outcastes' groups (scavengers, tanners, etc.). The Indian government recognizes both groups as suffering from social disabilities (GoI 2006: 192-193). Together these two groups are known as *Pasmanda* Muslims and the social movement that strives for their political and social empowerment as *Pasmanda Movement* (Ansari 2012). It is these *Pasmanda* Muslims (artisans and small entrepreneurs) who form majority among Urdu reading public. As a result of the deepening of democracy in India, they are now "part of a lower middle-class keen on consumption" (Jeffrey 1997c: 635).

An audit of successful Urdu newspapers reveal that the Urdu media field used to historically comprise of both Hindu and Muslim-owned Urdu newspa-

pers, each with completely different politics of culture. For example, *Hind Samachar*, a non-Muslim owned Urdu daily, has been carrying advertisements and press releases of the Ahmadis while the Muslim-owned Urdu newspapers have been doing the opposite (for a profile of *Hind Samachar*, see Jeffrey 1997c). The *Punjabi sharnarthis* (Punjabi-speaking Hindu and Sikh migrants from Pakistan) formed the majority amongst the readers of *Hind Samachar*. In North India, the *Punjabi sharnarthis* used to form a significant group of Urdu reading public till the 1990s. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the Hindu-owned Urdu newspapers shrank mainly because of the continuous disowning of Urdu language by non-Muslims as one of their professional languages in favour of English and Hindi (Orsini 1999: 410). On the contrary, Muslim-owned newspapers continued to cater to and shape the need of Urdu reading public. Consequently, Urdu press by and large became synonymous with Muslim press and Urdu reading public gradually got transformed into Muslim reading public.

Majority of Indian Muslims are Sunnites who follow the Hanafite School of Islamic jurisprudence. Also, most madrasas (Islamic seminaries) inculcate Sunnite-Hanafite Islam in their graduates who constitute a significant section of the Urdu reading public and Urdu journalists. Hence, to consolidate their audience-base, "publishers in Urdu produce magazines and newspapers geared overwhelmingly to Muslim interests" (Jeffrey 1997c: 635). Consequently, the dominant religio-cultural ideology of Urdu media is heavily influenced by the Sunnite-Hanafite interpretation of Islam. Studies have shown that the Urdu news media reflects and reproduces this dominant ideology of Muslim society, and it privileges religious elements (Verschooten, Amanullah & Nijs 2016) over secular ones (Amanullah 2011) of identity of Indian Muslims. This paper will focus on the *types* of religious elements of their identity emphasised upon in the Urdu news media.

Interestingly, advent of digital news production changed Urdu media outlets into profitable ventures in the concluding years of twentieth century and the opening decade of twenty-first century. With an eye on this positive change, a few Hindu-owned corporate media houses entered Urdu media market, either by bringing out a new newspaper like *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* (RS) by Sahara India Mass Communication or by acquiring an already successful daily like *Inquilab* of Midday Infomedia Limited by Jagran Prakashan Limited. Electronic media outlets like *ETV Urdu* and *Zee Salam* are also successful ventures of the Hindu-owned media houses.

In a significant departure from the past, twenty-first century Urdu media outlets of Hindu-owned big business houses have preferred a policy of cultural politics similar to Muslim-owned Urdu newspapers. It appears to be a business strategy to cater to the changed religious profile of Urdu reading public. However, *Hind Samachar*, being an old newspaper, continued with the old policy of cultural

politics of Hindu-owned Urdu newspapers, and the same explains why MAIH activists burnt its copies (details will follow later). Its non-coverage of the protests against Mukherjee's visit runs contrary to the dominant cultural politics of Urdu news and hence was considered provocative. In this sense, though Urdu news' wait for "its Northcliffe, Murdoch or Citizen Kane" seems to have come to an end as Robin Jeffrey (1997c: 635) had predicted, their capitalism in Urdu media field does not seem to be "accompanying non-religious tendencies".

The Ahmadiyya community

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community is an Islamic religious community founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908) (MGA) on 23 March 1889 in British India. He claimed that he was the *Mujaddid* (divine reformer) of the fourteenth century *Hijrah*, the promised Messiah and *Mahdi* awaited by Muslims (Khan 2015: 42). Currently, the community is estimated to number more than 10 million spread over 206 countries. The members of the community are referred to as Ahmadi Muslims or simply Ahmadis or *Qadianis* after the name of Qadian, a small town in Gurdaspur district of the Indian side of Punjab where MGA was born (Khan 2015: 23-24). The community is divided into two groups: the Qadiani group and the Lahori group. They differ in their interpretation of prophecy:

> … the Qadiani Ahmadi teach that although Muhammad was the gre-atest of the prophets, prophecy did not end with him. This is one of several important points on which the Qadiani Ahmadi disagree with the beliefs of the Lahori group. The Lahori group accept Muhammad as the last and the greatest of the Prophets, arguing that no prophet can come after him. They regard Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as Mujaddid [re-former] and a prophet in a metaphysical sense only. (Valentine 2008: 128)

Muslims generally regard the Qadiani Ahmadi teaching on the finality of the prop-hethood as heretic and it is because of this belief that Qadiani Ahmadis have been facing persecution (Valentine 2008: 227-40). However, the Indian state considers Ahmadis as Muslims. They are free to practice their religion and call themselves Muslims in India.

In addition to the Islamic festivals, Ahmadi Muslims also observe several functions that are regarded as important for the community but are not equal-ly obligatory. The most important among these is *Jalsa Salana*. MGA initiated it as the formal annual gathering of the community for increasing one's religious knowledge and promotion of harmony, friendship and solidarity within its members.

The Ahrar movement

Pranab Mukherjee (then Finance Minister of India) had to cancel his plan to attend *jalsa salana* of the Ahmadis on 27 December 2009 in Qadian. MAIH, the *ulama*-led interest group that was instrumental in forcing him to drop his plan, was formed in Ludhiana after independence. Its parent body Majlis Ahrar-e-Islam (MAI), also known as the Ahrar Party, was established in India in 1929 to inculcate the spirit of freedom among the Muslims. "Most of the Ahrar leadership was steeped in the Deobandi tradition of Islamic learning" (Qasmi 2014: 52). Similar to another *ulama*-led political party Jamiat Ulama-e Hind (JUH), MAI also championed the cause of complete freedom for India from the British rule. It always sided with the Indian National Congress throughout the struggle against the British colonial rule over India despite being an independent political body. MAI was bitterly opposed to the Muslim League and the partition of British India.

Being a cadre-based political organisation, MAI had "strong grass-roots connections for popular mobilization against the British rule" (Qasmi 2014: 53) which it used for political agitation against many social groups including the Ahmadis. It viewed them "as a British implant to divide the strength of Muslims and to bring about changes in sharia'at through the intermediary strength of a new prophet" (Qasmi 2014: 53) because they refuted the very idea of *Khatam-e Nabuwat* (finality of Mohammad's prophethood). Thus, it was at the forefront of agitations against the Ahmadis in the British period as well (see for details, Kamran 2013; Qasmi 2014). Maulana Habib-ur-Rehman Sani Ludhianvi (HRSL), the current President of MAIH, is the descendent of one of its founders Maulana Habib-ur-Rahman Ludhianvi.

The Ahmadis as news

Reports about Ahmadis with reference to its social interface with the Muslim community are recurrently covered in Urdu newspapers. Nature of Ahmadis' portrayal in these reports is generally negative. The first category of such reports focuses on the events organised by the *ulama* to caution Muslim masses about Ahmadis' proselytising activities. The second category of reports is about the protests that the *ulama*-led interest groups organise to counter these proselytising efforts. For example, it was reported in September 2011 that an Ahmadis-organised exhibition on the art of calligraphy in Pragati Maidan of New Delhi was forced to discontinue (Tankha 2011). An umpteen number of such examples are present in the history of India.

The newspaper reports that this paper will study fall under the second category. These reports appeared in December 2009 in Urdu newspapers and were about MAIH activists' protest against Mukherjee's visit to Qadian. It was selected as a

case study because this protest illustrates triangular interrelations of the Ahmadiyya community, the Muslim community and the Indian state. The involvement of the Indian state (represented by a cabinet minister) has never been as direct and clear as it was in this episode.

The sample for this case study includes three Urdu dailies: *Hamara Samaj* (HS), *Hindustan Express* (HE) and *Sahafat*. According to the classificatory scheme of the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), they fall under the category of medium-size dailies (circulation between 25001 and 75000). Though they are published from more than one city, the sample has been collected from their Delhi edition. In 2009, they were among the top five Urdu newspapers of Delhi (see Table 1).

Sr. No	Title	Place of Publication	Claimed Circulation	Category
1.	Hind Samachar	Jalandhar	15523	Small
2.	Hindustan Express	Delhi	58133	Medium
3.	Hamara Samaj	Delhi	71700	Medium
4.	Sahafat	Delhi	56526	Medium
5.	Roznama Rashtriya Sahara	Delhi	59450	Medium
6.	Inquilab	Mumbai	32241	Medium
7.	Siasat	Hyderabad	41967	Medium
8.	Akhbar E Mashriq	Kolkata	65589	Medium

Table 1: Circulation of Prominent Urdu dailies in 2009. Source: Press in India 2009-10

In the month of December 2009, HS, HE and *Sahafat* carried respectively 6, 9 and 8 reports related to the Ahmadis. Out of them 2, 5 and 5 reports, respectively, were about Mukherjee's visit and MAIH's protests against it. The analysis here is based only on news reports.

The next section will describe the sequence of events triggered by the announcement and later cancellation of Mukherjee's visit.

The visit that never was

In 2009, the Ahmadis planned to organise *jalsa salana* in Qadian from 26-28 of December and invited Pranab Mukherjee to attend some of its proceedings on the 27 December and visit "various holy places associated with the founder of the Ahmadiyya sect" (IANS 2009). When MAIH learnt about Mukherjee's visit, it launched a campaign in the state of Punjab against it. Urdu newspapers, especially the three that are being studied here, gave the campaign a favourable coverage and helped MAIH get Mukherjee's visit cancelled. A study of reports that focussed on Mukherjee's visit provides the following sequence of events:

26 December 2009

Although the Urdu press reported the ulama and Muslim organisations' convening of various meetings with the aim of preventing Muslim masses from converting to the Ahmadism and participating in *jals*a, it was only on 26 December that all three newspapers reported Mukherjee's likely attendance at *jalsa* and the beginning of protests against his visit all over Punjab. Responding to the appeal of MAIH President, Muslims of the state had taken to the street to protest against the alleged religious conversion of poor Muslims to Ahmadism at the upcoming *jalsa*. The protestors burnt the effigies of MGA and Mukherjee. Keeping in view the number of protesters and their anger, the police had to deploy a large number of its personnel to maintain law and order. According to MAIH's estimate, almost 18 out of 22 districts of Punjab witnessed protest demonstrations.

Ludhiana witnessed the biggest demonstration where around 20,000 Muslims jammed the biggest square of the city. Protests occurred at ten different places of the city and they also brought out *janaza* (funeral procession) of Ahmadism.

27 December 2009

In their follow-up reports, HS and *Sahafat* informed that protests continued in Amritsar and Faridkot on the second day (26 December) as well. Office-bearers of the central mosque of Ludhiana under the leadership of the General Secretary of MAIH Mohammad Usman Rahmani Ludhianavi submitted to the Deputy Commissioner of the city Kuldeep Singh a memorandum demanding that the Ahmadis be stopped from using Islamic symbols and name of Prophet Muhammad for the propagation of their faith. The memorandum also made it clear that if they did not discontinue misleading poor Muslims in their *jalsa*, the Muslim community would feel compelled to take hard measures.

The protestors on the 26th burnt copies of *Hind Samachar,* as it was publishing positive stories about Ahmadis and not covering MAIH's protests against the visit of the minister, in the presence of media in Jagraon and Kotkapura, chanting these slogans: *Qadiani fitna murdabad, Hind Samachar murdabad, khatm-e nu-*

buwat zindabad (Down with the Ahmadi mischief! Down with *Hind Samachar*! Long Live finality of Muhammad's Prophethood!). While burning copies of *Hind Samachar* in Kotkapura a local leader Mohammad Azam Khan said: "This newspaper today carried an advertisement from the Ahmadis that claimed that the Ahmadiyya community had come to existence as per a prediction of the Prophet Mohammad. This is a conspiracy on the part of a *batil* (false) community to mislead people in the name of the Prophet. This newspaper is *barabar ka sharik* (co-participant) in this false propaganda." (Quote carried by all three sample newspapers on 27 December.) He also accused *Hind Samachar* of being at the forefront in giving prominence to the Ahmadiyya ads and news that hurt the religious sentiments of Muslims.

Similarly, Dr Muhammad Shaukat burnt copies of *Hind Samachar* in Jagraon and accused the newspaper of being sold out to the Ahmadis. He further mentioned that they would wage a campaign against the Ahmadis as well as this newspaper if it did not stop hurting religious sentiments of the Muslims. He thought it was shameful that "*Hind Samachar* has not published even a single news about protest against the Qadianis, contrarily, it has published an article in praise of Qadianis and has gone to the extent of saying that *jalsa salana* at Qadian is equivalent to Haj". (Quote carried by all three sample newspapers on 27 December.)

