

ISAS Working Paper

No. 117 - 25 November 2010

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Mission, Money and Machinery: Indian Newspapers in the Twentieth Century

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Executive Summary

This paper provides readers with the context for the remarkable and sustained expansion of India's daily newspaper industry since the 1980s and the acceleration of that expansion in the twenty-first century at a time when daily print journalism in much of the world has declined. Covering a hundred years of the daily newspaper industry, the paper focuses on three themes: the ideas and motivations of the people who create newspapers, the financing of those newspapers and the technology through which they operate. The time-frame divides itself into four periods, each with identifiable and significant characteristics. In the first (1900 to 1920), from the time of the Viceroy, Lord Curzon to the ascendancy of M. K. Gandhi, English-owned newspapers slowly introduced industrial practices and journalistic conventions as they had evolved in Britain. A few Indian-owned English-language newspapers took up some of these innovations, but no Indian-language newspapers adopted such practices. Profit and ideology co-existed, but the largest and most influential (mostly British-owned) papers were more concerned with profit than preaching.

The second period was characterised by high nationalism. It extended roughly from 1920 to 50 – from Gandhi's first non-cooperation movement to the achievement of independence. Ideology was not everything; but it was king. People published newspapers so that others might be won over to various causes. The distinction in India between a "newspaper" and a "views paper" is rooted in this period when Gandhi succeeded Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) as the most famous journalist in the country.

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The third period unfolded once independence was achieved. Nationalist passion evaporated. British-owned newspapers passed into Indian hands; most Indian-language newspapers developed into small-scale family businesses. Newspapers slipped into predictable gentility, part of India's would-be socialist system. For those already in the newspaper business, income was steady, but there were few incentives to invest.

The fourth period begins from the end of Mrs Gandhi's "emergency" and continues to unfold in the second decade of the twenty-first century. A newspaper revolution began in 1977 with the lifting of censorship. The marriage of computer type-setting with photo-offset printing enabled faster, more attractive newspapers to be produced in Indian languages. An impatient middle-class encouraged aggressive marketing of consumer goods; advertising, the lifeblood of profitable newspapers, grew. And from the 1990s, television and then cell phones added previously unimaginable possibilities to the ways in which ideas could be communicated. The profession of journalism expanded with the demands of television and the output of a numerous schools of media and communication. The veneer of Indian journalism began to change from Edwardian England to 1980s USA. At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Indian print journalism appears to have a remarkably favourable medium-term future.

In January 1900, George Nathaniel Curzon, Viceroy of India (1899-1905; 1859-1925), no doubt received each morning in Calcutta a copy of the *Statesman*, the leading British daily newspaper of eastern India. On a typical morning, he might have read a hymn of praise to the steam engine as the machine that transformed the 19th century and glanced at the publication details of the newspaper: 'Printed and Published ... at the 'Statesman' Steam Press, 3, Chowringhee.'² The *Statesman* was reputed to have begun a transformation of Indian journalism by importing one of the first steam-driven presses in India and installing the first rotary press in 1907. Newspaper production in Curzon's day was moving from a trade for artisans to an industry for capitalists. Circulations were small. In 1908, the *Statesman* claimed to be the largest newspaper in India: it sold 10,000 copies a day.³ Curzon read no Indian language, though he could consult the Vernacular Newspaper Reports, a fortnightly distillation, prepared by bureaucrats, of Indian language newspapers. But Indian language newspapers had tiny print runs published from flatbed presses that Gutenberg would have recognised; British rulers viewed them as troublesome but not influential.

One hundred years later, K. R. Narayanan, President of India (1997-2002; 1920-2005), would likely have included in his morning's reading in the presidential palace in New Delhi, the *Hindu* of Chennai, which began publishing a New Delhi edition only a year or so earlier. Technology now allowed it to publish from a dozen centres, and it sold 800,000 copies a day. Narayanan read the *Hindu* out of habit. It pre-dated his own birth by 42 years, and he had worked for the newspaper when he was young. In 2000, as the President of India and a man comfortable in at least three languages and scripts, Narayanan would have also looked at the great Hindi dailies, which in the previous decade had become the circulation leaders in India – *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Bhaskar*. By the 21st century, they were each selling about two million copies a day. And as a Malayali – a man from Kerala – Narayanan would probably have glanced at the two great Malayalam dailies, *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi*, which together sold close to three million copies a day. The newspaper in India was a very different vehicle than it had been in Curzon's day when an English newspaper selling 10,000 copies was the most circulated voice in a country of 240 million people, of whom only a tiny fraction of a percentage read English.

This paper skims across a hundred years of the daily newspaper industry in India. Three themes persist: the ideas and motivations of the people who create newspapers, the financing of those newspapers and the technology through which they operate. Though a hundred years of newspaper history is huge and unruly, it divides itself into four plausible periods, each with

² *Statesman* (14 January and 20 June 1900), in Niranjan Majumder (ed.), *The Statesman: an Anthology* (Calcutta: The Statesman Ltd, 1975), pp.182-4, 186.

³ *Statesman* (19 July 1908 and 18 December 1932), in Niranjan Majumder (ed.), *The Statesman: an Anthology* (Calcutta: The Statesman Ltd, 1975), pp.250-1 and 425-6. The *Statesman* installed a new press in Calcutta capable of 80,000 copies an hour in 1932.

identifiable and significant characteristics common to each period. In the first (1900-20), from Curzon's time to the ascendancy of M.K. Gandhi, English-owned newspapers slowly introduced industrial practices and journalistic conventions as they had evolved in Britain in the era of Lord Northcliffe (1865-1922) contributing to the rise of the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*. A few Indian-owned English language newspapers took up some of these innovations, but no Indian-language newspapers were able to afford such practices – nor did they want to follow them. Profit and ideology co-existed, but the largest and most influential (mostly British-owned) papers were more concerned with profit than preaching. The author called this period 'Growth of an Industry.'

The second period, 'Birth of a Nation', is characterised by high nationalism. It extends from Gandhi's first country-wide non-cooperation movement in 1920 to the achievement of independence (roughly 1920-50). Ideology was not everything; but it was king. People spent money to publish newspapers so that others might be won over to various causes, ranging from the Indian nation to a communist state or even, indeed, to foster allegiance to the British Empire (not the most popular cause but one which did offer rewards for those who espoused it). The fond distinction in India between a 'news paper' and a 'views paper' is rooted in this period when Gandhi succeeded Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) as the most famous journalist in the country. Tilak, father of the journalism of militant nationalism with *Kesari* in Marathi and the *Mahratta* in English, had been sent to prison for his 'seditious' journalism.

The third period, 'Bland New World', unfolded once independence was achieved. The nationalist passion, which had induced people to put their hearts, souls and wealth into newspapers, evaporated. British-owned newspapers passed into Indian hands; most Indian language newspapers developed into small scale family businesses, little different from running an oil mill or a grain dealership. Newspapers slipped into slightly tattered, predictable gentility, part of India's aspiringly socialist, apologetically capitalist system. For those already in the newspaper business, income was steady, but there were few incentives to invest in expansion or new equipment, and anything that had to be imported involved lengthy minuetts with the bureaucracy for permits and quotas.

The fourth period, 'Brave New World', began from the end of Mrs Gandhi's 'emergency' and continues to unfold in the second decade of the 21st century. A newspaper revolution began in 1977 with the lifting of censorship. The marriage of computer type-setting with photo-offset printing enabled faster, more attractive newspapers to be produced in Indian languages. An impatient middle-class encouraged aggressive marketing of consumer goods; advertising, the lifeblood of profitable newspapers, thus grew. From the 1990s, television followed by cell phones added previously unimaginable possibilities to the ways in which ideas could be communicated. The profession of journalism expanded with the demands of television and the

output of numerous schools of media and communication. The veneer of Indian journalism began to change from Edwardian England to 1980s United States of America (USA).

