

**Media Discourse in Contemporary India:
A Study of Select News Channels**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in fulfillment
of the requirements for the award of the Degree of*
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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2019



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work titled 'Media Discourse in Contemporary India: A Study of Select News Channels', submitted for the award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is an original work done by me under the supervision of my supervisor Prof. Maitrayee Chaudhuri. This thesis has not been previously submitted for the award of the degree in part or full to this or any other university.

Date: 7.10.19

Place: New Delhi

Sudeshna Devi
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Acknowledgement

This thesis has been a journey of determination and loads of it!

I thank my supervisor Prof. Maitrayee Chaudhuri for her unwavering support and guidance. Our discussions on politics, media, JNU, career, family and children, have been illuminating and inspiring, and will stay the course with me.

I would like to thank Prof. Kameshwar Choudhary who recognized my potential and motivated me to pursue a PhD. Sir, thank you for your belief in me.

Thank you to Prof. Avijit Pathak for his encouragement and motivation during the course of my study.

Thank you to all my respondents who took the effort to respond to my curious queries. Their valuable insights have helped me in completing the research.

Thank you to all my friends and well wishers who helped me in accessing my respondents. This study would not have been possible, without their belief and unconditional help.

Thank you to Anita ji, Lalit ji and Bhupinder ji of CSSS, who were always there to help me.

Thank you to Sawmya, Madhumita and Reshma whose friendship has remained steadfast over the years.

Thank you to Samanta and Taberez, for their valuable guidance at important junctures of my life.

Thank you to my parents, sisters and in-laws for always being there.

I thank everyone who has contributed in her/his own way in helping me complete my work.

Heartfelt thanks to Digvijay. His love, empathy and understanding are way beyond the words that I write here. He has been my pillar of strength and will remain always.

My PhD would never have got completed without the love and support, of my seven years old, Vaivasvat. Our journey, from his learning of A, B and C, to my learning of sociology, has been quite eventful. I will forever treasure his innocent advice at every phase of my work.

Sudeshna...

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Abstract

The present study takes its cue from the idea that the media is an agency of framing public opinion in democratic societies. Media derives its power and influence from this capacity to frame and shape opinion on issues in the public domain. The study seeks to showcase, how television news media, through the systematic process of production, representation and consumption of media texts, produces narratives that offer a commentary on the issues in the public domain.

The study is set in the context of the evolving television news industry in India. It starts by tracing the historical journey of the state broadcaster *Doordarshan*. This account helps in contextualizing the transformations in television news media in the 21st century. The advent of structural reforms in 1991 ushered in significant transformations in the news media sector. The reforms paved the way for private and foreign participation in Indian media, leading to the exponential growth of the sector. Along with the rapid growth, the sector witnessed sweeping changes in content, practices, technologies and modes of consumption. The study highlights some of the key trends, namely, market-reliant revenue model, skewed regulation policies, social media changing content policy, digital news websites, that impinge on the structure and mode of operation of television news media in contemporary India.

Within the contemporary television news media space, the study looks into the process of framing public discourse by two private national news channels, *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*. This is done by critically looking into process and techniques of production and representation of current affairs programmes such as studio debates, panel discussions, audience talk shows and documentaries. The current affairs genre of programming consists of studio debates, panel discussions, documentaries and interviews. This *apparently* dialogical mode of communication, has made a radical shift, from the predominantly one way dissemination of information, to an interactive format where the focus is to analyze, investigate and explore the *why*, *how* and *what* of such everyday events and occurrences. The current affairs format of news programming is one where news commentators debate, discuss and analyze current events. Such discussions are framed, from certain ideological, political, cultural, religious perspective. This could be consistent with either their personal beliefs, or the organizational policies or their target

audience. The influence of either one of these factors or amalgamation of more than one factor, gives rise to similar as well as dissimilar ‘discourses’ by different media networks.

One also looks at how such programmes are consumed by the audience, citizens of Indian democracy, and importantly, located in diverse social settings. By juxtaposing, the production, representation and consumption of media texts, an attempt is made to understand the nature of the mediated public discourse in contemporary India. A complete understanding of this process would not have been possible, if only one aspect was taken into account. This is because each of the three aspects of production, representation and consumption, work in tandem to produce narratives that impact the nature of discourse in society.