28 December 2009

On 28 December *Sahafat* informed its readers that taking note of the appeal of HRSL and protests that continued for two days, Mukherjee had cancelled his visit to Qadian. The MAIH volunteers who were at the forefront of organising protests celebrated Mukherjee's decision and considered it their victory. Due to two-day-long intensive state-wide protests, the Ahmadis could not succeed in influencing even a single Muslim from rural Punjab to attend *jalsa* in 2009. Consequently, the event failed miserably and only 150 Ahmadis who came from Pakistan were present at the venue. The newspaper also claimed that around a dozen prominent non-Muslim leaders also declined to attend *jalsa*.

Discussion and analysis

The previous section described the sequence of events as they unfolded on the ground after the announcement of and later cancellation of Mukherjee's visit. This section will analyse the newspaper reports to illuminate on journalistic practices of Urdu news.

Journalistic practices in Urdu dailies

A comparison of the reports that HE, HS and *Sahafat* carried on 26 December 2009 confirms that apart from typos and style of using honorific titles, the same text was verbatim produced in all of them. HS and *Sahafat* presented it as a report prepared by their bureaus and did not acknowledge that it was a press release issued by MAIH while HE did. HS carried the full text of the press release. *Sahafat* and HE published a shorter report, omitting from the tail of press release some details about burning of effigies of Ahmadism and Mukherjee. HS and *Sahafat* carried the report on the front page along with photographs while HE on an inside page without any photograph.

What HS and *Sahafat* carried on 27 December was also a press release of MAIH, without any effort to copyedit it. Three photographs that appeared with it were also the same in both newspapers. In fact, there was no difference in the order they appeared: protestors burning copies of *Hind Samachar* in Jagraon, MAIH General Secretary submitting memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner in Ludhiana and protestors burning copies of *Hind Samachar* in Kotkapura. HS acknowledged that it received these photographs from MAIH while *Sahafat* did not mention the source. The press release appeared on the inside pages in both newspapers.

Interestingly, HE did not carry the press release that HS and *Sahafat* did on 27 December. The follow-up story that it published on 27 December was based on the views of Mufti Mahfuzur Rahman Usmani (MMRU), a Deobandi cleric from Bihar on Mukherjee's Qadian visit. HE News Bureau in Delhi prepared the story. According to the story, MMRU advised Mukherjee not to attend *jalsa* as his presence in the event would hurt religious sentiments of around 30 million Muslims. In his views, participation of a senior minister in the ceremony of traitors of the country is quite problematic. MMRU appealed to the President and General Secretary of the Congress Party to stop Mukherjee from attending *jalsa* otherwise it would suffer badly in future elections. The story carried a photograph of MMRU.

It seems that HE's decision on 26 December to acknowledge that the story is a press release and not a report filed by its reporter or prepared at the desk, forced HS and *Sahafat* to do the same by publishing MAIH's press release on 27 December as a press release. In an interesting move, HE unlike HS and *Sahafat* did not carry the press release and instead created a different but related story based on MMRU's views.

The report that *Sahafat* carried on 28 December on the front page was also a press release of MAIH. Interestingly, the press release draws on another press release by the Minority Cell of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (MCPP-CC). It also reports a press conference organised by the MAIH President. It informs about the post-cancellation scenario at Qadian based on the information

provided by some eyewitnesses. Despite its total reliance on what MAIH had been sharing with *Sahafat*, it took the credit for getting Mukherjee's visit cancelled as it claimed on 28th of December: *roznama Sahafat ki khabar rang layi* (coverage of the protest in the daily *Sahafat* made its impact).

As usual, three photographs accompanied the press release as proof of the events and information mentioned in it. It seems that *Sahafat* was compelled by HS (which, unlike *Sahafat*, acknowledged on 27 December that MAIH was the source of both the report and photographs) to acknowledge that photographs were shared by MAIH. Interestingly, HS chose not to carry the MAIH press release.

Sahafat claimed that in a telephonic conversation with the daily on 27 December MAIH President praised the support that the daily had extended to its protests by launching a media movement (*sahafat ki tahrik*) against the Ahmadis and making it a success. However, along with a front-page report on the cancellation of Mukherjee's visit, HE published on 27 December a box-item whose caption read: MAIH thanked the media. Unlike *Sahafat*, it noted that the Muslim community appreciated the role that all the newspapers of Punjab, and especially *muslim akhbarat* (Muslim-owned newspapers) from Delhi and other parts of the country played in the protest movement against Mukherjee's visit and was thankful to them for their support.

On 29 December, HS and *Sahafat* did not carry any related news. However, as a follow-up to what it had published on 27 December, HE on 30 December reported the response of MMRU to the cancellation of Mukherjee's visit. MMRU thanked the Congress high command for convincing Mukherjee to not attend *jalsa* and categorised it as a great success of Muslims and failure of the Ahmadi's design. As usual, the story carried his photograph as well. HE claimed in this news-item on 29 December that it had received several phone calls from the Muslims of Punjab, Delhi and the neighbouring districts who welcomed Mukherjee's decision. Interestingly, like *Sahafat*'s claim on 28 December, the claim of HE on 29 December confirms that this newspaper too was an active participant in the campaign against the Ahmadis.

HE and *Sahafat* on 31 December published a press release of MAIH with different headlines. According to the press release, MAIH had followed a well-planned strategy to get the visit cancelled. It had sent a fax message to the Prime Minister and all ministers of the central government saying that MAIH and the Muslim community would not tolerate Mukherjee's visit to Qadian; and if he encouraged the Ahmadis by attending their annual congregation, the MAIH volunteers would not only make the Ahmadis stop the event but would feel compelled to launch a nation-wide movement against the central government. Responding to the appeal of MAIH President, around five hundred thousand (this figure is bound to be an exaggerated one as it is based on MAIH estimate) Muslims in different parts of

Punjab came on the streets against the visit. Interestingly, HE and *Sahafat* both claimed that National General Secretary of MAIH shared this information with its correspondent in an exclusive meeting in Delhi while his photograph that accompanied the news report was the same in both newspapers!

The second story that *Sahafat* carried on the same day provided the reaction of two *ulama* from Moradabad to the Mukherjee's decision to cancel his Qadian visit. Office-bearers of the Moradabad branch of JUH welcomed Mukherjee's decision and congratulated *Sahafat* for bringing the truth to Mukherjee's notice. Appreciating the role of *Sahafat* in this episode, one of them said that *Sahafat* enthusiastically published it (*roznama Sahafat ne ise purzor tariqa se shaya kiya*). Originated in Moradabad, the story was written by *Sahafat* Bureau and carried passport size photograph of both *ulama*.

Contestations around field autonomy of Urdu news

In this section, I will return to the question of how the success of an interest group's media strategy reflects on the relationship between normative structure and journalistic practices of Urdu news posed at the beginning of the paper.

The case of Mukherjee's unrealised visit to Qadian evidences that medium-size Urdu newspapers receive press releases from *ulama*-led interest groups like MAIH on a regular basis. That some of these press releases get prominent placement signifies their high relevance for Urdu readers and newspapers' financial inability to use informal or enterprise channels to get first-hand information on the issues discussed in the press releases. Hence, these interest groups as key actors in Urdu public sphere are among the principal sources of information that provide 'information subsidies' to Urdu newspapers through their press releases. Oscar Gandy (1982: 8) defines 'information subsidies' as "efforts to reduce the prices faced by others for certain information, in order to increase its consumption". He includes press releases among "information subsidies" as they heavily subsidise the cost of information gathering for the reporters. In agreement with Leon Sigal (1973), Gandy maintains that the nature of the relations between news sources and reporters is essentially economic and hence 'information subsidies' too "operate on the basis of simple economic rules" (Gandy 1980: 106). However, the reason to provide such subsidies lies in the desire of news sources to control the "availability and interpretation of information about issues affecting their welfare" (Gandy 1980: 104), and hence they accept routine channels that is press releases, handouts, etc. MAIH through its press releases to a large extent controlled the flow of information about and interpretation of Mukherjee's visit.

Since *ulama* and their organisations perform majority of the agitprop activities that are done in the name of Islam in India, Urdu newspapers regard them as 'genuine' players of the Muslim politics. Neither any newspaper nor MAIH tried

to take along or provide any representation to masses and non-Deobandi ulama (Deobandi tradition of Indian Islam lays emphasis on reform of Muslims so that they strictly follow Islamic scriptures in their everyday life. Two other major traditions of Indian Islam are Ahl-e Hadis and Barelwi). It seemed as though MAIH, its volunteers and Deobandi *ulama* are the sole representatives of the Muslim community in Punjab. Protests were managed from the mosques where related meetings and press conferences were held. The fact that the ulama are not only consumers of Urdu newspapers but also creators and sponsors of news-worthy content and frames, enables them to wield powerful influence over the Urdu news field. If the volume of information traffic and interplay of influence between two social fields happen to be high, their interrelations are considered to be strong and they share the relationship of being neighbouring field of each other. By this logic, the religious field is the neighbouring field of Urdu news.

By continuous sharing of updates about their activities, Muslim interest groups display a sort of trust on Urdu dailies and by frequently publishing these updates in the form of press releases the newspapers demonstrate that they identify with the cause of these groups. Cancellation of Mukherjee's visit symbolised the success of MAIH's campaign which had a strong media component. 'Muslim-owned newspapers from Delhi' received special appreciation in the congratulatory message for their role in making the anti-Ahmadi campaign a success. MAIH President personally phoned these Urdu dailies to thank them (HE 27 December 2009).

In the Urdu news field that is largely divided between Muslim-owned and non-Muslim-owned outlets, *Hind Samachar* stands out as a non-Muslim-owned newspaper, which did not extend any media support to the anti-Ahmadi campaign. Moreover, unlike Muslim-owned newspapers, it carried Ahmadis' ads and news-items. This positive journalistic treatment provoked MAIHs' volunteers to burn its copies in Jagraon and Kotkapura. Since this journalistic stance did not reflect the dominant cultural ideology of Urdu news field, MAIH's volunteers accused it of "sell-out journalism" and hurting religious sentiments of Muslims.

Using press releases published verbatim in the sample newspapers, this case study establishes a symbiotic relationship between ulama-led Muslim interest groups and Urdu dailies. A possible reason for this symbiosis is that there is an almost complete lack of habitus gap between Urdu journalists and their sources i.e., MAIH activists and ulama as they share at least a major part of their habitus. Among those elements that are common to the habitus of both the journalists and MAIH sources is the notion that Ahmadis are not Muslims. This habitus affinity naturalised the editorial decision to publish the MAIH press releases as news-items without providing Ahmadis's perspective on the issue in question. Benson (2014: 27) observes: "One might expect habitus affinities to contribute to more

(and more positive) news coverage of some groups, whereas habitus disaffinities could contribute to less (and less positive) news coverage of other groups". Hence, MAIH's trust on Muslim-owned Urdu newspapers and the latter's identification with the cause of MAIH should be understood in terms of the workings of habitus affinities.

The historical conditions that shaped the formation of the Urdu news field in the colonial period, offer another possible explanation for the symbiotic relationship between *ulama*-led interest groups like MAIH and Urdu newspapers. Many prominent Urdu journalists, who were at the forefront of anti-British freedom struggle, were *ulama* and representatives of such interest groups. Also, Muslim-owned Urdu newspapers give positive and prominent coverage to campaigns and movements launched by *ulama*-led interest groups on issues related to the cultural identity of Indian Muslims. Coverage in Urdu newspapers of agitations in 1985-86 against the Supreme Court verdict in Shah Bano case which were led by All India Muslim Personal Law Board illustrates this point well (See Mody 1987: 949-50). Thus, due to similarity in their cultural politics, the *ulama* and Urdu journalists have been fellow travellers for long and have earned each other's trust over a long period of time. The symbolic capital (in the form of mutual trust and nationalist credentials) which the members of MAI and MAIH acquired through its participation in anti-Ahmadis agitations and ideological alignment with JUH and the Congress Party got smoothly converted into a form of capital that made MAIH an influential player in the fields of minority politics and Urdu news.

Because of its high degree of heteronomy and low degree of autonomy, the media field in Bourdieusian sociology is conceptualised as a "very weakly autonomous field" (Bourdieu 2005: 33). The autonomous pole in the case of Urdu news is constituted of its normative structure and professional logic. The extent of near-totalising influence that MAIH exercised on the sample newspapers was indicative of weak autonomy of Urdu news. The violation of journalistic code of fair representation (i.e., not providing any Ahmadi perspective on the issue in question) and objectivity (i.e., verbatim re-production of MAIH press releases) runs contrary to the professional logic of the field and evidences its weak autonomy.

However, the fact that the newspapers under study are medium-size newspapers owned by individuals, cannot furnish a convincing explanation for weak autonomy (erosion of professional logic) of Urdu news in its struggle against the powerful influence of neighbouring religious field. Reports on the Ahmadis are always negative and exclude the Ahmadi perspective whether published in medium and small-size newspapers owned by individuals or corporate houses like *Inquilab* and RS. The fact that owners of corporate-owned newspapers follow Hinduism does not make any difference in this regard. Since these newspapers also operationalise dominant ideology of Urdu news field, they may differ in terms of

frequency of publishing such reports but not in terms of frames and journalistic treatment.