Growth of an Industry: 1900 to 1920

The incentives to produce newspapers are ideology and profit – mission and money. Successful newspapers sometimes combine the two. Ideology can carry a newspaper for a time, but profit is essential for long-term survival. The oldest newspaper in India illustrates the pillar of profit. *Mumbai Samachar*, a Gujarati newspaper, first appeared in 1822 to provide commercial information to Gujarati-speaking traders around India's coast and the Arabian Sea. In 2008, its circulation was down to about 90,000 copies a day, the result, according to one observer, of the decline in numbers of Parsis who had been its primary base of readers.⁴ The key aspect of *Mumbai Samachar*, however, was that it brought profit to its owners by filling a need: information about prices and commercial conditions for Gujarati-speaking merchants. Speed was not essential, and politics was less important than commerce.

When Curzon arrived in 1899, printing in India was still using the techniques of Gutenberg and journalism was only just beginning to define itself as a profession. 'It was the day of the amateur', wrote Stanley Reed, who worked for the *Times of India* from 1897 to 1923, the last 17 years as the editor. Among the British, the *Pioneer*, which was based in Allahabad, was widely read across the subcontinent, arriving a few days after publication. The *Pioneer* was concerned with world news more than news in India, and was deemed 'a magazine rather than a newspaper.' Its circulation never passed 4,000 copies. The *Times of India* was 'produced direct from type [the Gutenberg way] on an obsolete flat-bed Middleton [press] ... which broke down at least once if not twice a week.' Its circulation was 3,000 a day.⁵ The leading British-owned daily was the *Statesman*, founded by the same Robert Knight who had created the *Times of India*; the *Statesman* was run by two of his sons. Its rotary presses were the first in India. Capable of 25,000 copies an hour of a 24-page paper, they printed from rounded plates cast from hot metal poured into curved paper-mache moulds, created by pressing the wet paper-mache mixture onto a flat bed of type.⁶ This was the mass production of industry, not the craft of individual artisans.

Print shops of any kind were relatively rare, though they had 'multiplied very rapidly in the last quarter of the 19th century' after the opening of the Suez Canal and the establishment of

⁴ *ABC* (July-December 2008) and Aakar Patel, *The News* (10 May 2009), www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=176791. Accessed on 23 September 2009.

⁵ Stanley Reed, *The India I Knew, 1897-1947* (London: Odhams Press, 1952), pp.30, 33.

⁶ *Statesman* (9 January 2007), in Niranjana Majumder (ed.), *The Statesman: an Anthology* (Calcutta: The Statesman Ltd, 1975), pp.241.

widespread railway and telegraph systems.⁷ In the 1880s, the Government of India identified just over a thousand presses. The same estimate put the number of newspapers in English at 127 and in Indian languages at 259.⁸ Average circulations were ‘somewhere between 250 and 300 copies.’⁹ The first print run of the *Hindu* in 1878 was 80 copies.¹⁰

For British people in India, as well as the *Statesman*, the *Pioneer* and the *Times of India*, there were the *Madras Mail* and *Madras Times*, the *Englishman* in Calcutta and the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore. Substantial Indian-owned English newspapers were few. The *Hindu* in Madras began as a weekly, went tri-weekly in 1883 and became a daily in 1889.¹¹ In Calcutta, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* began in 1868 as a Bengali daily but famously switched to English to avoid the provisions of the short-lived Vernacular Press Act of 1878.¹² Calcuttans also had Surendranath Bannerji’s *Bengalee*. The *Tribune* began in Lahore in 1881.¹³ And two of the surviving pioneers of Indian language newspapers, *Deepika* and *Malayala Manorama* published for the first time in 1887 and 1889. By the end of the 19th century, there were said to be 390 ‘journals’ coming out regularly in Indian languages.¹⁴

What was a journalist? And what was a newspaper supposed to do? The definition of the profession had accelerated in Britain and the USA from the 1880s when ‘an ardent professionalisation of journalism’ began.¹⁵ The young men who produced the first edition of the *Hindu* in 1878, on the other hand, ‘had no idea of the responsibility ... its publication would involve, of how to conduct it, [or] of the expenditure to be incurred.’ They started the paper for ideological reasons: to reply to British-owned newspapers’ criticisms of the appointment of an Indian as a judge of the Madras High Court.¹⁶ ‘The journalism of the period’ in the Hindi and Urdu press, ‘was the journalism of the Pandits and literary personalities’, Bhatnagar concluded. ‘Few papers were connected with correspondents or reporters.’¹⁷ Stanley Reed found only

⁷ Ramratan Bhatnagar, *The Rise and Growth of Hindi Journalism, 1826-1945* (Varanasi: Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 2003; 1st published in 1947), p.483.

⁸ *Statesman* (27 January 1889), in Niranjan Majumder (ed.), *The Statesman: an Anthology* (Calcutta: The Statesman Ltd, 1975), pp.117-18.

⁹ Ramratan Bhatnagar, *The Rise and Growth of Hindi Journalism, 1826-1945* (Varanasi: Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 2003; 1st published in 1947), p.78. The Reports on Native Newspapers, or ‘Vernacular Press Reports,’ sometimes reported circulations.

¹⁰ Rangaswami Parthasarathy, *A Hundred Years of the Hindu* (Madras: Kasturi and Sons, n.d. [1978]), p.1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.4, 7.

¹² Robin Jeffrey, *India’s Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.129-30. J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1955), p.187.

¹³ Prakash Ananda, *A History of the Tribune* (Chandigarh: The Tribune Trust, 1986), p.195.

¹⁴ Rangaswami Parthasarathy, *A Hundred Years of the Hindu* (Madras: Kasturi and Sons, n.d. [1978]), p.170.

¹⁵ Michael Schudson, ‘The US model of journalism: exception or exemplar?’, in Schudson, *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p.32.

¹⁶ Rangaswami Parthasarathy, *A Hundred Years of the Hindu* (Madras: Kasturi and Sons, n.d. [1978]), p.1.

¹⁷ Ramratan Bhatnagar, *The Rise and Growth of Hindi Journalism, 1826-1945* (Varanasi: Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 2003; 1st published in 1947), p.171.

slightly more professionalism when he arrived from Britain at the *Times of India*: ‘there was a tranquil leisureliness in the journalism of the nineties.’¹⁸

Politics dragged newspaper circulation behind it, sometimes assisted by the possibility of profit. In the period before the First World War, the political excitement that accompanied the partition of Bengal in 1905 in eastern India and Tilak’s trials and imprisonment for his Marathi writings in *Kesari* in 1898 and 1908, propelled demand. Newspapers expanded, invested and reduced their prices. In Lahore, the *Tribune* became a daily in 1906 and cut its price to two annas.¹⁹ The *Times of India* installed rotary presses just before the war, dropped the cost of the paper from four annas to one anna and quadrupled circulation in three days.²⁰ The Knight brothers at the *Statesman* had already recognised that ‘a new reading public was growing up in the thousands of matriculates from the universities’; they had installed rotary presses and cut the price to an anna at the beginning of the new century and ‘must be given the credit of the pioneer of popular journalism in India’, according to Stanley Reed.²¹

In percentages, literacy figures appeared deplorable – 5.4 per cent of 238 million people could read and write in 1901. Nevertheless, this amounted to 13 million potential readers of a newspaper, and given that 5,000 copies constituted a very large print run from the flatbed presses that prevailed across India, this was a market that outstripped supply – as the *Times of India*, *Tribune* and *Statesman*, among others, recognised.

Table 1: Population, crude literacy rates and number of literates, 1901-2001

Year	Population in millions	Crude literacy rate in per cent	Number of literates in millions
1901	238	5.4	13
1911	252	5.9	15
1921	251	7.2	18
1931	279	9.5	27
1941	319	16.1	51
1951	361	16.7	60
1961	439	24	105

¹⁸ Stanley Reed, *The India I Knew, 1897-1947* (London: Odhams Press, 1952), p.33.

¹⁹ Prakash Ananda, *A History of the Tribune* (Chandigarh: The Tribune Trust, 1986), p.195. As a weekly in the 1880s, the paper had cost four annas (p.193).

²⁰ Stanley Reed, *The India I Knew, 1897-1947* (London: Odhams Press, 1952), pp.38-9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.35.

1971	548	29.4	161
1981	683	36.2	247
1991	846	42.8	362
2001	1029	55.3	569

Source: *Census of India* for relevant years.