A mix of research techniques were used for the collection of field data. Semi-structured interview schedules were used to interview journalists associated with the print, broadcast and digital media. Similarly, questionnaires and interview schedules were used for eliciting response from news viewers. The technique of textual analysis was used to analyze the current affairs programs aired by the two news channels over a period of one month.

The production aspect of the media texts was probed by entering into newsrooms of the two news channels. Drawing from the theoretical perspectives of media organization and news production, an inquiry was made to understand the key techniques and processes for the production of the current affairs shows by probing questions like: nature of issues/topics debated, selection of experts, coordination among various departments, viewership base of the channels, influence of social media, organizational and editorial policy. The study highlights how current affairs programming has become a dominant genre of programming across news channels. By debating, discussing and deliberating, a range of issues of social, political, cultural, regional, economic issues, such format has played a key role in framing the public discourse around them. This format has given rise to new forms of news production, planning, designing and strategizing.

Similarly, the representation aspect of media texts was analyzed by using Stuart Hall’s theory of ‘politics of signification’. Thus, the key aspects that were probed into were: the process, nature and the significance of the discourse framed by the two news channels. The

textual analysis of the discussions in the two channels, revealed, the prevalence of two dominant themes, namely, cultural nationalism and mis-governance. These two themes became the overarching frames for mediatized discussions, on the news stories that made it to the headlines during the period of study. On the issue of mis-governance, both the news channels framed a similar narrative. The issue of mis-governance was seen as failure of government policies. Both the channels were univocal on their stand of calling out systemic inefficiency of the political system which was paralyzing the governance structure of the country. However, the divide in Indian media was clearly visible on the issues debated within the overarching theme cultural nationalism. The ascendancy of the right-wing politics in India has resulted in the center-staging of the idea of cultural nationalism into the mainstream discourse. Some media groups have been important constituents in constructing and legitimizing this discourse. In contemporary times, one finds that while one section of media accepts the government ideology and propagates its majoritarian views, the other section is critical of the current dispensation. This division was clearly visible in the manner in which the two news channels framed their discourse on social, cultural and political issues. While *NDTV 24x7* spoke about upholding the rule of law, *Aaj Tak* called for upholding the rule of the majority. The shrill discourse on cultural nationalism by *Aaj Tak* was in sync with the ideology of the government-hyper-nationalist, majoritarian and divisive. These narratives, highlighted, the power of media, to *signify* divergent realities.

Likewise, the framework of New Audience Research was used to understand and analyze the dynamics of media consumption. The study approached the issue of media consumption at two levels- organizational and viewership. At the organizational level, the focus was to examine how journalists and news professionals working in the two concerned news organizations, identify their viewership base. It probed into the kinds of processes, techniques, strategies used by them for producing content for their targeted audiences. At the viewership level, an attempt was made to make sense of how news audience understand and interpret news reporting by news channels in general. A probe into the nature of engagement of audiences with two concerned news channels was also undertaken. The study showcases that the viewership of television news media in India straddles between two universe. On one hand, there exists the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* and on the other, a plethora of private news channels in English, Hindi and other regional languages. The increasing marginalization of the state broadcaster due to loss of

financial and functional autonomy, has led to erosion of its credibility. Private news channels with their fast paced reporting, better programming content and sleek production technique have grown in numbers to offer stiff competition to *Doordarshan*. The transformation from a state centric to a market centric ownership control of news channels has come at the cost of the transformation on news audience as *citizens* to news audience as *consumers*, primarily through the changing revenue model and content policy.

By juxtaposing all the three processes, the study has identified some key internal (ownership of the institution, its editorial policies, the organizational structuring, work ethics, revenue model) and external factors (social media, market, state policies, media regulations, viewership base) that influence the discourse (s) in the two news channels. All these aspects together help in understanding how media networks are influenced by internal (ownership of the institution, its editorial policies, the organizational structuring, work ethics, revenue model) and external factors (social media, market, state policies, media regulations) that frame their discourse (s).