Only *Hind Samachar* stands out as an aberration to this widespread trend of negative coverage of Ahmadis and hence needs a different explanation. *Hind Samachar* is a part of the Hind Samachar Group that is a big media house with presence in Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu news markets. Unlike its Hindi daily *Punjab Kesari* or Punjabi daily *Jag Bani* (for their profile, see Jeffrey 1997a & 1997b), *Hind Samachar* is on the decline. It cannot survive only on the subscription fee from its Ahamdi audience, a tiny fraction of an already miniscule number of Urdu readers in Punjab. Its core audience, Urdu-reading Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs of the partition generation who were concentrated in Delhi and Punjab have almost disappeared. On the contrary, core audience of HE, HS and *Sahafat* are Muslims of Bihar, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh and these newspapers are currently trying to enter the news market of Punjab as well.

Hence, the normative structure and cultural politics of Urdu news shared by all Muslim-owned Urdu newspapers, appears to be more convincing an explanation of the difference in the way these four newspapers reported MAIH's agitations than the difference in their ownership structure as neither of them did it for financial gains alone. In other words, it is not poor financial conditions of these newspapers that render autonomy of Urdu news weak vis-à-vis the influence of neighbouring field of religion, rather it is their normative structure and cultural politics. *Hind Samachar* by publishing reports about MAIH's protests and other three newspapers by publishing Ahmadis' advertisements would have definitely gained commercial benefits but they chose not to do so.

Rajagopal (2001) through his study of the Ayodhya movement coverage in Hindi news has shown that well-planned campaigns couched in the religious idiom and imagery, successfully secure positive coverage and such a success owes more to normative structure of news field than to the ownership structure. This line of argument does not downplay the importance of commercial logic of news media rather emphasises the role of an overlap of commercial and cultural (ideological) logics in sustaining Urdu newspapers. This alignment of both logics is 'given' in the case of Muslim-owned Urdu newspapers while deliberately achieved by Hindu-owned newspapers to ensure their commercial success.

Inter-field dynamics of Urdu news

This section will use four variables proposed by Marchetti (2005: 76-79) to analyse inter-field relationships of Urdu news, i.e., its interactions with the political and religious fields in the context of Mukherjee's Qadian visit. First variable is the interdependence of a field's economy with that of the field of activity being covered. Among three key revenue streams of Indian media (state patronage, commercial

ads and subscription fee), the sampled newspapers rely mainly on state patronage and subscription fee. They attract very little commercial ads being the independently owned medium-size Urdu newspapers. Revenue from NGOs could be an additional revenue stream. Ulama-led interest groups constitute majority of the NGO sector in Urdu public sphere. Due to lack of data, it is not clear how much this revenue stream constitutes of the total budget of these newspapers. Though Urdu news is dependent on the religious field whose activity it frequently covers, nature and extent of the economic aspect of their interdependence is not clear, and hence requires attention of media scholars.

The second variable is the degree of control the field (and its institutions) has on its own coverage. It is clear from the above discussion that the religious field has considerable control over its own coverage in Urdu news, as MAIH's all press releases appeared almost verbatim in Muslim-owned Urdu newspapers. Like Urdu news, the political field also proved to be quite susceptible to the influence of religious field. These newspapers reasoned that the cancellation of Mukherjee's visit was in response to the appeal of MAIH President and protests of its volunteers. However, the MAIH's leadership, as mentioned earlier, acknowledged that the whole-hearted support of Urdu news amplified the impact of protests on the Congress party.

The third indicator is the degree to which media field imposes its own logic and internal hierarchies upon the field it is covering. Urdu news being a 'very weakly autonomous' field has not been able to impose its own logic on the field it covers. Rather, Urdu newspapers succumbed to pressures from the religious field they were covering in the case of Mukherjee's visit and compromised their 'objectivity' which Soloski (1989:213) defines as reporting of facts by the journalists "as fairly and in as balanced a way as possible". He considers 'objectivity' as "the most important professional norm" of news profession. They did so (compromised their professionalism) by not being honest with their readers about their sources, about their method of gathering information and by not providing any voice to the Ahmadis who were targeted in MAIH's press releases.

The last indicator is the social characteristics of social actors. Discussions in the preceding sections deal with social characteristics of actors of the religious and political fields in detail with the help of notions such as habitus and cultural capital of different social actors as well as historical conditions for the evolution of normative structure of Urdu news. Educational trajectories of Urdu journalists suggest that a good number of them have received at least a few years of their education in madrasas. So, despite their divergent professional trajectories, there exists a significant social proximity among them and actors of the religious field. In addition, there are elements of overlaps between their habitus. It is in this sense that Marchetti suggests that interactions among various social fields at the level

of social actors should be understood as "meetings between different habitus and different positions in the field" (Marchetti 2005: 76). However, elements of habitus affinity, as already shown, skew struggle of these actors for dominance and recognition in favour of a set of actors. The symbolic capital (in the form of mutual trust and nationalist credentials) which MAIH acquired through its participation in the anti-British struggles, ideological opposition to the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan and ideological alignment with the Congress Party compelled the latter to honour the demand of MAIH to prevent Mukherjee from participating in *jalsa*. Hence, given its closely entwining relationship among fields, Urdu news plays a "crucial mediator" among the religious and the political fields.

Conclusion

By focusing on the inter-field relationship of media and religious fields, this study has demonstrated the existence of a symbiosis between *ulama*-led interest groups and Muslim-owned Urdu dailies which the actors of the religious field use to influence decisions made in the political field. It explains the existence and endurance of the symbiosis in terms of historical formation of Urdu news field, ownership structure of Urdu newspapers and their cultural politics. Use of Marchetti's (2005) four variables has helped illuminate different aspects of this symbiosis: ambivalence about economic interdependence of Urdu news and Muslim interest groups, control over coverage, autonomy of both fields and social characteristics of actors located in each field. Social and educational trajectories of Urdu journalists shape outcome of their professional socialisation and make autonomy of Urdu news weak. Benson's (2013) concepts of habitus affinities and habitus gap draw attention to importance of weak autonomy to sustain such a symbiosis. Likewise, utility of information subsidies depends upon ideological underpinnings of their content. Both press releases of MAIH and advertisements of Ahmadis were information subsidies, however, Muslim-owned Urdu newspapers could use only the former while *Hind Samachar* only the latter due to difference in their cultural politics.

Another key theme that this paper highlighted is the impact of exclusionary politics of Urdu news on mediated Muslim identity. Joshua Meyrowitz (1997:59) argues that news media 'are themselves social contexts that foster certain forms of interactions and social identities'. The argument also holds true in the case of Urdu news, which serves as a social context that mediates construction of a particular type of Muslim identity through its strategic location within the field of power. The MCPPCC Chairman clarified in a press release on 27 December that "the Congress Party does not have anything to do with the Ahmadiyya community" (*Congress party ka qadiani jamat se koi talluq nahi hai*). By distancing itself from the Ahmadis, it succumbed to MAIH's demands including denial of Ahmadis'

rights to a fair media representation.

MAIH's discourse of 'othering' of the Ahmadis prefers to question their religious identity as well as their political identity (citizenship credentials and territorial loyalty to the Union of India). It selectively forgets social cleavages among Muslims along the lines of caste, language, region, etc. Urdu news helped MAIH execute its project of 'othering' at the cost of citizenship and fair media rights of the Ahmadis, a minority within the minority.

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Social Media, Violence and the Law: "Objectionable Material" and the Changing Contours of Hate Speech Regulation in India

By Siddharth Narrain

Abstract

With the advent of the internet and increasing circulation of hate speech, and material that has been linked to public order disturbances, there has been a shift in the legal discourse around hate speech. What has emerged, especially post the striking down of section 66A of the Information Technology Act, are categories such as 'objectionable', 'provocative' content. The focus has shifted from the content itself, what it says, and the intention of the author, to being able to pre-empt the circulation of such material. Law is increasingly invoked to prevent speech (through prior restraint) rather than post facto investigation and prosecutions.

This in turn has given rise to a range of institutional mechanisms such as monitoring labs that are now part of policing practice. Additionally, civil society organizations are now collaborating with police to help trigger mechanisms to take content off internet platforms. Increasingly it is through keywords and algorithmic searches that the category of hate speech has been defined rather than traditional legal doctrine. In the words of Lawrence Lessig, code plays the role of law, and the architecture of the internet becomes policy.

This paper will examine the issues outlined above relying heavily on a series of interviews with lawyers, policy analysts, journalists, academics, civil society activists, and police personnel conducted in Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai and Pune.

Introduction

Debates around the regulation of hate speech are highly contested globally. There is little agreement over what constitutes hate speech, what part of hate speech should be regulated by law, and where to draw the line between freedom of speech and hate speech that is deemed illegal. However, the range of international, domestic and theoretical material that has emerged around this theme, helps us understand and situate hate speech and the impulse to legally define and regulate such speech.

This paper traces the legal and regulatory debates that have emerged in response to hate speech in India, situating these developments within the global context. It focuses on the shift from regulation of content online to the regulation of circulation of content, as evident from specific examples of incidents of inter-group violence in Bengaluru (Bangalore), Pune (Poona), and Western Uttar Pradesh during the last decade. By examining these specific instances where content online, including morphed images of gods and goddesses, attacks on persons revered by Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and rumours meant to incite violence and exacerbate communal tensions, this paper argues that the increasing use of internet-enabled mobile phones and peer-to-peer communication platforms could potentially lead to a fundamental shift in the manner in which law and governance mechanisms respond to inter-group violence.

I have relied largely on detailed interviews conducted between January 2015 and March 2017 with police, lawyers, civil society groups, journalists, academics and policy experts. I have also relied on news reports from this period, legal documents such as First Information Reports, judgments and orders, and a range of secondary material including published books and articles. While I have focused almost entirely on India, I refer to the United States and European context in the introduction to broadly situate the Indian context within global developments around the theme of regulation of hate speech.

Globally, countries have taken very different approaches to regulating hate speech. One of the outliers in terms of hate speech law is the United States, whose Supreme Court has set a high bar for what kind of speech can be construed illegal, and the First Amendment has been interpreted widely to provide a robust mechanism for protection of speech. This approach remains substantially the same when it comes to online hate speech. This liberal approach to hate speech of United States law has been criticized by Matsuda and other critical legal scholars who have argued that United States law does not account for the way in which for example, racist speech perpetuates historical inequalities and harms communities that have been at the receiving end of targeted violence (Matsuda et al 1993). The philosopher Jeremy Waldron, in his influential book, The Harm in Hate Speech Law, argues that the standards set by the United States Supreme Court do not account

for instances where hate speech targeting or vilifying a group can lead to a feeling of insecurity among the target group and prevent those from that group from participating freely in the public sphere (Waldron 2012).

In contrast to the United States, European nations have traditionally placed more restrictions on hate speech. The German government has been one of the most pro-active in the world in regulating hate speech online. Faced with increasing anti-immigrant speech in platforms Facebook and Twitter, has enacted The Act to Improve Enforcement on the Law in Social Networks (NetzDG) enacted in October 2017 that is aimed at ensuring that social media platforms regulate content that is already illegal under the German Criminal Code. This law requires that social media platforms set up effective and transparent complaint mechanisms for the regulation of hate speech and other online content that is illegal, and has been severely criticized by German opposition parties as curbing free speech (Theil 2018).

The way the German law is formulated indicates a tension between what is typically be considered public communication in Western liberal democracies, when compared to parts of the Global South including countries like India. Since this law specifically exempts email and messaging apps it is not clear whether it would be effective when it comes to peer-to-peer networks such as WhatsApp, which is very widely used in India. The picture becomes more complicated when we consider that in countries like India and Indonesia powerful political parties (Chaturvedi 2016) and other religious and political interest groups (George 2016), have actively used social media to amplify such content to further their own political or social agenda.

Internationally, legal principles around freedom of speech evolved through the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant for the Protection of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) allow for regulating speech that incites hatred or discrimination against a group. However, such a restriction must be provided by law, must not be arbitrary, and must pursue one of the legitimate aims listed – such as protecting the rights and reputation of others, or to protect national security, public order or the rights or public health and morals. The laws that are enacted to restrict speech should be both necessary and legitimate to achieve these aims, and should also use least restrictive proportional means to achieve their purported aim (Electronic Frontier Foundation et al 2014: 14). These principles are meant to ensure that there are checks and balances built into this kind of regulation of speech.