People who published newspapers in Indian languages faced various challenges. Technology was one. Gutenberg-style printing requires small metal shapes: letters that represent sounds. In the Roman alphabet, about 70 shapes will supply most needs – 26 letters in upper and lower cases, numbers from 1 to 10 and some punctuation marks. But Indian languages form composite symbols to represent composite sounds. In English ‘p’ plus ‘r’ becomes ‘pr’. In Indian languages, a new symbol – neither ‘p’ nor ‘r’, but a combination of the two – is required. Up to 900 different metal shapes would be necessary to do justice to some languages. But making types is expensive, and corners had to be cut. Print in Indian languages could be unattractive to the eye and sometimes unrecognisable to those unaccustomed to corner-cutting conventions. Publishers also had to shape language. Whose style was to be used? ‘It was not easy in those days to conduct a daily newspaper in the Tamil language’, S. Natarajan wrote. *Swadesamitram* ‘contributed to the development of the Tamil language by expressing modern world events and ideas in a language ... easily understood.’²² In Hindi, a battle had begun to determine just what the language of north India ought to be. ‘Standardisation of language had not taken place’ by the beginning of the 20th century, wrote Ramratan Bhatnagar ruefully in 1947. ‘The tendency of reverting to dialects was so great that there were many papers which could only be enjoyed by a limited circle of readers.’²³ This shaping of language – of legitimising some forms and excluding others – intensified over the next fifty years and continues in the 21st century.²⁴ Newspapers play a crucial role: old guards seek to preserve ‘chaste’ and ‘pure’ conventions and styles; successful mass newspapers often celebrate the argot of the streets.

When Gandhi returned to India in 1915, only four Indian language newspapers that currently survive in the 21st century existed: *Malayala Manorama* and *Nasrani Deepika* in Malayalam, *Kesari* in Marathi and *Mumbai Samachar* in Gujarati. Their combined circulations did not

²² J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1955), p.105.

²³ Ramratan Bhatnagar, *The Rise and Growth of Hindi Journalism, 1826-1945* (Varanasi: Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 2003; 1st published in 1947), p.117.

²⁴ Robin Jeffrey, *India’s Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.99-102. For discussion of a vast theme, see Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940. Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2001).

exceed 10,000 copies. However, in the 1920s, Gandhi's *Young India*, an English weekly, begun in 1919 and achieved print runs of 40,000.²⁵

Birth of a Nation: 1920 to 1950

Gandhi's message of militant nationalism, propagated in part through his skill as a communicator, changed Indian journalism, along with a substantial growth in the number of literates to 50 million potential newspaper readers (Table 1). By the time of independence and Gandhi's assassination, European dominance of the newspaper industry had almost vanished, and newspapers in Indian languages were increasingly becoming businesses, rather than social and political missions.

The Gandhian era also produced a generation of journalists drawn to the industry by idealism. As they matured and India struggled towards independence, they defined and shaped Indian journalism. Some of that era set out to be journalists. J. N. Sahni, who edited the *Hindustan Times* from 1926-33, went to the USA to do a journalism qualification at the University of Michigan.²⁶ Dr N.B. Parulekar, who founded the Marathi daily *Sakal*, had done a PhD at Columbia University. Having worked in the USA, Sahni was dismayed at 'the mechanical limitations of newspapers in India' and 'realised that the readers wanted more news and better presentation.'²⁷ Parulekar's *Sakal* was ridiculed because it reported on vegetable prices in the Pune bazaars and closely covered local events; previously 'news' had been about distant wars and politics. The national cause was essential for both Sahni's *Hindustan Times* and Parulekar's *Sakal* – and for a host of other publications that grew from the 1920s. Sahni went to jail in the civil disobedience movement in 1932, and the circulation of the *Hindustan Times* soared on the back of the national movement to 30,000 copies produced on ancient presses.²⁸

Newspapers founded in this period, particularly those in Indian languages, owed much to ideology- one incentive to commit journalism (profit is the other). *Aj*, the oldest of surviving Hindi dailies, was founded in 1920 to support the Gandhian movement. Swaminath Sadanand's legendary *Free Press Journal*, founded in 1930, was a model of such newspapers. It was 'not so much a business venture as a cause', but aimed 'at the common man as its pricing policy and writing style proclaimed in every issue.'²⁹ Sadanand promoted the national cause aggressively

²⁵ Anu Bandhyopadhyaya, *M. K. Gandhi: Author, Journalist, Printer, Publisher* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1994), p.14.

²⁶ Milton Israel, *Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920-47* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.52. J. N. Sahni, *Truth about the Indian Press* (Mumbai: Allied, 1974), pp.11-22.

²⁷ J. N. Sahni, *Truth about the Indian Press* (Mumbai: Allied, 1974), pp.31-2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.91, 98.

²⁹ Jaikumar Karnani, 'Foreword', in *The Saga of a Newspaper: Fifty Years of Free Press Journal* (Mumbai: Indian National Press, n.d. [1981]), p.21.

and added entertaining sweeteners like extensive sports coverage to the daily diet of politics and nationalism. After independence, he died broke and broken, but many of the people who worked for the *Free Press Journal* helped to define the meaning of Indian journalism.³⁰

The evolution from 1910 of the Associated Press of India (API), forerunner of today's Press Trust of India, highlighted new pressures exerted by commerce and nationalism – and the potential of new technology. API eventually became a subsidiary of Reuters in 1919 and a tool for British governments in disseminating their versions of the Gandhian national movement. But API developed out of India-wide interest in news of the First World War and in national politics and from the fact that an increasing number of newspapers looked for ways to fill their pages frugally but with timely news. 'Very often', one old editor recalled, 'there was not enough news to fill the available space.'³¹ API offered its clients a steady flow of telegraphed news at relatively cheap rates. Nationalists like Sadanand attempted to set up rival agencies but were thwarted by newspapers' parsimony and imperial penalties. Nevertheless by the late 1930s, API was providing copy to scores of Indian language papers as well as its large English language clients. National newspaper institutions fostered national thinking – even those like API that were not intended to do so.³²

By the time Ian Stephens, newly promoted editor of the *Statesman*, still the premier newspaper in India, attended his first meeting of the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference in October 1942, most of the key figures were Indian, and Indian language newspapers like *Tej* and *Janma Bhoomi* played an important part in the tempestuous discussions.³³ Stephens calculated 'several thousand publications in the country, most of them negligibly small.' He also noted the two inter-connected motivators of newspaper production: ideology and income. By the end of September 1942, though many newspapers had stopped publication in August to oppose the government's suppression of the Quit India movement, 'commercial need ... soon compelled reopenings', and no more than 50 remained closed, 'only one ... a newspaper of standing.'³⁴ The commercial need was inescapable. Durga Das noted the founding of three fiery nationalist newspapers in the 1920s, none of which could 'survive the fierce competition of the time'.³⁵

³⁰ M.V. Kamath, '21, Dalal Street', in *The Saga of a Newspaper: Fifty Years of Free Press Journal* (Mumbai: Indian National Press, n.d. [1981]), p.30.

³¹ Sham Lal, 'Foreword', in *George, Pothan Joseph's India* (New Delhi: Sanchar Publishing House, 1992), p.5.

³² Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After* (New York: John Day, 1969), pp.40-2. S.C. Bhatt, *Indian Press since 1955* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1997), pp.40-1. Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.42. Ramratan Bhatnagar, *The Rise and Growth of Hindi Journalism, 1826-1945* (Varanasi: Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 2003; 1st published in 1947), p.181.

³³ Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning* (London: Ernest Benn, 1966), pp.47-9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.46.

³⁵ Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After* (New York: John Day, 1969), p.109.

Gandhi's ascendancy after 1920 provided a powerful impulse to ideologically driven newspapers. Gandhi himself was an outstanding communicator, and his publications in this period, *Young India*, *Navajivan* and *Harijan*, were central to the Congress and the national movement. They were eagerly awaited, widely read and readily able to find the funds to sustain them. Other idealistic nationalist publishers, such as Sadanand, had a more difficult task. They had to build readership, keep the British at bay and pay the bills.

One of the survivors that managed both to fulfil its nationalist ideals and stay solvent was *Aj* of Varanasi, founded in 1920 by a wealthy commercial man, Shiv Prasad Gupta (1885-1944). Gupta, however, had finances from other sources to support his newspapers. Among the survivors of the period were *Ananda Bazar Patrika* in Bengali (1922), *Mathrubhumi* in Malayalam (1924), *Sakal* in Marathi (1932), *Dina Thanthi* in Tamil (1942) and *Dainik Jagran* in Hindi (1942).