These mediatized discourses circulated by the news channels, are also reflective of the wider socio-political climate prevailing in the country. History is witness to the fact that Indian media has always been intrinsically tied to the political trajectories of the country. It has always been reflective of the social and political exigencies, prevalent at various junctures, in the history of the nation. In contemporary times too, a large section of the media has become a part of the hegemonic right-wing political milieu, trying to silence critical voices. A major chunk of mediated discourses are laced with majoritarian ideas and beliefs. The dominant trend, to debate and deliberate every issue, through the lens of hyper nationalism, seems to override the formation of any informed and reasoned public discourse. Two processes jeopardize the autonomy of media: one, the commercial imperatives and two, a deliberate endorsement and promotion of a majoritarian discourse that threatens to disrupt the diversity and plurality of Indian democracy. It also raises questions on the role of media as the fourth pillar of democracy.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In common parlance, the task of media is understood to be that of systematic collection, processing and dissemination of information about everyday happenings and occurrences, from the local to the global level. This information is supposed to have been gathered through time tested methods of journalistic enquiry and open to interrogation if not held valid. But unfortunately, in contemporary India, this rarely is the case. Media, as the study seeks to show, frames very different narratives of the same event. The nature of framing a story, through the processes of production, representation and circulation, fundamentally structures the meaning of the story. Media derives its power and influence from this capacity to frame and shape opinion on issues in the public domain.

The present study takes its cue from this role of media as an agency of framing public opinion. It seeks to examine the *nature and significance* of current affairs programming in two 24x7 private national news channels, *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*, on wide range of social, political and cultural issues. This is done by critically looking into process and techniques of production and representation of current affairs programmes such as studio debates, panel discussions, audience talk shows and documentaries. One also looks at how such programmes are consumed by the audience, citizens of Indian democracy, and importantly, located in diverse social settings. By juxtaposing, the production, representation and consumption of media texts, an attempt is made to understand the nature of the mediated public discourse in contemporary India.

This chapter is divided into five parts. First, it maps the context and significance of the study. It provides the rationale for the study of television news in the hybrid media-system¹. Second, it maps the objectives and scope of the study. Third, it describes the methodological framework of the study. Fourth, it charts the reflections of the fieldwork undertaken for this study during the period of data collection and analysis. The last section provides an overview of the structure of the thesis.

¹ Chadwick (2013) describes a hybrid media system as one in which both older (print and broadcast) and newer (digital) forms of media are used by individuals, groups and communities for interaction, communication and mobilization.

Context and Significance of the Study

The context of the study is the changing media environment in contemporary India. The television sector is growing at an exponential rate. Many private and foreign television players like *NDTV 24x7*, *Times Now*, *India Today*, *Republic TV*, *Zee News*, *ABP News*, *Aaj Tak*, *BBC World*, *Al-Jazeera*, *CNN*, *Channel News Asia* have challenged the age-old monopoly of the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* and gained a strong foothold in the media business. According to the FICCI Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2019, the Indian television industry which was estimated at 660 billion rupees in 2017, reached 815 billion rupees in 2019². It is projected to reach 955 billion rupees by 2021 at a CAGR of 8.8%. The report also highlights that the advertising revenue which was at 668 billion rupees in 2017, reached a figure of 843 billion rupees in 2019 and was pegged to increase to 1042 billion rupees by 2021. Giving insights from the television news media sector in 2007, Mehta (2008) states, ‘in 1998, India’s first private 24-hour news channel came into existence, and by 2007, more than 300 satellite channels had started broadcasting news. Of these, 106 channels were in 14 regional languages and 54 of these were 24-hour news channels in 11 languages (ibid: 59). The Annual Report of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, states a figure of 866 private television channels (366 news channels and 500 non-news channels) that have permit to operate as of March 2018³.