Scholars have used categories such as 'extreme speech' and 'dangerous speech' to demarcate a category of speech that is seen as generally unacceptable. Hare and Weinstein (2009), for instance, define extreme speech as a form of speech that is

outside acceptable norms of dissent. Anushka Singh, in a recent book, *Sedition in Liberal Democracies,* describes extreme speech as a wider category of speech that liberal democracies find uncomfortable including categories such as hate speech, sedition, pornography, and libel. (Singh 2018: 3-14). Johnathan Maynard and Susan Benesch use the category of 'dangerous speech' to demarcate speech that is unacceptable. Benesch draws upon her experience of working with international tribunals that have dealt with the question of genocide. In Rwanda, for instance, calls for violence over the radio played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for the violence that followed. Maynard and Benesch describe dangerous speech a category of speech that has a reasonable chance of catalyzing or amplifying violence by one group against another, keeping in mind the circumstances in which it is being disseminated and factors such as who is speaking, the nature of the audience, and the means of communication (Maynard and Benesch 2016). For the purposes of this paper I will use the term hate speech as a broader category that includes both extreme speech and dangerous speech.

In India, the term 'hate speech law' is used by lawyers and the media to refer to a number of laws that proscribe 'promoting enmity' between classes of people, (e.g. section 153A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)) and outraging religious sentiments (e.g. section 295A of the IPC). Hate speech laws have their origin in colonial British policy, especially in the deep seated view that law makers such as Thomas Macaulay had that Indian subjects were especially vulnerable to insult and offence and were religiously and emotionally excitable subjects, quick to create public disorder on provocation based on insult to religion or religious beliefs (Ahmed 2009: 173). While hate speech laws have evolved gradually over time through judicial pronouncements (Narrain 2016), the use of social and digital media to spread hate has brought into focus specific legal and governance issues. Increasingly there is recognition that the posting and circulating of hate speech online poses specific challenges linked to the speed, scale, and volume of transmission across multiple platforms and formats, which can be interlinked (Gagliardone et al 2015: 13).

Hate speech laws in India are medium neutral – they apply equally to theatre, print, radio, broadcasting, and the internet. However, each time a media technology has gained popularity, special laws have been enacted to govern these, which are usually based on the language of the penal provisions governing hate speech. In case of the internet, a 2008 amendment to the Information Technology Act, 2000 (hereafter, IT Act), passed with barely any discussion in Parliament, resulted in the enactment of, amongst other provisions, section 66A of the IT Act that criminalized offensive content– defined as content that caused "annoyance", "insult", "enmity", "hatred or ill will" etc. Initially meant to tackle spam, this provision came to be used frequently against content online that was thought to have the capacity to cause public order disturbances. In 2015, section 66A was struck down

by the Indian Supreme Court as violative of the right to freedom of speech and expression. Even while 66A was in operation, the police often used 66A along with the Indian Penal Code (IPC) provisions such as Section 153A, that prohibits enmity between groups and committing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony, and section 295A that proscribes speech that outrages religious feelings or insults religious feelings or beliefs.

The Central Government has the power to block content online under section 69A of the IT Act. The most common ground for invoking section 69A is disturbance of public order (Arun et al 2018: 136). The procedure to be followed to block content is contained in the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009 (or Blocking Rules, for short). Section 79 of the IT Act governs the liability of intermediaries for content, exempting them from liability subject to certain conditions (Ibid).

Thus in India hate speech online is governed by a combination of colonial era penal laws and laws specifically enacted to regulate communication online. All of these are subject to 'reasonable restrictions' to the Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of speech and expression. These include 'public order', which is the most commonly invoked restriction. When compared to other jurisdictions, Indian law regulating hate speech is closer to the European model, and is far more restrictive than in the United States.

'Objectionable Material', Communal Violence and Social Media

The last decade has seen a gradual rise in the widespread use of social media in India, enabled by the availability of affordable smartphones, affordable data plans, increased broadband penetration, and the expansion of internet use in regional and vernacular languages. The current decade in India has seen the emergence of a media discourse that links 'social media' to 'public order disturbances'. In many of these incidents, it is hate speech provisions that have been regularly invoked, along with other provisions dealing with public order. Dana Boyd refers to social media as 1) sites and services that emerged globally in the early 2000s, including social network sites, video sharing sites, blogging and micro blogging platforms, and related tools that allow participants to share their own content and 2) the cultural mindset that emerged in the mid 2000s as part of the technical and business phenomenon called Web 2.0. (Boyd 2014:6). For the purposes of this paper I use the term social media to include digital media such as MMSs, SMSs, and communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Snap Chat, given that much of the content I am talking about moved between these communication platforms with great ease. I have consciously included peer-to-peer encrypted Over the Top

(OTT) platforms such as WhatsApp, as the volume of content on this platform is extremely high with over 200 million monthly active users in India alone (Financial Express 2018). Further, the ability of WhatsApp groups with a maximum of 256 members to effectively circulate and magnify content, and the ease with which text, audio, and video files can be shared on WhatsApp, and other similar OTT platforms, make them central to the circulation of hate speech online.

The Legal Regulation of 'Objectionable Material'

From 2010 onwards there have been a number of incidents of violence reported by the news media that have been linked to content that has circulated on social media. Such material is now popularly referred to in the news media as 'objectionable' material. Going by the dictionary meaning of 'objectionable', this would amount to material that arouses distaste or opposition, is unpleasant or offensive; it thus covers a wide range of material that is not just related to hate speech or incitement to violence.

In cases related to communal violence and hate speech, this term 'objectionable material' is used to both allude to and elides the exact nature of the content. This works well for news reports, as it avoids the problem of the content of these messages, by virtue of being reported, leading to further provocation or tensions in an already tense situation. 'Objectionable material' has over a period of time come to stand in for 'hate speech', 'seditious material', 'obscene material', and defamatory material. 'Objectionable material' has been used since the colonial period and continues to be used by governments and media, to refer to the larger category of material that the government has taken off the internet (or other media) because the material is not appropriate for viewing or consumption. For instance, the first legislative intervention to regulate cinema in India, the Indian Cinematograph Act, 1918, was justified by the colonial government as necessary to prevent the screening of objectionable films (Hughes 2000:51).

The most important development in Indian law related to internet is the 2015 Supreme Court decision in the Shreya Singhal case, where the young student Shreya Singhal challenged section 66A of the Information Technology Act (Shreya Singhal 2015). This case related to a challenge to three key provisions of the Information Technology Act 2000, the law that governs the internet in India. These provisions related to the proscribing of 'grossly offensive' and 'menacing' content (section 66A), the government's authority power to block content (section 69A) and the legal standards that governed internet intermediaries (section 79). The case garnered publicity in the backdrop of a series of arrests of artists, students, and those critical of political figures under section 66A. These arrests happened both at the central and regional level, and were severely criticized by civil society and human rights organizations, especially those working in the area of technolo-

gy, free speech, and digital rights.

In one of these incidents, two young women were arrested by the Maharashtra police for violating section 66A of the Information Technology Act by posting a comment on Facebook criticizing the fact that city of Mumbai (Bombay) shut down after the death of the Shiv Sena (a powerful local political party) leader Bal Thackeray. One of them had posted the comment and the other had 'liked' this post. The comment resulted in Shiv Sena members physically threatening the two women, and vandalizing a clinic owned by one of the two women's relatives. (Press Trust of India 2012).

The arrests prompted widespread outrage (Arun et al 2018: 134), and led to a young student Shreya Singhal challenging section 66A of the Information Technology Act (Ibid) in the Supreme Court. Other petitioners including civil society organizations and internet trade associations intervened in this case broadening the scope of the challenge to include sections 69A and 79.

In the Shreya Singhal case, the Supreme Court struck down section 66A of the IT Act but upheld section 69A (power to block content) and 79 (due diligence for intermediaries), quoting the Additional Solicitor General (representing the Central Government), who argued that there should be a different standard of reasonable restrictions for the internet. The Additional Solicitor General, while justifying this proposition stated that "the recipient of the free speech and expression used in a print media can only be literate persons while internet can be accessed by literate and illiterate both since one click is needed to download an objectionable post or a video" (emphasis added) (Ibid at Para 27). Thus the government attempted to justify the retention of a law meant to curb free expression online on the basis that there was something different about the medium, specifically pointing to the ease of use and the fact that one did not require to be literate or have specialized knowledge to use this medium. The democratization of the internet is used as a justification to ensure greater regulation of the medium, and to apply a different legal standard that would allow for the government to restrict free speech online.

The Northeast Exodus, 2012

One of the first incidents of inter-group violence, where hate speech was circulated on SMSs, MMSs and posts on Facebook was in 2012. It targeted persons from the Northeast of the country[1] living in cities of south and west India, such as Bengaluru, Pune and Chennai (Madras), and it subsequently led to a mass exodus. A large number of persons from the Northeast live in these cities because of better employment and educational opportunities, when compared to cities and towns in the Northeast. Persons from the Northeast are often the target of discrimination in these cities given their distinct ethnicities, and cultural practices

(McDuie-Ra 2017: 27-44).

In August 2012, tensions began to flare in Bengaluru after messages began circulating online threatening retribution for those from the Bodo community killed during the July 2012 ethnic violence in Kokrajhar, in the Northeastern state of Assam between indigenous Bodo community and Bengali-speaking Muslims, who have faced the brunt of anti-immigrant sentiment in the state. These messages explicitly threatened retribution by Muslims against persons from the Northeast in the lead up to Eid al-Fitr, a Muslim festival celebrated at the end of Ramadan (Ibid: 34).

Many of these SMSs, MMSs and Facebook posts were circulated widely by persons belonging to the Northeast to their friends and family, creating a ripple effect within the community. This led to an unprecedented feeling of insecurity among persons from the Northeast, as well as anyone who looked like they were from this region (which included Tibetans, Indian Chinese, and Koreans), leading to an estimated thirty thousand people fleeing these cities in a mass exodus within a span of few days (Sailo 2012). In Bengaluru, many who fled were students and labourers. Just how much the circulation of material on social media was linked to this feeling of insecurity can be gauged from the Central government's measure to ban bulk SMSs temporarily and to block websites (even though these were arbitrarily chosen), which was seen by many persons from the Northeast at the time as a necessary measure to address the fear and mass panic that was created by SMSs, MMSs and threatening messages circulating on social media.

This incident became one of the first recorded instances where large numbers of people, fearing for their security and safety left their places of residence, after receiving threatening messages on their phones through SMSs and MMSs. The Northeast exodus led to a lively debate within civil society and policy groups on whether the government's response in temporarily barring bulk SMSs and blocking a number of websites amounted to overreach (Prakash 2012), and just how crucial a new form of technology, mobile phone enabled digital media, was to such mass panic (Sundaram 2012).

Muzaffarnagar Riots, 2013

In 2013, the Western part of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India, witnessed large-scale political violence against Muslims. Thousands of Muslims were displaced from their homes, and continue to live in makeshift homes in the districts of Shamli and Muzaffarnagar. One of the key factors in the violence was the active role of politicians including the BJP legislator from Uttar Pradesh, Sangeet Som, who posted a controversial video on his Facebook page. This controversial video, circulated on social media in the lead up to the violence in 2013, helping to mobilize people for a Jat mahapanchayat (a gathering of local village councils

of the dominant Jat caste grouping that is a traditionally agricultural community) community on 31 August 2013. The gathering was specifically called as a response to the ongoing violence in the region and the circulation of the video allowed for the mobilization of large numbers of persons from the community, which in turn acted as a catalyst to the large-scale violence that unfolded subsequently. At the time of the violence, the video was circulated as showing a Muslim mob lynching two Hindu men. The video was later debunked as being filmed in an unrelated incident in Sialkot, Pakistan in 2010 (Centre for Policy Analysis 2013). However at the time it was circulated, and in the context of communal tensions that already existed, the impact of the video should not be underestimated. Newspaper reports indicate that even the Commission of Inquiry into the Muzaffarnagar riots point to the failure of the state government to effectively respond to the circulation of this video, thus acknowledging the role of its circulation during the violence that ensued (Ali 2016).

Inter-group Violence in Pune, 2014

In this section I build on my earlier fieldwork in Pune where I had examined the role of the police and civil society in the aftermath of inter-group violence in 2014 (Narrain 2017). In order to address the problem of hate speech online during incidents of inter-group violence, the police and sections of civil society have, over a period of time, begun to realize how best to activate the internal mechanisms of intermediaries to remove "objectionable content". A striking example of how this was achieved occurred in Pune, in the aftermath of communal riots in events in the months leading up to June 2014. A group of individuals who called themselves The Social Peace Force, who had already worked in this area around the issue of drought relief in 2013 and had a Facebook Group of more than 20,000 members, decided to intervene to prevent such objectionable material from circulating online To do this they assumed the role of civil society watchdogs, and began to monitor content on social media. They used key words included terms such as "Ram", "Sita", "Laxman", (Hindu religious figures) and "Allah". These keyword searches were done in multiple spellings and pronunciations.