The commercial pressures that mould newspaper industries manifested themselves in the associations formed to guard the interests of newspapers and their proprietors. The Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society (IENS) was founded in 1939, the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference (AINEC) in 1940 and the Indian Languages Newspaper Association (ILNA) in 1941.³⁶ The creation of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) in 1948 to collect reliable circulation figures symbolised the supremacy of business over ideology after independence. To sell advertisements, newspapers needed to be able to proclaim to advertisers the number of eyes that would see an advertisement. Commercial advertisements (as opposed to government advertising which may be a cross between a bribe and a dole) go to newspapers with the greatest number of prosperous readers, and no major newspaper can survive for long without a steady stream of advertising. The feisty nationalist newspapers of pre-1947 either became cash-conscious businesses after independence or failed. The *Bombay Chronicle*, the legendary nationalist paper whose editor B.G. Horniman (1873-1948) had been deported by the British government in 1919, wound up in 1959.

English language newspapers passed out of European hands or stopped publishing. *The Englishman* of Calcutta, founded in 1821, folded in 1934.³⁷ The *Pioneer* was sold to Indian businessmen in the 1930s.³⁸ And the *Times of India* famously came into the hands of Ramakrishna Dalmia (1893-1978) in 1944. 'To Dalmia', wrote D.R. Mankekar, 'a newspaper plant was no different from a cement ... factory. Making profit ... was the sole motivation.'

³⁶ Robin Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.131-2. J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1955), p.249.

³⁷ *Statesman*, (27 March 1934), in Niranjana Majumder (ed.), *The Statesman: an Anthology* (Calcutta: The Statesman Ltd, 1975), p.436.

³⁸ G. N. S. Raghavan, *The Press in India* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1994), p.110.

Dalmia also liked to use his newspapers to promote ideas of varying idiosyncrasy, but he relied on his editors to maintain the paper's circulation.³⁹ Dalmia lost control of the paper and went to prison in 1956 for fraud, and the paper passed into the hands of his son-in-law Shanti Prasad Jain (1911-77) and his family.⁴⁰

The passion that lured young men⁴¹ to journalism during the nationalist period dispersed after independence into various movements, goals and ideals. 'During the pre-independence period', M. V. Kamath wrote, 'it was easy to distinguish between right and wrong, what was patriotic and what was not. The British were wrong; the Congress was right.'⁴² The change was apparent within a few years. The first Press Commission noted in 1952 that 'newspapers are no longer run as a mission, but have become commercial ventures.'⁴³ Such ventures could well reflect the passion of their proprietors, as Dalmia's proclaimed affection for the cow suggested. Ram Nath Goenka, owner of the *Indian Express* chain, similarly used his newspapers to pursue causes dear to him. But Goenka was 'a stingy paymaster' who ran his newspapers like a 'Marwari shop', and though they were intended 'to serve the cause', they were also required 'at least to break even'.⁴⁴

When India became independent in 1947, the literacy rate was 17 per cent. About 300 daily newspapers sold fewer than 2.5 million copies a day; close to 30 per cent of those newspapers were in English, a language read by no more than six or seven million in a population of 361 million. Fewer than 15 per cent of dailies were in Hindi, the soon-to-be national language spoken by 150 million.⁴⁵ Yet national newspaper institutions and networks had developed, and among the small elite that created independent India's institutions in the 1950s, newspapers, particularly in English, were a constant concern. Men who had entered journalism to support the national movement were about to create a unique brand of Indian journalism. They brought to their newspapers a pride in independence, sympathy for Nehru's vision of non-alignment, a preoccupation with national politics and an ability to practise journalism within the tight budgets provided by the commercial families that controlled major newspapers.

³⁹ D. R. Mankekar, *Sheer Anecdote* (New Delhi: Allied, 1983), p.173. Nothing is to be learned from the psychedelic Neelima Dalmia Adhar, *Father Dearest: the Life and Times of R. K. Dalmia* (New Delhi: Roli, 2003).

⁴⁰ Neelima Dalmia Adhar, *Father Dearest: the Life and Times of R. K. Dalmia* (New Delhi: Roli, 2003), pp.140-1.

⁴¹ There were almost no women working as regular newspapers people during the nationalist time. Rama Jha, *Women and the Indian Print Media* (New Delhi: Chanakya, 1992), pp.5-6.

⁴² M. V. Kamath, *A Reporter at Large* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2002), p.205.

⁴³ Mohit Mitra, *A History of Indian Journalism* (Kolkata: National Book Agency, 1993; first published 1969), p.15, quoting *Report of the Press Commission* (1954), p.482.

⁴⁴ B.G. Verghese, *Warrior of the Fourth Estate: Ramnath Goenka of the Express* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005), pp.319, 193.

⁴⁵ S.C. Bhatt, *Indian Press since 1955* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1997), pp.6-7.

Bland New World: 1950-1977

‘The light has gone out of our lives’, Nehru said after Gandhi was murdered. Indian journalists often give the impression that the light of journalism steadily dimmed after independence in 1947. ‘In my time’, one wrote, ‘journalism was a mission, not a profession. It was a means of serving the nation.’⁴⁶ The refrain continues with the laments about the decline in the role of the editor and the rise in importance of proprietors and their business managers. There is little new or uniquely Indian in this. Even in the glory days of the nationalist movement, ‘our increments depended on the whims of the proprietor, who could hire or fire young men at his sweet will.’⁴⁷ A critique of the United States (US) journalism, published in 1993, had the plaintive title: *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom*.⁴⁸

Indian newspapers after independence reflected the refashioning of the Indian state – the ‘Nehruvian model’ in which the state deployed scarce resources to create equality and reduce poverty. Print media was seen as important in this process – though, remarkably, television and radio did not get similar attention.⁴⁹ Governments spent considerable energy in analysing the press, which politicians and policy-makers often concluded was hopelessly in thrall to commerce and capitalism. Between 1950 and 1977, Indian governments set up two Press Commissions (1952 and 1977), an inquiry into small newspapers (1964), and a fact-finding committee into newspaper economics (1975). Far less attention was paid to radio and television, largely because governments already controlled them and the elites in power were not familiar with these new media. But everyone in the elite of newly independent India read newspapers, even though newspaper penetration in the 1950s and 1960s was fewer than 10 dailies for every 1,000 people. Newspapers fell into the comfortable mould of bridled capitalism that characterised Indian business enterprises after 1947. Governments complained about the newspapers’ lack of commitment to a socialist India; newspaper managements complained about government controls and regulation; but each learned to live with the other. Newspapers enjoyed steady and predictable government advertising and found ways to profit in an undemanding, urban environment.

The newly independent state took over the role of the colonial government in attempting to tame and manage newspapers. The first amendment to the constitution which was passed in June 1951, only six months after the constitution’s inauguration, curtailed the freedom of the press by enabling governments to ban publication of materials deemed to endanger the interests of the

⁴⁶ N. G. Jog in R. Srinivasan (ed.), *Crusaders of the Fourth Estate in India* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1989), p.15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.15-16.

⁴⁸ Doug Underwood, *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ Robin Jeffrey, ‘The Mahatma Didn’t Like the Movies and Why It Matters: Indian Broadcasting Policy, 1920s-1990s’, *Global Media and Communication*, vol.2, no.2 (2006), pp.207-27.

state. This was followed in October 1951 with a Press (Objectionable Matters) Act.⁵⁰ In response to the protests of journalists, many of whom had spent their careers playing cat-and-mouse with the British, Nehru's government set up a Press Commission to examine the role of the press in free India, and out of the Press Commission, two bodies emerged: the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) in 1956 and the Press Council in 1966.⁵¹

Attempting to map and measure newspapers across India, the Press Commission of 1954 estimated there were 320 dailies with a total circulation of 2.5 million.⁵² A rough calculation then suggests (Table 2) there were perhaps eight dailies for every 1,000 Indians. English was the largest newspaper language in the country, with daily circulations of close to 700,000, which would translate into a newspaper for every two speakers of English. Malayalam, the language of Kerala, had the next highest rate of penetration: 15 dailies for every 1,000 Malayalam speakers. For the national language, Hindi, the calculation was three dailies for 1,000 speakers.

⁵⁰ Sharad Karkhanis, *Indian Politics and the Role of the Press* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1981), pp.84-7. Robin Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.183-5. The Press (Objectionable Matters) Act lapsed in 1956.

⁵¹ Robin Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.188. C. P. Mathen, *I Have Borne Much* (Madras: Amphill, 1951). The composition of the commission hinted at the compromises that a newly independent government had to make. Among the members was Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, who as the diwan (minister) of the princely state of Travancore had closed down *Malayala Manorama* in 1938 and done his best to ruin the proprietors.

⁵² *Press Commission* (1954), Part 1, *Report*, pp.15, 17.

Table 2: Daily circulations, number of speakers of a language and estimate of dailies per thousand speakers, 1951

Language	Number of daily newspapers	Daily Circulation in '000	Estimated speakers in '000	Dailies per '000 speakers
Assamese	1	3	5000	0.6
Bengali	7	240	25100	10
English	41	697	1100	634
Gujarati	23	187	16300	11
Hindi	76	379	150000	3
Kannada	25	72	14500	5
Malayalam	21	196	13400	15
Marathi	26	191	27100	7
Oriya	3	43	12200	4
Punjabi	9	23	n.a.	
Tamil	12	168	26600	6
Telugu	6	98	33000	3
Urdu	70	213	n.a.	
TOTAL	320	2510	324300	8

Source: *Press Commission (1954), Part 1, Report, pp.15, 17.*

Such calculations are rough and raw, but they suggest trends that other indicators help to confirm. At independence, the newspaper was a thoroughly urban medium, except for Kerala. The dominance of English language newspapers and their penetration among English speakers (Column E of Table 2 and Figure 1) was based on sales in the great cities. Similarly, the fact that Gujarati and Bengali were the two Indian languages – after Malayalam – in which people were most likely to read a newspaper resulted from their prevalence in the metropolises of Mumbai and Kolkata. Circulations were small: 240,000 copies a day for 25 million Bengali speakers; fewer than 190,000 copies a day for 16 million Gujarati speakers. Yet this was more than three times the penetration for Hindi, the national language, which had no great city to call its own and published an estimated three daily newspapers for every 1,000 Hindi speakers.

What explains the front-running place of Malayalam, the language of Kerala? Malayalam newspapers were the most prevalent in India among their language group – 15 dailies per thousand Malayalam speakers, five times the penetration of Hindi. Politics drove newspaper circulation in Malayalam. Kerala, of course, had one essential quality for newspaper consumption: literacy, the highest rates in India. Moreover, by 1951, Kerala had had three

celebrated suppressions of politically provocative newspapers – *Swadeshabhimani* in 1910, *Malayala Manorama* in 1938 and the *Deshabhimani* in 1948. By later standards, the circulations of these newspapers were small. In the 1940s when the Congress government shut it down, the Communist *Deshabhimani* was printing no more than 8,000 copies a day.⁵³ It paid the bills through its cover price, donations and occasional appeals to its readers. *Malayala Manorama*, on the other hand, was commercial venture from the start. It was founded as one of the first joint-stock companies in south India by the Kandathil family, established Syrian Christian merchants and estate owners.⁵⁴ *Malayala Manorama* installed its first rotary press only in 1950, but by the middle of the decade, both it and *Mathrubhumi* were selling more than 50,000 copies a day.⁵⁵ In Kerala, the intense political mobilisation, carried on by the Communist Party of India, the Congress and various smaller parties and social movements, is consistent with the argument that political action drags newspaper circulations behind it. The producers of those newspapers may be either keen commercial people who sense opportunity, political zealots who seek followers or a combination of the two. The sense of mission and ideology that drove Indian journalism in the pre-independence period endured in Kerala in the contest between communists and their opponents.

Though most of journalism lost the ideological fuel – Indian independence – after 1947, newspapers became a comfortable business for many existing publications. Proprietors now behaved in much the same way as other Indian capitalist enterprises at the beginning of the ‘socialist experiment’. Competition was discouraged, government advertising was regular and reliable for established newspapers, and the selling price of the paper, even with modest circulations, went a long way to covering the cost of production. The *Hindustan Times*, for example, sold for one anna (one-sixteenth of a rupee) in 1938 and two annas by 1946.⁵⁶ It reached two and a half annas (about 16 per cent of a rupee) in 1952 and stayed there until the late 1960s.

What was ‘news’ in the era after independence? Local news, which later became the vital ingredient of Indian language newspapers, was thin. Mankekar relished the fact that the Delhi edition of the *Times of India* when it began in 1950 has ‘six local reporters as against no more than one or two of our rivals, the *Hindustan Times* and the *Statesman*.’⁵⁷ ‘News’ was the activities of the legislatures and politicians and what came in on the wire. ‘Indian journalism’,

⁵³ For the Kerala story, Robin Jeffrey, ‘Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800-2007’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.68, no.2 (May 2009), pp.476-8.

⁵⁴ *Story of Manorama* (Kottayam: Malayala Manorama, 1968), p.9.

⁵⁵ *Annual Report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India 1958* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1958), p.38.

⁵⁶ Prem Shankar Jha (ed.), *History in the Making: 75 Years of the Hindustan Times* (New Delhi: Hindustan Times, 2000).

⁵⁷ Mankekar, *Leaves*, p.175.

wrote Mankekar, ‘was largely politics.’⁵⁸ The *Hindustan Times* dominated the Delhi market with sales of 32,000 a day.⁵⁹ The grey, serious English language dailies of the 1960s, and their skinny, badly printed Indian language contemporaries, rarely went to the village for news. Exceptions, such as *Sakal*, the Marathi daily of Dr Parulekar, were ridiculed for grassroots reporting.⁶⁰

National institutions established in the 1940s, like the Press Trust of India, made newspapers into hinges of the Indian nation after independence. The spirit is captured in the line in English on the masthead of *Mathrubhumi*, the great Malayalam daily, founded to promote the Gandhian nationalist movement: ‘The National Daily in Malayalam’. Sentiments about being part of a national profession and a nationwide endeavour acquired institutional substance. The Indian Newspaper Society (INS) was founded in 1939, the All-India Newspaper Editors’ Conference (AINEC) in 1940, the Indian Languages Newspaper Association (ILNA) in 1941 and the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) in 1948. The AINEC brought editors together in an informal club, just as the two associations brought together publishers and owners. And by auditing and certifying circulations, the Audit Bureau helped to create a national advertising market by providing a mechanism to estimate the value of an advertisement in a particular publication: how many copies did a publication sell?

However, for the daily maintenance of newspapers as hinges, loosely fastening together a disparate country, the news agencies were crucial. The Press Trust of India (PTI), taking shape out of the Associated Press of India in 1949, provided enough news on the teleprinter to fill the skimpy newspapers of the time.⁶¹ ‘All the news [the *Free Press Journal* of Mumbai] needed came from the *Press Trust of India*’, wrote M.V. Kamath.⁶² The country-wide sharing of PTI’s stories, and those of its smaller cousin, the United News of India (UNI), oiled India’s hinges every day. Copy arrived – and still arrives – in English to be translated on the desks of individual newspapers into every language from Assamese to Urdu. Syndication, which Durga Das claimed to have pioneered in 1959 with the India News and Features Alliance (INFA), served a similar function by bringing national columnists to audiences all over India.⁶³

Censorship and control of the media took a new form after independence. The British had struggled to control newspapers. The failed Vernacular Press Act of 1878 (abandoned in 1882) was one of the best known examples, but variations were used throughout the national movement, particularly in 1910 and 1930. Tilak’s writing in *Kesari* had led to his imprisonment

⁵⁸ Mankekar, *Leaves*, p.308.

⁵⁹ Mankekar, *Leaves*, p.175.

⁶⁰ Robin Jeffrey, *India’s Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.89.

⁶¹ S. C. Bhatt, *Indian Press since 1955* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1997), p.42.

⁶² M. V. Kamath, *A Reporter at Large* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2002), p.190.