Once they detected material they considered unacceptable, they would send this to a group of 10 people amongst them whose role was to look at the content and decide if they should ask for it to be taken down. If they decided that the post was a problem, they would call upon the 20,000 strong Facebook group to report this content as spam to Facebook (Ibid). Faced with such large number of spam reports, Facebook began taking down such content immediately. Of course even in asking and responding to such material, the group had to be careful to not violate the existing hate speech law and section 66A of the IT Act (Ibid). Eventually they approached the police, and the then Minister of State for Home of Maharash-

tra, Satej Patil who advised them to involve the Pune Police's Cyber Cell. Soon members of Pune Police's Cyber Cell and the Minister joined the Social Peace Corps Facebook group. At the time their effort came in for severe criticism from a prominent writer who accused them of moral policing – a viewpoint more widely representing those uncomfortable with what they saw as a form of vigilantism online. The group now continues to cooperate with the Cyber Police to ensure that such material is removed (Ibid). The Social Peace Force identified what is objectionable through a 'non-discriminatory'/multi-faith model. A member of the Force who I interviewed said, "If a God's image is replaced with a model's body, we would identify this as bad. We did not discriminate based on religion".

What this shows is that the architecture of the internet and technological capacities of citizens and governments determine the manner in which objectionable material is regulated, rather than legislation and administrative orders. For instance, in Pune, the Social Peace Force suggested another method of controlling communal violence that has been implemented by the city police. On WhatsApp, the police created groups of police stations, housing societies, social workers, and politicians, with 3,300 police officers added to different groups. This helped them have a substantial presence on WhatsApp communities to track images and utterances so as to respond quickly. Thus they combined traditional mechanisms of police surveillance with usage of new technological platforms, and in partnership with civil society.

Police Surveillance, Pedagogy, and Publicity

Besides such local examples, over the last few years institutional mechanisms centered on surveillance, monitoring, and training and equipping police to deal with cyber crimes have emerged. The most prominent of these is the Mumbai Social Media Lab (MSML) set up in 2014. The MSML was set up in collaboration with the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) (a trade association of software companies) and The Data Security Council of India (a not for profit industry body set up by NASSCOM) using a monitoring application provided by a for profit company, SocialAppsHQ.Com, to help real time alerts on content related to social media platforms. The MSML was set up as an immediate response to the massive mobilization of protestors as well as public anger in December 2012 sparked off by the brutal gang rape of a young woman in Delhi. The Mumbai police publicly stated that the MSML would help them keep tabs on the "mood and emotions of citizens" and track public views and sentiments on "sensitive issues and protests" (Press Trust of India 2013).

The second set of Social Media Labs are being set up in the state of Uttar Pradesh, by the state police in collaboration with a public university, the Indraprastha Institute of Technology (IIIT), Delhi. While one lab is located in Meerut

the communally sensitive Western region of the state, the other is in the capital, Lucknow. Official statements in the media indicate that the main reason for this has been concern around communally sensitive material circulating in Uttar Pradesh, especially in the wake of the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 discussed earlier in this paper (Bhatia 2015).

Despite these public and highly publicized interventions by the Social Media Labs in Mumbai and Uttar Pradesh, the Union Telecommunications Minister did not mention of these in responding to a Parliament question in April 2015 on whether the government was monitoring social media sites. Instead, he stated that there is no institutional monitoring mechanism for monitoring social networking sites, and that Law Enforcement and Intelligence / Security Agencies monitor the internet on a case-to-case basis. The Minister only referred to the Electronic Media Monitoring Centre (EMMC), located in the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, to track trends on social media and monitor "public interface on the social media network." (Ministry of Information and Technology 2015). Moreover, the Minister also referred to section 79 of the IT Act that requires intermediaries to observe due diligence quoting an advisory issued to all intermediaries by the previous government in 2012, to monitor "both national and international networking sites", and to disable inflammatory and hateful content hosted on their websites on a priority basis (Ibid).

Pedagogy and publicity have emerged as important instrument in the police's effort to deal with 'objectionable material'. For instance in the aftermath of the 2014 Pune riots, the police embarked on an extensive campaign to educate the public on the dangers of circulating material during communal riots. This happened both offline and online. They organized lectures and debates in educational institutions in Pune with the help of IT experts, teachers, and social activists. Large hoardings over the city urged the public to not "like" or "dislike" content that was communally sensitive, nor to post comments, share, or forward such material (Narrain 2017). The police organized meetings in public spaces, housing societies and community halls. Through these meetings, the police encouraged the public to report such content circulating online (Ibid).

Code as Law

The examples from the previous sections illustrate how police and civil society struggled with the question of hate speech online, seemingly caught unaware by the scale and speed of circulation and impact of such content. Over a period of time there has emerged a collaborative effort to respond in real time to the circulation of hate speech online, the most effective of these being in Pune, which has a strong technological infrastructure and persons who were well-equipped to adapt

to this challenge.

These strategies bring me back to Boyd's definition of social media, as both about its technological aspects as well as the cultural practices associated with it, which include the impulse to forward, like and share content (Boyd 2014). Boyd's emphasis on the link between the technological and cultural aspects of social media can be read in conjunction with the work of the legal scholar Lawrence Lessig. In his influential book 'Code 2.0', Lessig argued that the architecture of cyberspace becomes a de facto regulator, and the technology underlying the internet, or code can be compared to law (Lessig 2006: 78-79). Referring to chat rooms in the USA, for instance, Lessig says that the fact that only 23 people are allowed in an AOL (America Online) chat room is the choice of code engineers, but the effect of this is that it becomes much more difficult to excite members of AOL into public action. Lessig argues that, although AOL was one of the largest internet Service Providers in the world at that time, with 27 million in 2006, the architecture of the space only allowed for a maximum of 23 persons to gather in one space together. Lessig argued that on AOL, there was no space large enough for citizens to create a riot (Lessig 2006: 90-91). If one compares Lessig's AOL chatroom example with contemporary WhatsApp groups that allow for 256 members and are easier to use on a continuous basis because of internet enabled mobile phones, the role of code in Lessig's formulation becomes clearer.

Transposing this example to the situation around 'objectionable' material online, it seems as if there are many versions of law and policy at play. Along with the law laid down by sovereign states, we have guidelines and community standards that are formulated by global companies, such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter. In addition to this there are technical capacities of police to monitor and filter information, done primarily through key word searches. Then we have the ability of police and civil society to trigger mechanisms by intermediaries such Facebook flagging hate speech posts. These technical capacities determine the level and effectiveness of regulation of content, as much as   laws formulated by states. In the current scenario, the ability or inability of governments to intercept or block material on messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat have led to both the ability to escape state regulation and enhance extreme measures by the Central and state governments. These extreme measures include suspending all internet services for extended periods of time, and blocking particular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

The Union Telecommunication Minister, in a reply to a parliament question in Winter 2015 revealed that during January and March 2015 the government had not only blocked (under section 69A, IT Act) 143 urls, including those of Facebook, Twitter, Orkut, and Linked In, but also asked social networking sites to disable 496 urls in order to comply with court orders (Lok Sabha Unstarred

Question 2015). These compliances are usually done through take down orders (under section 79 of the IT Act) or through self-reporting tools instituted by intermediaries. These self-reporting tools include mechanisms such as flagging on YouTube, where users can flag material if they violate YouTube's community guidelines. These guidelines are bunched under categories such as 'hateful content', 'violent and graphic content', 'harmful or dangerous content', 'nudity or sexual content', copyright violations and threats (YouTube Community Guidelines). As per Facebook's Governments Requests Report, it restricted 1228 pieces of content between January and June 2017. The majority of these were because of violating laws related to hate speech and defamation of religion (Facebook Data Requests January-June 2017).

These statistics indicate that the response from law and order and government to hate speech online has been to request Facebook to take down content, and to take the drastic measure of shutting down the internet. In the next section, this paper will examine the move from post publication prosecutions to prevention action by law enforcement mechanisms in more detail.

Conclusion: Prosecution to Prevention

Along with the emergence of these new mechanisms of governance to tackle objectionable material online, the focus of law enforcement has moved increasingly from responding after the publication to preventive action. In other words, focus is moving away from the content and the originator of the content to preventing the circulation of such content. Part of this is linked to technological difficulties in identifying whom to hold culpable, especially when material is downloaded and moves with consummate ease across platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp. Another factor that has resulted in this move is jurisdictional limitations when it comes to prosecuting material that originates outside the country. The Indian government has also been putting pressure on intermediaries to locate their servers within India to allow for greater access and control of such information by agencies of the government.

The most obvious example of this shift can be seen in the manner that the Union and state governments have resorted to internet bans in specific geographical locations. One of these bans, the Gujarat government's blocking of internet sites in a number of cities across the state in 2015, was challenged by a law student in the High Court of Gujarat. The government's decision to cut off access to mobile internet connections was in response to political agitations related to the demand for reservations in government jobs by the Patidar community, a dominant caste in the state of Gujarat. The agitation was far from peaceful, with incidents of violence and arson, and curfew imposed by the state government in several cities

and towns across the state. The state police had directed telecommunication companies to stop services in cities across Gujarat for over a week (Singh 2015).

The main ground of challenge in court was that the government used Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to block access to internet over mobiles, while it should have used its powers under section 69A of the IT Act to block select sites or pages. Section 144 CrPC is a law that has traditionally been used to enforce curfew and maintain law and order during or in anticipation of riots and public order disturbances (Gaurav Sureshbhai Vyas). The state government argued that the public order situation was so serious that they had to resort to the use of Section 144 of the CrPC, and that this section was targeted at persons rather than just internet sites. This justified the use of Section 144 CrPC instead of section 69A of the IT Act and related blocking rules, which are meant to block specific urls or websites.

The use of Section 144 CrPC signals the onset of legal responses meant to prevent internet access rather than prosecute persons based on content, or even block specific content based on filtering mechanisms. This mass scale shutting down of internet access was justified by the Gujarat High Court as meeting the standards under Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution which guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. The High Court, in its judgment, agreed with the state government's contention that since the shutdown extended only to mobile internet services in the state, and broadband and wifi access to internet was available, the government had applied its mind and not taken an arbitrary decision. The court expressed its faith in the executive's capacity to take a call on how best to respond to a public order situation, thus giving the government plenty of leeway in the means they used to restrict access to the internet (Supra Gaurav Sureshbhai Vyas). The constitutionality of Section 144 CrPC has been challenged earlier, but courts have so far upheld it, stating these measures are needed in urgent situations where there are public order disturbances. (Arun et al 2018: 142)

Using the example of hate speech law in India, specifically online content deemed 'objectionable' linked to public order disturbances, I have attempted to show that the broader questions around the governance of hate speech have shifted from a focus on the content itself to managing circulation of such content, which is mediated by new media technologies.

The sheer velocity, and reach of social media has changed the rules of the game. In effect the technological change in the period I describe in this paper, has led to a situation where law and regulation of 'objectionable material' has become more complex, and difficult for states. The movement of content across territorial borders, the importance of guidelines and rules created by transnational companies such as Facebook, Twitter and Google, monitoring and censorship

through algorithmic searches, new mechanisms of policing, and closer engagements between state and civil society organisations have together created a landscape that has shifted the contours of the law around hate speech. The perceived importance of dealing with 'objectionable material' within government and police has led to regulatory structures and practices, which while resonating earlier histories of regulating print, broadcasting, and cinema, have inaugurated a distinct moment.

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Notes

[1] The category 'Northeast' refers to a geographical area in India that includes many communities and identities, many of who have been fighting for their right to self-determination. The expression was originally coined as a bureaucratic term, which arose during the reorganization of states in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the border war with China. While this category was intended to homogenize and depoliticize, it is a category that people and media from this region have begun to use widely, especially with reference to their position within the Indian state and in relation to mainstream Indian society, Mcduie-Ra, Duncan, (2017): "Solidarity, Visibility, Vulnerability: 'Northeast as a Racial Category in India", Yasmin Saikia & Amit R. Baishya, Northeast India: A Place of Relations", New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

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From Autonomy to Anonymity: Information Technology Policy and Changing Politics of the Media System in Indian Democracy

By Aasim Khan

Abstract

The prominence of information and communications technology (ICTs) in defining India's media modernity can be gauged by the growing reach of online social media as well as continuing expansion of digital media channels and satellite broadcasting even in the early 21st Century. Policies concerning information technologies, from telegraph to satellite networks, have also been central to media politics and with the rise of new media, internet related policies have similarly become pivotal to the interaction between the state and media system. Drawing from a comparative media system perspective, this paper argues that while there has been no major constitutional or legal overhaul, as yet, new ideas and information technology policy activism are reshaping the contours of state action and 'autonomy' of the press in India's democracy. Comparing technology debates in an earlier era, when satellite networks swept across the media system, with the more recent deliberations around liabilities for digital intermediaries, the paper unpacks the nature of change and locates its origins in the revival of discursive institutions (Schmidt 2002, 2008) of technology policy since the early 2000s. Technology related ideas, I argue, now serve as institutions, able to function as a 'coordinating discourse' (ibid) that have revived ideals of an autonomous media. Technology inflected ideals of 'anonymity' also counter the 'communicative discourse' (ibid) of *Hindutva* and cultural nationalist politics of media which framed the issue of autonomy in the ascendant phase of print and electronic media capitalism until the 1990s.