⁶³ Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After* (New York: John Day, 1969), pp.358-9. M. V. Kamath, *A Reporter at Large* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2002), p.721.

and symbolic martyrdom, and Sadanand of the *Free Press Journal* ‘had to face a jail sentence’ which put ‘a halo round his head’ in the 1930s.⁶⁴ After independence, Nehru’s government confronted the chaos of partition and a communist insurgency. The first amendment of the Indian constitution in June 1951 curtailed the right to freedom of speech. Indian governments have sought to guide and control the media ever since, most notably when full censorship was imposed during Mrs Gandhi’s cumbersome ‘emergency’ of 1975-77.⁶⁵ The amended constitution gives governments the potential to prevent stories from being run and to penalise publications that ignore instructions.

Table 3: Expansion of daily newspapers since independence

	1952	1977	1991	2007
Number of dailies who reported to the Registrar of Newspapers for India	330	603	923	2,337
Circulation of dailies reporting to the Registrar, '000	2,500	10,672	24,290	98,837

Sources: *PII*, 1978, pp.11, 52, 135; 1992, pp.9, 45; 2006-07, p.31.

In the first 30 years after independence, newspapers proved a comfortable business, manufacturing a scarce product for a limited market. They grew slowly (see Table 3), and English remained the largest selling language. Signs of a more competitive environment emerged in the 1960s in Kerala, the hotbed of Indian newspapers, when *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* opened additional publication centres in each other’s territory. Just before Mrs Gandhi proclaimed the ‘emergency’ in 1975, other indications of change were in the air. Ramoji Rao started the trend-setting *Eenadu* in Telugu on ancient presses in Vishakatapatam in 1974, and *Dainik Jagran* and *Aaj* started publication centres in each other’s territory in 1974-5.⁶⁶ The censorship of the ‘emergency’ proved a pressure-cooker: once it was removed, publication energy overflowed. The new government permitted the import of modern equipment. Publishers began the switch to computers and offset printing and opened new publication centres to bring their newspapers closer to new readers. New kinds of publications came into their own (the news magazine, *India Today*, founded in 1976, was one example). Advertisers and publishers fell into each other’s arms, the former searching for new markets and the latter full of good news about how their publications could penetrate such markets in small towns and rural India. After the

⁶⁴ M. V. Kamath, *A Reporter at Large* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2002), pp.196-7. J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1955), p.211.

⁶⁵ G. N. S. Raghavan, *The Press in India* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1994), pp.138-42.

⁶⁶ Robin Jeffrey, *India’s Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.81-5. For distinctions about rare, scarce and mass media, see Robin Jeffrey, ‘Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800-2007’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.68, no.2 (May 2009).

emergency', the bland new world of post-1947 seemed to become, at least for newspapers, exciting and brave.

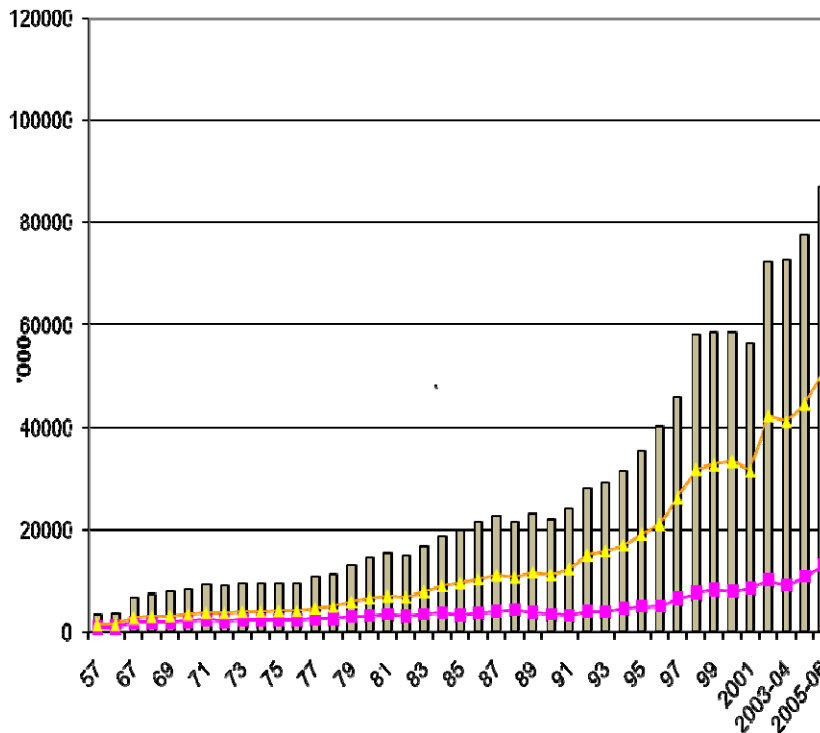
Brave New World: 1977 and After

The explosion in newspaper circulations at the end of the 'emergency' seemed dramatic then, though paltry in comparison to the first decade of the 21st century. The significant landmark came in 1979 when the circulation of Hindi dailies exceeded that of English for the first time by a few thousand copies.⁶⁷ For the first 32 years of independence, the remarkable fact had been that English, a language of no more than five per cent of the population, sold more newspapers each day than the national language spoken by more than 40 per cent of the population.

A widening involvement of people in politics – the 'excesses of the emergency' were catalytic for many – produced circulation increases, and the growth of advertising compelled proprietors to reach out to new readers and rewarded those who did. Until the 1980s, markets in Indian languages did not seem worth an advertiser's rupees. But from the end of the 'emergency', proprietors of Indian language newspapers began to succeed in their campaigns to show their effectiveness as advertising media. As production of consumer goods grew, so did the advertising industry, and the golden days before commercial television found rich advertising revenues flowing to newspapers that could demonstrate their readership. The incentive and the resources to expand had arrived, even for Indian languages.

⁶⁷ By 28,000 papers, according to RNI figures – 2,997,000 for Hindi and 2,967,000 for English.

Figure 1: Daily newspaper circulations, 1957 to 2007



Bar = all dailies; Line of triangles = Hindi dailies; Line of squares = English dailies

Source: *Press in India* for relevant years.

Daily circulations more than doubled from 9.3 million papers a day in the dreary depths of the ‘emergency’ in 1976 to 19.7 million copies a day in 1985. More than six million of those papers were in Hindi, which by now had nearly doubled its lead on English.⁶⁸ These notable increases were eclipsed in the 1990s. Circulations nearly trebled – from 21.9 million in 1990 to 58.3 million in 1999. By 2007, they reached 97 million copies a day, an increase of close to five times in 17 years. More than 40 per cent of the circulation is now in Hindi.

A great political and social story lies behind this expansion. Large numbers of lower status people in India’s Hindi heartland were becoming both literate and politicised. The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh is perhaps the most dramatic example of a process that has gone on at varying speed across India. Newspaper readership is a cart: politicisation pulls the cart like bullocks in the shafts while advertisers and marketers push the cart from behind. This expansion of newspaper sales also needed the imagination and investment of proprietors who detected opportunities and were eager to profit. Owners of Indian language