From Autonomy to Anonymity: Information technology policy and changing politics of the media system in Indian democracy

The prominence of information and communications technology (ICTs) in defining India's media modernity can be gauged by the growing reach of online social media as well as continuing expansion of digital media channels and satellite broadcasting in the early 21stCentury. Today, even as more than hundreds of news channels continuously beam their content across hundreds of millions of television screens, online networks are bringing sweeping changes in the media system. In spite of persistent inequality in access and use of these networks, the internet and ICTs have made technology a core component of India's mediated public sphere, and debates and contentions around information technology policy are also driving changes in the nature and functioning of India's media system.

In this paper, taking the context of technology policy, I explain how debates around the internet are influencing the media system, particularly in terms of the autonomy enjoyed by the press in India. Drawing from contemporary history, I analyse the changing structures and discourse of technology policy and argue that while there has been no major constitutional or legal overhaul, as yet, new ideas and activism, such as those seeking a right to privacy and 'anonymity', are reshaping the contours of state action and autonomy of the press from private and commercial interests. Moreover, this shift also marks a rupture from the past when autonomy was defined largely within a cultural nationalist framework forged under the *Hindutva*-dominated media politics in the post-colonial era.

In theoretical terms, rather than take a technological deterministic view, the essay focusses on the role of contending ideas and technology related activism as discursive institutions (Schmidt 2002, 2008) which have revived progressive forces that resist the *Hindutva* agenda, particularly in enhancing the autonomy of the press. In doing so, the paper draws from comparative media system studies and reformulates India's case with the help of concepts from discursive and historical institutionalist theories of policy change (Schmidt 2008, Beland 2009). In this way it seeks adds a technology policy dimension to media politics and in turn, implicates technological change in the politics of policy in India. This double movement is often lost in static theories of political economy of media system which see technology as being subservient to a particular variety of 'print capitalism' (Anderson 2006, Jeffrey 2009) and overlook the role of ideas as institutions capable of resisting dominant political and ideological forces like *Hindutva* in India.

Ideas as institutions: Media system beyond print capitalism

Rather than explain changes in media system as an outcome of a 'balance of power' between the state and industry at any moment in history (van Cuilenburg & McQuail 2003), this essay emphasises the role of ideas, including ideological interpretations of technology, as a crucial factor in defining autonomy of the press. In other words, we need to move from political economy to politics of media systems and consider the role of parties, legislature as well as technology activism in defining the growth and diversity of media platforms. The focus on technology policy also contributes to the growing literature on telecommunications and ICT related laws (Acharya 2015, Raghavan 2007) while providing a unique lens to understand how public activism and politics shapes the contours of state action.

This *ideational dimension* of technology policy is often lost in much of the 'media system' literature, which limits the role of the state simply as a 'rational legal authority'. Hallin and Mancini have argued that 'the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates' (2004:2) but their analysis reduces the ambit of politics to the notion of 'political parallelism' that categorises media systems in broad varieties of print capitalism, while ignoring the way in which parties and ideologies often influence state action in very political ways. Recent comparative media scholarship from non-Western contexts have drawn attention to the limitation of such modelling, particularly in China where an ideologically motivated, one-party state dominates the media system even as it promotes technological innovations in media markets (Zhao 2012).

Hence it is important to recognise that technology policy is a crucial lever for political forces that seek to utilise the media system both as a conduit to expand their reach as well as a site to demonstrate ideological hegemony. Even in a democratic context, policies can restrict citizens' right to an independent press which exercises autonomy not just from the state but also private interests. In the context of India, current literature on media systems largely rehearses the variety of print capitalism approach, which sees growth in the print (Jeffrey 2009) and electronic media (Mehta 2015) as a result of changes in wider economy as well as everyday practices of Indian media consumers. By dissecting the ideological structures of politics of digitalisation and even technological globalisation, which does not necessarily coincide with economic liberalisation (Sonwalkar 2001), this essay shifts attention to themes of technology policy activism and ideas to understand the changes in the autonomy of the press.

In celebratory accounts about the growth in newspaper readership and ever-expanding infrastructure of television media to 'billion screens' (Mehta 2015), public contentions surrounding autonomy of online bloggers and routine harassment of journalists has largely been ignored. My focus on technology policy helps underline these struggles for the media system, and shows how technolo-

gists are playing a crucial role in changing the pathetic state of 'phantom journalism' which has become a trademark of the post- economic liberalisation (Saeed 2015). These trends have already led to several popular and parliamentary debates, particularly around questions of information technology policy since the early 2000s, but as yet there is no account which can contextualise why this domain has become a primary arena for debating autonomy alongside the more conventional arena of media political economy.

A focus on technology policy as a lens to understand media politics takes us beyond conventional political economy of media system. Instead of seeing India's case as another variant of the print capitalism that developed in Europe, we can consider evidence that links the rise of unethical and communal forms of journalism in a capitalist media system of the 1990s with the rise of *Hindutva.* While it is well known that *Hindutva* as an ideological movement was able to use mass media to expand its cultural nationalist and Hindu majoritarian version of Indian state (Jaffrelot 1999, Rajagopal 2011, Banaji 2018), there are as yet very few accounts which can show why the *Hindutva* forces have been unable to control the new media system, as yet, even though they took hold of the electoral system in 2014 (Palshikar 2017).

A focus on policy also highlights the changes in the structures and institutions of policy-making in India, and understand how ideological forces operate in the domain of policy and not just the public sphere (Habermas 1989). Using the rise of the internet as a crucial moment of technology policy-making, we can also explain *how* alternative ideas have challenged this *Hindutva* politics in the recent years. But before we analyse the ideational and institutional roots of ongoing contentions around intermediary liability, we need to revisit institutions of technology policy to understand the role of *Hindutva* in setting the stage for the rise of electronic media capitalism and news broadcasting until the 1990s.

Post-colonial media system: Standing on a weak discourse of autonomy

Before we begin to analyse the course of recent contentions, it is important to revisit the historical context in which India's media system had evolved, particularly since the emergence of satellite networks which brought along a drastic growth of television media infrastructure (Narayan 2014). While scholars have argued that a cultural nationalist television system took hold in the country in the late 1990s (Rajagopal 2001), little is understood about the role of ideologies and politics in shaping the contours of autonomy of the press and electronic news media at the time. In order to better grasp the basis for right-wing media activism in contemporary India, we can turn to historical and 'discursive institutionalist' theories

(Schmidt 2002, 2008; Beland 2009) which emphasise the role of ideational actors who mediate in the political economy of policy-making.

The role of *Hindutva* has so far been seen largely within the limited context of content production and its reception in India's mediated public sphere (Rajagopal 2001). But the ways it *institutionalises* and structures technology adoption in media system has been overlooked, particularly in accounts of broadcast technology and mass media policy (Jeffrey 2006). My approach diverges from conventional political economy accounts to reconsider how *Hindutva* and other ideological forces actively reformulate policy and work as institutions that reformulate media system in its own image. To understand the dynamics of institutionalization, I turn to the works of Schmidt (2002, 2008), and explore the way in which ideological movements and activism can undermine the 'background ideational abilities' that are necessary for public policy *coordination* among key stakeholders. Instead they function in tandem with a '*communicative* discourse' (ibid) of policy, which relies on mass appeal and communication to legitimise policy agenda.

In order to understand how ideas shaped technology policy in contemporary Indian history for instance, we need to begin by analysing the relationship between the state's official discourse and deliberations in the Parliament and consider how ideological and party politics came to have an impact on it. To be sure, India's media system was not always dominated by *Hindutva* or similar ideologies. In fact, at the time of independence, there were several independent institutions, including professional media unions and civil society organisations which played the crucial *coordinating* role in technology policy related decision-making. Public activism of groups like the All-India Editors' Conference (A-INEC) and the more radical Indian Federation of Working Journalists (IFWJ) which were also active in campaigning against telegraph and radio technology laws, provided institutionalised mechanism as far as negotiating the nature of autonomy of the press was concerned.[1]

To really appreciate the coordinating role of these unions, we also need to understand the democratic nature of their discourse through which they sought to structure influence the direction of media and telegraph policy at the time. Throughout the 1940s, A-INEC leadership joined various popular, anti-colonial movements and also took a keen interest in emerging technologies which they saw as central to the advancement of the press. Their *coordinating* role emerged from the fact that the leadership of groups like A-INEC did not need to just rely on populist articulations but engaged public deliberations with legal and statutory institutions, including in the first major Parliamentary review of the press laws in India. Among other demands, its leadership sought the scrapping of the Indian Telegraph Act of 1885 which was seen to be a direct assault on the freedom of the press from surveillance by the colonial state.[2]

Even before that, in the wake of the crackdown during the Quit India movement for instance, A-INEC came up with a policy framework that would enhance what it called 'freedom of information' and autonomy of the press. Taking into account the emerging technological advancements, they called for complete 'emancipation of radio and sources of information from monopolistic control either of the government or private agencies.'[3] As a founding member of A-INEC, as well as the editor of the *National Herald* and its sister publication *Qaumi Awaaz*, Congress party leader and later independent India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was the symbol of the potential of the union to play a crucial in technology policy and shaping the media system at large. In his address, Nehru often promised that his party would curb the powers of the 'big press' which put 'vested interests' of the owners over and above the role of the press in India's democracy.[4]

But in spite of these early formations, the *coordinating* discourse of technology policy was limited, and assertions about reforming telegraph and wireless technology policies did not come to fruition. Moreover, the rise of *Hindutva* and communalism in the aftermath a catastrophic territorial 'Partition' of the subcontinent also ensured that Nehru's commitment to reform weakened swiftly. From our perspective what is crucial is that in mid-20th century, technology policy and powers accorded through laws like the Telegraph Act was barely touched by the progressive movement for independence, while organisations like A-INEC lost their pivotal role in the policy domain. Instead of coordination with technologists, media system in India became reliant on a conservative and even communal *communicative* discourse which framed issues of technology highly in cultural nationalist terms.

Slowly, but steadily, leadership at the helm of institutions like the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting side-lined groups like the A-INEC and IFWJ. Instead of Nehru, more conservative Congress party leaders like VB Patel took over as the first I&B minister and combined, what Jeffrey (2006) has called, a kind of 'Gandhian asceticism' with an impulse to utilise the press as a means of statecraft.[5] In contrast to Nehru who had courted institutions like A-INEC and actively nurtured the more progressive Indian Federation of Working Journalists (IFWJ), Patel and his successors relied more and more on ideological co-option, and did not shy from using censorship to censure anyone breaking the mould in which they wanted to carve the emerging media system.

Ignoring the value of public coordination and policy deliberations, this weakness resulted policy agenda being set from above; marginalising voices seeking to open India's telegraph services and in favour of continuing with colonial era legislations. For instance, on the issue of content regulation, rather than embracing public inputs, Patel worried about the courts which he argued could 'knock the bottom out of the press regulation.'[6] From the time when India's new republic

came into existence, demands to reform the Telegraph Act were ignored, while successive governments pushed for stronger curbs rather than open public debates (Chadrachud 2017).

Apathy among professional media groups followed, and was already evident the run-up to the first amendment which saw A-INEC condemning the governments motives and even calling for a general strike against the decision to impose amend the Article 19. Demands for stopping the amendment was raised by several editors and journalists from across the media system including *The Hindu*, *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*. These threats indicated the weakness in coordination among key policy stakeholders, although with the involvement of Prime Minister, eventually the strike was called off. With Nehru as the pivot, the government in independent India could still convince others of its intentions, and only a handful of small newspapers came out to protest (Nair 1951).

Technology policy in the age of cultural nationalism

But if the leadership in the independence era had taken a turn away from nurturing strong coordinating institutions, within the significant domain of technology policy there was an ever growing reliance on personality in the following decades. Instead of horizontal coordination, the debate around satellite networking came to rely more and more on a communicative discourse, which saw the political leadership of the day turn further towards themes of cultural nationalism rather than public deliberations. Even as the international technology policy debates saw the emergence of a global movement for a new international order (which later institutionalised in a formal institution called the 'New World Information and Communication Order' [NWICO] roundtable), policy deliberations in India came to centre around populist themes of culture and 'foreign' influence through mass media.

In post-colonial India, debates around technology took place more and more in isolation from the critical public sphere, a scenario encouraged by policy discourse under Indira Gandhi who took over the Minister for Information and Broadcasting in 1963. An early instance of the impact of cultural nationalism can be traced back to this era, when opposition groups including the political wing of *Hindutva* groups among others, raised hue and cry against the proposed installation of high-quality transmitters to be set up in partnership with the Voice of America (VOA) along India's frontiers. Instead of highlighting the need for redistributing world's communication resources, which was initially at the heart of the international negotiations and campaigns for NWICO,[7] the issue of 'foreign' technology became central to policy discourse both within and Parliament and beyond.

For Prime Minister Nehru, acting in the wake of Chinese aggression of 1962, the emergence of long distance transmission and satellite technology were to provide strategic support to India's military strategy and coordinate a response based on limiting the 'vicious and venomous propaganda against the Government of India by Chinese broadcasting services'.[8] In the Parliament, and later beyond, the opposition, which included the representatives from *Hindutva* movement, the issue was to be framed in terms of cultural nationalism . Opposition MPs related the effort to limit Chinese propaganda as a breach of India's territorial and cultural sovereignty, and eventually forced the Prime Minister to backtrack in his bid to allow 'foreign' transmitters on Indian soil (Times of India 1963).