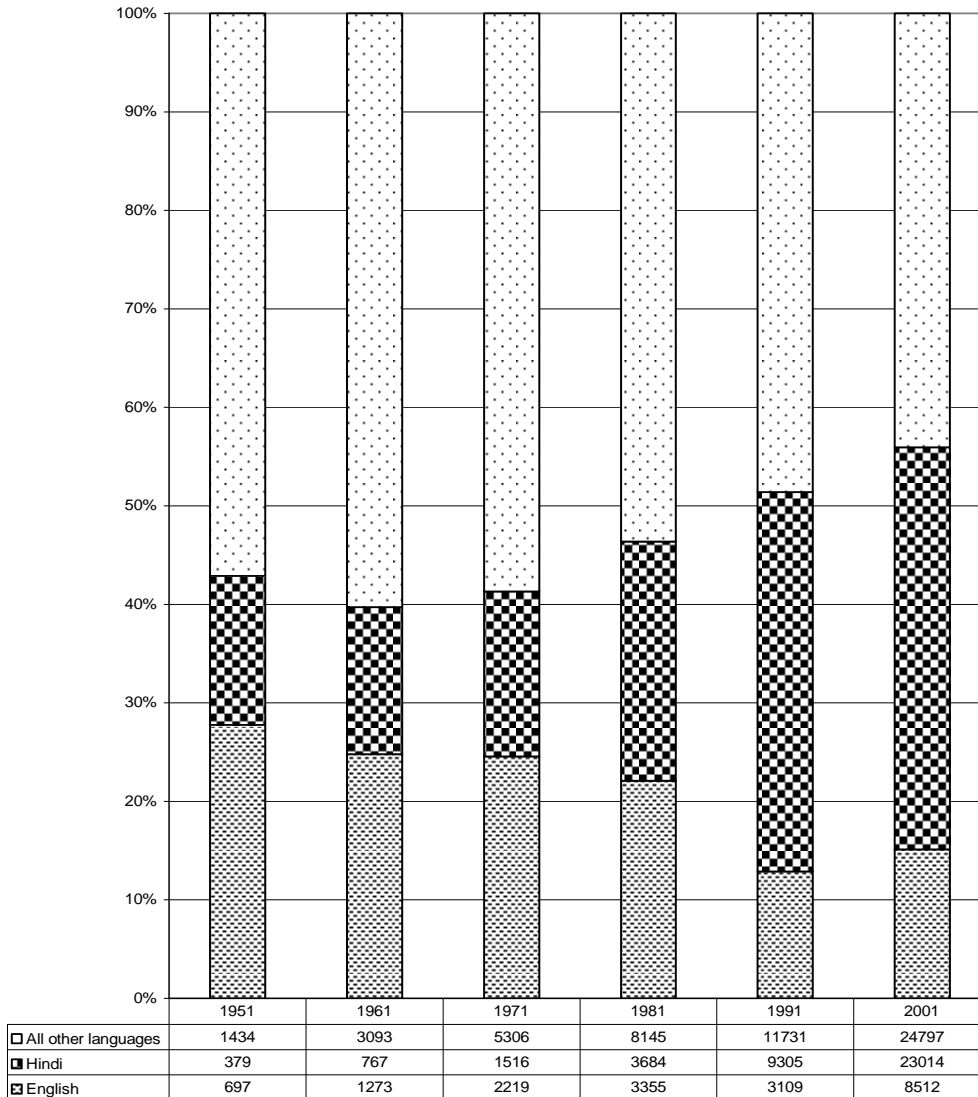
⁶⁸ Robin Jeffrey, *India’s Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.46-7.

newspapers, especially Hindi, had to convince advertisers that readers of Indian language newspapers had purchasing power. They could do this only after showing substantial circulation figures that no producer of small item consumer goods could ignore. This job of convincing that began in the 1970s flowered from the 1990s as proprietors pushed their news gathering, printing and distribution operations into smaller towns. They localised both news and distribution, and readers, increasingly mobilised for politics, bought the newspapers. Not all newspapers succeeded or survived; some of the ‘grand old names’ of Indian language publishing failed – *Andhra Patrika* in Telugu and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in Bengali are examples. But others, like *Eenadu*, *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Bhaskar*, expanded spectacularly. The Hindi story is captured in two remarkable books, Sevanti Ninan’s *Headlines from the Heartland*, which paints the big picture across north India, and Per Stahlberg’s *Lucknow Daily*, a finely etched portrait of life on a Hindi daily in a state capital.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Sevanti Ninan, *Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere* (New Delhi: Sage, 2007) and Per Stahlberg, *Lucknow Daily: How a Hindi Newspaper Constructs Society* (Stockholm: Stockholm Studies in Anthropology, 2002).

Figure 2: Hindi and English daily circulations as percentage of total daily circulation in all languages

Hindi and English as % of Circulation in All Languages



Source: *Press in India* for relevant years.

Critics sometimes lament the ‘gossip-at-the-village-well’ coverage of local events that has been a part of the recipe for the expansion of Indian language newspapers. There is no doubt that people like to read about, and see pictures of themselves. Has this localisation destroyed a unified public sphere? At its best, the coverage of local news, particularly in Indian language newspapers, means that rural people have never known so much about their world and never had better means of making their grievances known than they have had since the 1980s. At its worst, as Mrinal Pande writes, the emphasis on localisation – of news, advertising and publication – ‘opens the

floodgates to paid news’, rounded up by poorly paid local stringers deriving income from selling space in the newspaper, which sometimes masquerades as editorial copy.⁷⁰ At the top of such a pyramid, owners have done deals with politicians for relentlessly favourable coverage before elections.⁷¹ In the 2009 general elections, it appears that some candidates paid very large sums to some newspapers in return for wide and favourable editorial coverage, and many candidates were offered ‘packages’ – happy stories in return for even happier payments to the newspaper.⁷²

Ethics, advertising, training and judgement are staples of newsroom debates.⁷³ Gandhi refused to accept advertising for his publications in the era of nationalist and ideological zeal. He was said to have lost Rs 26,000 in publishing *Indian Opinion* in South Africa, but ‘he knew that he would not be able to serve truth and remain independent if he accepted advertisements.’⁷⁴ The men who came of age prior to independence and created the models for post-independence journalism were products of their experience in the journalism of the national movement, but they were also aware of their place in an international English language tradition, of Northcliffe, Hearst, Evelyn Waugh’s *Scoop* and Ben Hecht’s *The Front Page*. Durga Das, Pothan Joseph, M. V. Kamath, D. R. Mankekar, Frank Moraes and K. N. Sahni saw themselves as newsmen of the world, ‘possessed [of] a sly and cynical sense of humour which improved in quality in direct proportion to the quantity of spirituous nourishment ... imbibed.’⁷⁵ What constituted a journalist was open to question. The people who made the profession before and after independence had often stumbled into it. Kamath was a young chemist who wanted to write. He pestered the *Free Press Journal* of Mumbai for a job, and when he finally met the legendary editor, Sadanand, the latter told him: ‘My dear young man, you have come to the wrong place. This is a newspaper office, not a pharmaceutical laboratory!’ But he got the job and his salary dropped by 15 rupees to Rs 100 a month in the 1940s.⁷⁶ ‘How many editors and distinguished reporters in England have ever passed through the portals of a university?’, Durga Das’ mentor used to ask.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Mrinal Pande, ‘Operating above the fault lines’, *The Hindu* (17 March 2010), www.beta.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article248212.ece?homepage. Accessed on 18 March 2010.

⁷¹ P. Sainath, *The Hindu* (30 November 2009), www.beta.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/articles57019.ece?css. Accessed on 30 November 2009.

⁷² For a survey of the issue, brought to light by P. Sainath in *The Hindu*, see Sevanti Ninan, ‘Who will bell the cat’, *The Hoot* (April 2010), www.thehoot.org/web/home/story.php?storyid=4394&mod=1&pg=1§ionId=19&valid=true. Accessed on 20 April 2010.

⁷³ ‘You can’t buy a journalist with a meal’, was a line I used to hear in Canada in the 1960s; ‘but you might with a restaurant’.

⁷⁴ Anu Bandyopadhyaya, *M. K. Gandhi: Author, Journalist, Printer Publisher* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1994), p.13.

⁷⁵ Mankekar, *Leaves*, Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After* (New York: John Day, 1969), p.263

⁷⁶ M. V. Kamath, *A Reporter at Large* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2002), p.189.

⁷⁷ Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After* (New York: John Day, 1969), p.38. This was K. C. Roy, founder of API. At school, Das spent his pocket money on a subscription to the *Tribune* of Lahore.

The expansion of media industries from the 1990s produced many more journalists and newspapers, many of them coming out of media schools of the sort that Das' mentor deplored. In 2010, a cursory Web survey found more than 100 journalism and media programs in various institutions.⁷⁸ The old school of Indian journalism detected at least two major flaws in the way the industry developed. First, the proprietors of Indian language publications increasingly put themselves in the editors' chairs. They became publisher-editors and devalued 'real' journalists. Second, as the industry grew, it hired more people. For Indian language newspapers, these people were often stringers who had no training. One practitioner argued that 'in the Hindi media, it has become a habit to shamelessly publish false information ... there is no accountability – not to the readers, to society or even to one's own organisation. Frequent transfers, postings, new contracts – all these have become a pastime for senior journalists.'⁷⁹ With the expansion of Indian language newspapers from the 1980s, stringers became essential both to mop up local news and to keep the costs of news gathering low. Stringers were not new. R. K. Narayan captured his own early life in *Talkative Man*, a novella about the stringer of Malgudi.⁸⁰ But the needs of an expanding industry multiplied their number, made it even less likely that they would have any training and increased the likelihood that they would be selling advertising in the newspaper and – their critics say – picking up gratuities of one kind or another along the way. They are also vulnerable. The murder of a stringer for an Indian language newspaper in a small town does not generate national outrage.⁸¹ Taberez Neyazi captures the various pressures on local part-time correspondents in his rich account of life at one of *Dainik Bhaskar's* publication centres.⁸²

⁷⁸ www.indiaedu.com. Accessed on 16 May 2010. Delhi had 14 such programs, Maharashtra 13 and Karnataka 12.

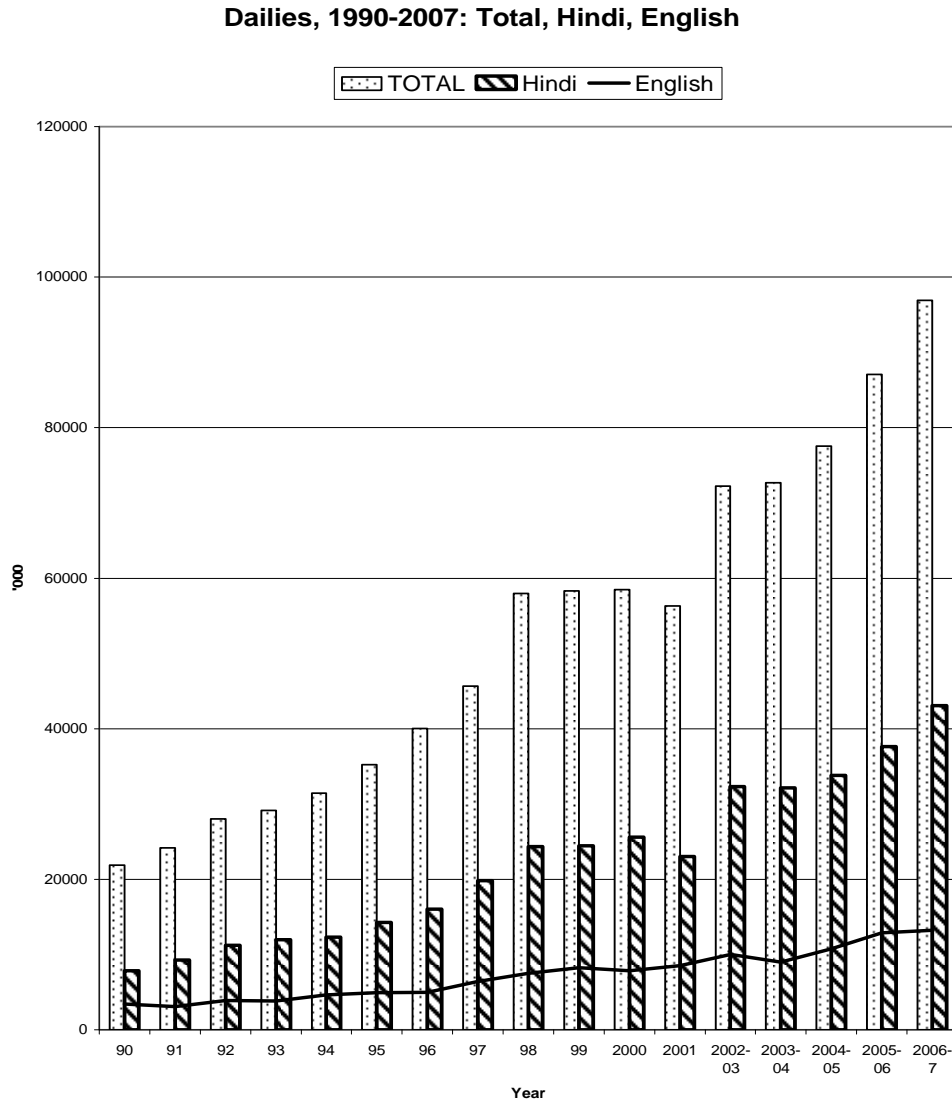
⁷⁹ Harivansh, 'Prabhat Khabar: an experiment in journalism', in Nalini Rajan (ed.), *Practising Journalism* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), p.59.

⁸⁰ R. K. Narayan, *Talkative Man* (London: Heinemann, 1986).

⁸¹ Robin Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.248.

⁸² Taberez Neyazi, 'Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers: Changing Institutional and Discursive Dimensions, 1977-2007', *PhD thesis, National University of Singapore* (2009).

Figure 3: Daily circulations, 1990 to 2007, total, Hindi and English



Source: *Press in India* for relevant years.

The expansion of private television channels after 1992 increased demand for ‘journalists’ and ended the easy and prosperous era for the advertising departments of Indian newspapers. In 1990, Indian television consisted of the government-controlled Doordarshan and its tightly managed, tediously cautious newscasts. Within a decade after satellite television opened up the skies, India had more than 50 news channels alone.⁸³ Though advertising expenditures grew massively, the share of newspapers shrunk, as television channels became fierce and powerful competitors. The largest publication chains like *Dainik Jagran* or the *Times of India* (to name only two) started their own television channels. The ‘mushroom growth of journalists’ that the

⁸³ Nalin Mehta, *India on Television* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2008).

late S.P. Singh identified in 1993⁸⁴ doubled or tripled in the next decade as the new medium gobbled up established print journalists and camera-friendly young reporters. If there were 25,000 journalists in India in the early 1990s, it would be reasonable to suggest there were close to 100,000 when the global recession began in 2008.⁸⁵

When Curzon read the *Statesman* in Government House, Kolkata, at the beginning of the 20th century, changes in media technology and the practice of journalism in India had begun. However, the steam-driven rotary presses of the *Statesman* seem a paltry, snail's-pace innovation when contrasted with the fast changing media world in which K. R. Narayanan lived as President of India a hundred years later. And even Narayanan's world changed fundamentally after his death in 2005. In 2002, the year he retired as President, India had fewer than 50 million telephones; in January 2010, it had more than 580 million.⁸⁶ The future of newspapers and 'journalists' in an age of digitised electronics, in which a cell phone makes every person a potential reporter and photographer, is unpredictable. One practitioner in 2010 believed that 'the growth prospects for the print media in India look very good in the near term and probably good in the medium term', but that the reliability of their reporting and the integrity of their journalism would determine the extent to which Indian newspapers would do well in the future.⁸⁷ The new media, in which every person is her or his own publicist, presents challenges and opportunities uncannily like those that Gandhi identified at the height of the nationalist movement. 'Let us break the idol of machinery and leaden type', he wrote – and that has happened since the 1980s. 'The pen is our foundry and the hands of the willing copyists our printing machine.'⁸⁸ Perhaps in the 21st century, India will substitute cell phone for pen. He continued: 'Let everyone become his walking paper and carry the news from mouth to mouth. This no Government can suppress.'⁸⁹ Governments can, to be sure, close down mobile phone networks for a time, as in Iran, and terrorists can blow up mobile phone transmission towers, as in Afghanistan; but in the new era of media, the Gandhian vision presents a stimulating, unsettling possibility to which daily newspapers will have to respond.

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⁸⁴ Interview, S. P. Singh, New Delhi, 21 February 1993.

⁸⁵ Robin Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.128 recorded 34,000 journalists on 963 dailies that returned such information, out of 2,374 registered dailies. If the average of 35 journalists per daily is applied to all 2,374 registered dailies, we get a figure of more than 80,000. This excludes, of course, the television industry and its employees and journalists who work for periodicals.

⁸⁶ Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 'Telecom Subscription Data as on 31st January 2010', www.trai.gov.in/pressreleases_list_year.asp. Accessed on 12 March 2010. See also TRAI, *Annual Report, 2008-09* (New Delhi: TRAI, 2009), p.40.

⁸⁷ N. Ram in *The Hindu* (20 April 2010), www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscri/print.pl?file=2010042061701300.htm. Accessed on 20 April 2010.

⁸⁸ 'Young India', in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol.25 (12 January 1922), p.428.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Anu Bandyopadhyaya, *M. K. Gandhi: Author, Journalist, Printer Publisher* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1994), p.20. I have not been able to find this portion of the quotation in the *CWMG*, though Bandyopadhyaya has the passage in quotation marks.