The internationalization of technology and telecommunications policy could have empowered the Indian media system to enrich it practices with global innovations, instead its fate fell into the hand of cultural chauvinists. In Europe and many Latin American and African countries, in contrast, technology policies were proactively advanced to achieve a very different purpose. For instance, through the Intergovernmental Bureau for Informatics (IBI), an international forum that emerged in the mid-1960s and sought to popularise local use of satellite networking and social informatics, many African nations were able to expand their domestic media and communications systems. New ideas and initiatives like the IBI which promised the 'socialization of informatics' (Pohle 2012: 109), could have also benefitted India's media system at the time but the populist turn in policy and weak institutions upended any such possibility.

Instead, the emergence of satellite networks and subsequent policy negotiations around autonomy of public service broadcasting was framed in terms that eventually benefitted and legitimised the *Hindutva* agenda. In the Parliament, Nehru's daughter and political successor Indira Gandhi who took over the reins of the Congress party in the late 1960s ignored demands for a wider debate on technology policy. Instead of reviving public consultations through a media organisation like A-INEC, Mrs Gandhi dealt with technological change through the lens of political expediency. In 1966, when an experts' committee, headed by a retired justice, submitted its five-volume report to the Parliament, calling for reforming state intervention to support the autonomy of the press, Prime Minister Gandhi cut short the legislative review, arguing that 'time was not right' for considering such a sensitive matter (Committee on *Broadcasting* and Information Media 1964).

Initially, the issue of autonomy remained tied to themes of satellite networking policy only tangentially, buried within the debates tied to the changing political economy of television and electronic media system (Sridharan 1996). But gradually, as Indira Gandhi and later her opponents sought to exploit mass media to build their electoral and political appeal among the masses, the debate in tech-

nology policy also saw a turn towards cultural populism that relied on rhetoric and pomp rather than policy and public advocacy. In particular, Indira Gandhi was able to replace policy coordination with a communicative discourse which reworked themes of Third World ideology to suit her party-political and personal agenda.

The spectacle of technology policy propaganda was in full display at the various non-aligned movement (NAM) summits hosted in Delhi for journalists from non-Western world. At one such event, in 1983, Prime Minister Gandhi even equated the rise of satellite networking with the Orwellian surveillance system, calling 'the eye in the sky' a real threat to sovereignty of NAM nations. At least in her popular rhetoric she did not completely abandon the progressive strand of NWICO, although it often came alongside severe criticism of 'Western press' which she often equated with criticism of her own government (Times of India 1983).

Prime Minister Gandhi also routinely cited the use of satellite technologies as having the potential to carry out surveillance while making no commitment to reforming domestic telegraph laws that allowed the state to do the same at home. Meanwhile, the decline in the institutions of policy coordination deepened with each passing year, with the nineteen-month state crackdown on civil liberties that began in 1975, notorious as 'the Emergency', marking a crucial moment in the remaking of mass media in India (Rajagopal 2011) . In the course of the Emergency the Prime Minister not only abolished crucial bodies like the Press Council of India which were set up to guard the autonomy of the press in India, but also came to directly control a host of agencies and ministries responsible for technology policy. In contrast, the 'All-India' groups went into a sharp decline, with A-INEC reconstituting itself as the Bombay Union of Journalists (BUJ) in 1984. Their decline mirrored the growing role of powerful party leaders in policy debates, a fact evident to all, including the A-INEC's national leadership that acknowledged it as a 'fact of life'(Nihal Singh 1980).

Hindutva and technology policy: Empowering mass communication over deliberations

Although the emphasis on state control might indicate a 'sovereignty-centric paradigm', as defined by van Cuilenberg and Mcquail (2003); in the Indian media system, from a discursive institutional perspective, the growing reliance on cultural populism was a result of a more complex reality. It marked the emergence of a media system that aligned with ideological forces which threatened the very fabric of press autonomy. Ironically, an editor of one of India's oldest and largest circulating English national daily, *The Times of India* publicly admitted that 'everyone knew what happened during Emergency' but there was no point speaking

out given the costs.[9]

More crucially, the Emergency era also helped the rise of *Hindutva* ideology which found its footing in technology policy debates also during this period. Particularly, in 1977, when following the victory of anti-Indira Gandhi forces in the election, a spokesman for *Hindutva* ideology in its mouthpiece *The Organiser,* LK Advani took charge as India's first non-Congress Minister for Information and Broadcasting.[10] Once in charge, Advani consistently emphasised a communal and cultural nationalist ideology, while frequently speaking at NAM platforms in Asia as well as to journalists at home. Like his predecessors, Advani also championed ideals of NWICO but added a slant towards a more cultural nationalist interpretation to the debate around satellite networking as well as wider issue of technological globalisation that had prompted many countries to embrace IT as a means to accelerate their economic development (Evans 1995).

In the Parliament, throughout the Emergency era, the opposition parties, particularly the socialist and Left parties, tried to resist the communal ideas of *Hindutva* ideologues. For instance, when Advani tried to restructure the public broadcasting sector, opposition groups came together to decry the communal intent in his policy choices.[11] However, once in power, the *Hindutva* leadership revived the communicative discourse which had been set in motion by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This included upending efforts by journalists and technology activists, particularly those associated with the NWICO movement, to take advantage of the emerging technology and undermining key coordinating institutions that could empower community media networks in the country.[12]

Developing indigenous community radio systems was among the main recommendations of the Working Group on Mass Media set up soon after the end of the Emergency in 1978. The group was headed by BG Verghese, who was an active member of the NWICO movement, and they took up the issue of autonomy for community media and television in their review. In the context of technology policy, the Working Group had tried to utilise an alternative approach to suggest ways in which more decentralisation could cater to India's cultural diversity. But when the Working Group submitted its report to the Ministry, LK Advani dismissed their recommendations by arguing that 'we had promised autonomy but you have asked for complete independence'.[13]

So even as *Hindutva* forces came to control I&B ministry and policy arena, Minister Advani and his party organisation, most Left parties as well as related social movements which could have resisted *Hindutva* ideas largely ignored the rise of television news media both within the Parliament and beyond. Ironically, many prominent groups like the CPI(M) consistently added fuel to populist communicative discourse of 'foreign' influence with their own, often vacuous, dismissal of television media as a 'hybrid mix of spirituality, portrayal of women as sex

objects and crass consumerism'.[14] While some members of the secular alliances that emerged in the 1980s followed the Congress party led weak effort to counter *Hindutva* with its own ideal of cultural nationalism,[15] the more radical Dalit and subaltern social movements against caste and communal injustice, that also grew in electoral prominence in the 1980s (Jaffrelot 1999), completely shunned the media autonomy debate. As Loynd (2006) has shown, this distancing from both news broadcasting as well as commercial print sector, was a remarkably stable feature of contemporary Dalit politics.

Even so, there were some *alternative* ideas which persisted, albeit away from mainstream technology policy and political sphere in India. Given the rapid technology expansion throughout South Asia in 1990s (Page & Crawley 2000), there were small but important groups emerging that were to have an impact on policy debates in the coming years. The most significant amongst these were the 'long revolution' in IT sector in India (Sharma 2012) and the arrival of the internet based new media technology. While it has been argued that the internet provides a 'playground for liberal ideas' in many parts of the world (Hofheinz 2005), in the Indian context, the internet and ICT related activism and ideas came to confront complex political realities of Post-colonial era.

It included the emergence of a grassroots Free and Open Source Software movement in the country, which had originated and spread largely due to the spread of the internet worldwide in the 1990s (Kelty 2008). However, unlike the reality in the more economically advanced parts of the world, in India, IT networks developed outside of the framework of telegraph and satellite networking laws. Several small Blackboard Services (BBS) servers were set up in India, in cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore, and as a result remained untouched by the logic of print capitalism that grew alongside a 'calculated communalism' of *Hindutva* politics in the 'Hindi heartland' of northern India (Ninan 2007).

In particular, Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) activist cultures emerged largely in southern Indian states like Kerala and Karnataka where the IT service sector drew in a range of individuals and social groups into its fold (Kelty 2008). Gradually, and most crucially, FOSS related activism gave rise to new discursive institutions and organisations that grew into a full-fledged technology policy networks over time. Over the last two decades, as the internet spread rapidly, these networks also connected with more Left-aligned groups like the Society for Knowledge Commons (SKC), a Delhi-based NGO whose leadership worked closely with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) over the years. These groups also had a more media-savvy approach than the central leadership, with activists framing FOSS as 'freedom software' that could enable reforms in the media system as well as the Indian economy at large.[16]

Reframing autonomy: Politics of media system after the IT Act of 2000

Throughout the 1990s, and particularly since the passage of the Information Technology of 2000, new internet-based networks have emerged as a hub for technology policy activism in India. These included FOSS campaigners and allied social networks which began to foreground questions of freedom of the press, including privacy rights of journalists as a primary goal of their movement. If the *Hindutva* politics of media system had relied on a communicative discourse of cultural nationalism and encouraged the rise of print and electronic media capitalism, FOSS related activism and ideas often relied on the internet to give rise to an alternative coordinating discourse of ICTs which sought to empower socially marginalised communities.

While sometime this resulted in technologists formally participating in political movements, as is the case with the leadership of SKC, quite often new media activist networks operated through unconventional routes; one that relied on the internet as a site to build camaraderie rather than political solidarity (Kelty 2008). This for instance was the case with online websites like India-GII which became a crucial node in the campaign for user privacy in India, by bringing together 'techies, academics, bureaucrats, activists and people simply interested in a critical look at India's telecommunications and internet growth' in the early 2000s.[17]

Technology policy eventually became the site for a clash between the competing ideas, but this time rather than *Hindutva* dominance the result was quite different. The passage of the IT Act in the year 2000 provided the immediate context, which saw the cultural nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) led coalition pass a new law that was meant to enable faster spread of e-commerce networks in the country (Times of India 1999). But the law was also used, largely surreptitiously, as a lever to regulate content on online web portals, which, in the 1990s, were still not yet covered under the telegraph laws or agencies under the Ministry of I&B at the time. However, in their effort to avoid public deliberations the BJP ended up making technology policy a pivotal battleground for the future of media system, with issues of autonomy of emerging 'intermediaries' giving rise to competing alliances and ideologies both within the Parliament as well as in the new hybrid media system which saw dramatic changes in the digital era.

Most prominently, this was the rise of online whistleblowing websites, as in the case of with Tehelka.com, which famously saw largely unknown online media journalists exposing corruption deals and use the internet to circulate digital copies to audiences around the world.[18] As a result of lack of clear framework for autonomy, several such cases got clubbed together under the technology policy context with the IT Act related guidelines becoming subject of intense public debates. The law itself was largely meant to limit circulation of explicit content

online, particularly in instances when online e-commerce websites were used to share highly objectionable content.[19] But it also exposed the weakness in the existing framework for autonomy in the media system. In their urgency to pass IT laws, rather than address the concerns relating to content regulation in a digital 'convergence' environment, the BJP had used technology policy as a short cut to avoid wider public consultations.

On the challenge of convergence and online journalism, the Minister for Information and Broadcasting Pramod Mahajan, a *Hindutva* political strategist within the Parliament who at the time also held the portfolio for the newly constituted Ministry for Information Technology, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, repeatedly argued that 'there was no hurry' to introduce a new law. Instead, the BJP government used the IT Act as a means to legitimise its cultural nationalist agenda. It kept the 'media convergence' legislation pending until it lapsed with the dissolution of the Parliament in 2004. (Reditt.com 2002)

However, unlike the case in the past when the question of autonomy was confined to a communicative discourse, there was little scope to appeal to cultural nationalism in the heady days of technological globalisation. In 2004, as a Congress party led government returned to power, it was forced to acknowledge these shortcomings, and open the arena for FOSS activists who emerged as crucial intermediaries in policy debates that followed. With IT Act becoming a platform for a debate on the media system, questions ranging from access to copyright, alongside long pending issues around telecommunications and IT-related convergence, opened possibilities for an alternative alliance to take shape. Free and Open Source Software, these groups argued, was the only means to address the loopholes in the media system and reinstate the autonomy of Indian press in an era of digital convergence.

As stakes continued to rise, public debates became sharper and precipitated a crisis in 2008, when the UPA made fresh amendments to the IT Act, in which its leadership desperately tried to utilise the clause concerning intermediary liability as a means to regulate harmful content online. In addition, under revised Sections 66-69, it also added a new list of activities which, if undertaken, could be considered criminal, including production and distribution of content that could cause 'annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred or ill will' (IT (amendment) Act 2008). Unsurprisingly, the BJP and *Hindutva* leadership, which had originally conceived the IT Act, wholeheartedly backed these amendments (The Indian Express 2015).

But beneath the Parliamentary consensus, discontent brewed and an alternative discourse of autonomy emerged from a counter-alliance which sought the revocation of the amendments to the IT Act soon after. Although not stated as such, FOSS activism about online anonymity began to dominate technology poli-

cy fora in the late 2000s, including at international meets such as the Internet Go-vernance Forum, held in Hyderabad in 2011. At such deliberations, FOSS activists like those from the Center for Internet and Society argued for a 'right to online anonymity' which they argued was significant for new media systems which they argued relies on 'anonymous officials from various ministries making statements to the press' (Abraham 2011).

Ideas beyond digital capitalism: Technology policy as a reform in media system

By reframing the issue of autonomy in technology inflected terms of anonymi-ty, FOSS activists were able to provide a new explanation for the ills of Indian journalism and propose novel solutions for the media system at large. As Beland (2009) argues, diagnostic framing of key issues constitutes the first stage for ideas to impact policy. The next stage, Beland argues, is when new ideas provide a prog-nostic analysis, and showcase models and pathways to resolve outstanding policy problems. In the case of new media and technology policy debates, the alterna-tive ideational alliance proved successful on both counts. In many ways, FOSS groups revived the coordinating role and idealism of groups like the A-INEC in the 1940s, which had similarly built alliances with political groups without neces-sarily compromising their own ideas or let cultural nationalism get the better of their arguments.

As already mentioned, technology policy groups like the Center for Internet and Society framed autonomy in terms of anonymity online,[20] while grassroots organisations like the Software Freedom Law Center and the Free Software Mo-vement of India brought in a more political dimension to such arguments. In the Parliament, political support also came from the Left parties like the Communist Party of India (CPIM) which enhanced the coordinating role of FOSS ideas in technology policy activism, and in turn in the debate around media autonomy. As Thomas (2011: 182) has argued, at the grassroots level, the success of FOSS movement in India could be 'attributed to the specific political environment in the state (of Kerala)' where progressive and communist movements were far more engaged with questions of technology than the national leadership had ever been in the satellite era debates.

This coming together of grassroots technologists and IT and media industry linked think-tanks, constituted a discursive institution able to oppose *Hindutva* and cultural nationalist assertions. Not to be out done, but 2012 even the BJP le-adership revised its own discourse of technology policy and proposed a solution that involved mixing its own ideology of cultural nationalism with the framework of new media capitalism. Rather than demand autonomy or anonymity for jour-

nalists and bloggers, *Hindutva* technology leadership made a promise to 'lure' digital capital to keep all its data within India and ensure that 'foreign' intermediaries would not violate what they called the 'digital sovereignty' of India.[21]

This *political* discourse of digital capitalism developed through a top-down structure, through its 'IT cell' , which is organised in sharp contrast to the more horizontal networks developed by the Left parties and FOSS activists who relied on the internet both as a means to advance their ideas as well as engage with other like-minded NGOs and movements. While it originated in online networks like the India-GII, increasingly this alternative alliance drew in online and digital campaign sites and intermediaries like Change.org A petition moved by the CPI(M) MP argued that the guidelines issued under Section 66-69 restricted online freedom and called on the Internet users to 'tell the government that it cannot use vaguely defined laws and loopholes to take away your freedom of speech and expression.' [22]

By 2013, the question of autonomy now divided the *Hindutva* ideas from the more progressive strand of technology policy activism, and the intermediary liability clause in the IT Act emerged as a pivotal arena in the battle for redefine the contours of state intervention and autonomy of new media system in India. Within the Parliament the matter was raised consistently by member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) who moved an annulment motion against guidelines with the support of many of the regional parties opposed to the BJP as well as from the Congress. By 2013, the UPA government agreed to form a Committee on Subordinate Legislation on IT Act and invited three of the leading FOSS groups to submit their view points before the house, and in turn in front of policy stakeholders in India.

Among the three groups which participated alongside the Left parties in the Parliament were some of the most well networked activists in India's technology policy arena. These not only included IT industry supported groups like the CIS and the Society for Knowledge Commons, but also the legal advocacy network Software Freedom Law Center (SFLC) which worked globally on issues of copyright and privacy and had been at the forefront for advocating FOSS as a solution to the issues in India's media system.[23] So even as *Hindutva* forces tried hard to create a polarising discourse and co-opt powerful interests, new ideas and discursive institutions provided an alternative, one that was not controlled by a single party or held captive by industry interests alone.

Once in Parliament, their ideas worked as institutions in their own right, and impacted technology policy by proposing solutions for the media system in ways that went far beyond the digital capitalism envisioned by the *Hindutva* leadership. Initiating the discussion in the Parliament, officials from IT ministry, spelled out the fundamental difficulty of autonomy in an internet-enabled media system.

They stated how the Indian citizens faced the growing problem of 'malicious content' online and highlighted the difficulty of autonomy in a rapidly evolving new media system. 'How do we contact the owner of information? How do we identify that this is the person who has uploaded the information?' they asked in their submissions.[24]

In response, representations from SFLC, SKC and the CIS brought forward a socially-contextual reading of ongoing technological change, and proposed technology solutions that related the problem of autonomy given the affordances and the logic of new media. Moreover, by providing a prognostic framework, they also made common cause with a wider cross-section of media intermediaries, particularly the small digital media units which they argued were being penalised under the laws that would end up benefitting only a few. One of the representatives argued that 'Only (large) companies of the size of Google and Yahoo may be able to do it (find content online and remove it)' and hence called for abolishing of any requirement that would put the onus of gatekeeping on small digital publishers.[25]

Unlike the satellite networking and broadcasting era debates, when cultural populism against 'foreign' media was often used by political leadership to undermine a progressive community media and technology policy, FOSS groups and allied activists were able to put forward a framework that engaged more thoroughly with politics and political economy of India's emerging media system. Their ability to coordinate benefitted from the fact that that sections within the Congress party led UPA government began to recognise themes of privacy as a fundamental right in India, a trend that again contrasted with communicative strategy the party had adopted in the satellite era when cultural nationalist arguments often shut down calls for reforms.[26]

This was partly a result of contingency, particularly the fact that the domestic debates came in light of Snowden's 2013 revelations,[27] which became public around the same time. In response, activists and internet evangelists called for more use of 'community-based infrastructure such as Open Street Maps and DuckDuckGo', which the Director of Center for Internet and Society argued represented the most effective way to escape mass surveillance and a better way to 'stay anonymous.' [28] These contrasting realities, both in India and internationally, helped new ideas find policy footing within the Parliament, and strengthened the coordinating role of independent technology activism to reach out to political groups as well as stakeholders in India' emerging media system.

In its final report, the Parliamentary review committee, helmed by a CPI (M) MP, came down clearly on their side, calling the existing rules under the IT Act as 'arbitrary' and asking the UPA government to engage more seriously with issues of technology. By 2014, when the BJP returned to power at the centre, technology policy had given shape to a new politics of media system which had taken deep

roots both within the legislature and in the practices of online journalism. Combined with grassroots activism by groups like the Free Software Movement of India, ICT policy framed the problems of media autonomy in terms of the citizens' right to a free press.

Conclusion

This paper provides a theoretical framework to understand ongoing contestations around new media in India. By tracing the roots of current debates around online social media and intermediary liability to the historical weakness in ICT policy framework, it is able to explain why ongoing contentions are likely to continue until the underlying ideational conflict is resolved. Looking ahead, in order to substantiate these arguments, we need to conduct more formal analysis of the relative strengths of the competing alliances around questions of intermediary liability as well as analyse the ability of *Hindutva* formations to take control of new media related interests in the domestic as well as international arena.

Based on the analysis so far, we also need to caution against taking the shift in policy as being permanent. It is not. For reformers the challenge is two-fold; technologists have largely focussed on themes of autonomy within a technology-centric framework of anonymity and now they will need to address the growing menace of online hate speech, sometimes involving anonymous *Hindutva* 'troll' mobs (Chaturvedi 2016). In turn, political parties will also need to evolve more structural linkages with themes of privacy and online anonymity and reconfigure the rise of digital media and journalism in their own campaigns for social and economic justice.

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Notes

[1] Demands for repealing sections of the Telegraph Act were left unaddressed in the final report on the Press Laws Enquiry Committee. The two members belonging to A-INEC submitted their dissent notes and refused to sign on the report. See (Ganga

Nath) Committee 1947-48: Report. Delhi, 1948, British Library, India Officer Records: IOR/V/26/960/2

[2] Press Laws Enquiry (Ganganath) Committee 1947-48: Report. Delhi, 1948, British Library, India Officer Records: IOR/V/26/960/2

[3] Quote here is from the IV annual conference, from the President S. Brelvi, editor of the English language Bombay Chronicle who was a close ally of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement. 'Govt. Restrictions On Indian Press: Editors' Plea for Relaxation in The Times of India, 30 January 1945

[4] Nehru addressed or participated in almost all session until independence. The final attendance was in fifth annual session of A-INEC which was addressed by Nehru. See "Danger of Big Press Combines: Pundit Nehru's Warning" in The Times of India, 18 February 1946

[5] For a first-hand account, see Iyengar, A. S. (2001). Role of Press and Indian Freedom Struggle: All Through the Gandhian Era. New Delhi, A.P.H. Publishing Corporation.

[6] Austin G., Working a Democratic Constitution: The Indian Experience, New Delhi: OUP, 1999 p. 42. Patel is quoted as telling an editor that "We are interested in newspapers which will support us wholeheartedly. To say you will support us when we are right is meaningless. For why should anyone oppose us then?"

[7] For an insider's account of the way international technology and media policy debate also progressed over the decades of 1960s-1990s, see Nodenstreng, Kaarle (2010). Speech available online: http://www.uta.fi/cmt/en/contact/staff/kaarlenordenstreng/publications/nordenstreng_becker.pdf (Accessed November 2015)

[8] 'Prime Minister's Statement in Lok Sabha on AIR-VOA Agreement', Question Hour, Lok Sabha archives, 14 August 1963

[9] Besides Girilal Jain, most prominent editors, including Khushwant Singh supported the Emergency. Singh suggested the reason was that "Not one other editor was willing to risk his job". "Why I supported the Emergency: Khushwant Singh", Outlook, July 2000

[10] For a record of his tenure, I conducted an in-depth interview with senior journalists, including veteran editor BG Verghese in Delhi. Interview conducted by researcher, in December 2013, New Delhi

[11] For instance, allegations were made against the removal of Doordarshan employees on their cultural and religious affiliations in the aftermath of post-Emergency changes. Rajya Sabha Question Hour, 12 May 1978

[12] Interview with Mr. B. G. Verghese,a member of the NWICO round table. Conducted by the author in April 2014, New Delhi

[13] Interview conducted by researcher, in December 2013, New Delhi

[14] Plenum: Report on Organisation. (Comment from Party supremo Prakash Karat in a speech made at the annual conference of CPI(M),2008.)

[15] Excerpts from the P. C. Joshi Report in Chowla, N. L. Joshi Report: "India's Personality" On TV in The Times of India, 28 August 1985

16 The description here is based on field interviews conducted in Bangalore with members of FOSS technology groups, in January 2014. More details of activist networks and legal advocacy see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeO70Z4WrOA (Accessed December 2016)

[17] The tagline for the India-GII list read: "This list has existed since 1995, tracking India's progress from one of the most expensive, monopolistic telecom markets to one of the most competitive." Details available on its online archive: https://lists.cpsr.org/lists/info/india-gii (Accessed March 2015)

[18] A detailed account of the accusations faced by Tehelka is available in Trehan, M. (2009)

[19] In 2004, the police arrested the Indian CEO of the US-based website although his firm had been bought over by online commerce site e-Bay a while time ago. A first-hand account of the events as they unfolded in April 2004 is available in Balakrishnan, A.(2012) The Wave Rider, Pan Macmillan India, New Delhi

[20] CIS advocacy emphasized 'anonymity' as 'a necessary pre-condition for democratic and open governance, free media, protection of whistle-blowers and artistic freedom.'"We are anonymous, we are legion", Sunil Abraham in The Hindu, 9 April 2011

[21] Comment from a blog written by the main IT advisor to the BJP's national leadership. See "IT Sovereignty in India – The Data Centre Dimension", 11 April 2014 https://vinitgoenka.wordpress.com/2014/04/11/it-sovereignty-in-india-the-data-centre-dimension/ (accessed September 2016)

[22] https://www.change.org/p/mps-of-india-support-the-annulment-motion-to-protect-internet-freedom-stopitrules (accessed December 2015).

[23] Set up in 2011 SFLC brought together a whole range of activist groups under the umbrella of legal FOSS activism. See https://sflc.in/about-us/board-members

[24] Report on the IT (Intermediaries Guidelines) Rules, 2011, prepared by the Committee on Subordinate Legislation (2012-2013), XV Lok Sabha, March 2013

[25] Comments made by the FOSS advocacy groups Society for Knowledge Commons. See item numbered 64 of the Report on the IT (Intermediaries Guidelines) Rules, 2011, prepared by the Committee on Subordinate Legislation (2012-2013) XV Lok Sabha, March 2013

[26] Ibid.

[27] The revelations were published in the mainstream press in June 2013; see "The NSA Filed Decoded", The Guardian. Accessible here: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/the-nsa-files (accessed September 2016)

[28] Director of CIS, Sunil Abraham quoted in "Cyber experts suggest using open source software to protect privacy" in The Times of India, 23 June 2013

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