The statistics indicate that the television industry is growing at a fast pace. Along with the rapid growth, the television space is also witnessing sweeping changes in content, practices technologies and modes of consumption. The entry of private players evokes question on the ownership, control and regulation of media organizations. Similarly, the convergence of different mediums of media- print, broadcasting and digital, resulting in a hybrid media system, evokes question of its impact on media production, representation and consumption. Social media

²For more on the report, read, [https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-a-billion-screens-of-opportunity/\\$FILE/EY-a-billion-screens-of-opportunity.pdf](https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-a-billion-screens-of-opportunity/$FILE/EY-a-billion-screens-of-opportunity.pdf), accessed 22 March, 2018.

³The latest list for the permitted number of satellite news channels is available at <https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Master%20List%20of%20Permitted%20Private%20statellite%20TV%20Channels%20as%20on%202031.10.2018.pdf>, accessed 21 April, 2018.

platforms like twitter, instagram, facebook, YouTube have been making inroads into news production. Tweets, videos and blogs are now part of news framing. Philipose (2019) opines that contemporary media public discourse on important events like- India Against Corruption Campaign of 2011, Delhi Gang Rape of 2012, Delhi Assembly Elections of 2013 and 2015 and the General Elections of 2014, is shaped through convergence of communication technologies and traditional media. She argues that 'between 2011-15, termed as the 'mediatised half decade', the country saw a simultaneous efflorescence of older media, comprising largely print and television, as well as the emergence of newer media, representing a *mélange* of communication technologies, interactive digital platforms, and communication modes and practices. Both categories were simultaneously attracting investments, market traction, and public involvement in this period. Older and newer media were not binaries, rather they converged together at various junctures and the consequent inter-media links thus went on to transform public culture in decisive ways' (ibid: 6). Along with the convergence of diverse media technologies, transformation is also being witnessed in the content policy of news media. A major chunk of news programming is no longer on a one way dissemination of information. The focus is more on debates and discussions on issues that have recently occurred or make headlines through the day.

Besides, economic, technological and organizational factors, social and political factors also influence the functioning of media. A glimpse into the history of India media illustrates how communications have always been shaped by dominant policy orientations. Indian media has changed with the changing political landscape. From a state controlled media in the Nehruvian era (Chatterjee 1991; Mitra: 1993; Ninan: 1995; Singhal and Rogers 1989), to the emergence of private media in the nineties (Butcher: 2003; Mazarella: 2003; Mehta 2008; Page and Crawley 2001, Thussu: 2007a), to being a collaborator in the right-wing ascendancy in 2014 (Chadha and Bhat: 2019; Chaudhuri: 2017; Udupa: 2015b) Indian media has unfortunately molded itself, with a few exceptions, to the existing political exigencies. Moreover, the complex interactions between media and other social institutions of family, caste, religion, gender, community, also evoke questions of mediated representation and constructions, and its influence on social relations in contemporary society. Amidst such transformatory changes, a re-look at the

conventional role of television news media, especially private news media, as an agency for framing opinion, is warranted.

Within the television news media space, the study looks into the process of framing public discourse by two private national news channels, *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*. This is done by specifically looking into the nature and significance of the current affairs format of news programming. Consisting of studio debates, panel discussions, documentaries and interviews, this apparently dialogical mode of communication has become a pervasive feature across news channels. The news cycle has made a radical shift from the predominantly one way dissemination of information to an interactive format where the focus is to analyze, investigate and explore the *why*, *how* and *what* of such everyday events and occurrences. The current affairs format of news programming is one where news commentators debate, discuss and analyze current events. One uses the terms ‘interactive’ and ‘dialogic’ with care for it often appears, and this is what this study seeks to examine, is that such discussions are framed, from certain ideological, political, cultural, religious perspective. This could be consistent with either their personal beliefs, or the organizational policies or their target audience. The influence of either one of these factors or amalgamation of more than one factor, gives rise to similar as well as dissimilar ‘discourses’ by different media networks.

As the focus of the study is to examine how news networks frame media discourse, an attempt is made to juxtapose the three components- production, representation and consumption of their media narratives, to understand how particular discourse (s) are produced. This study juxtaposes the three processes to understand the nuances of media discourse. A complete understanding of this process would not have been possible, if only one aspect was taken into account. This is because each of the three aspects of production, representation and consumption, work in tandem to produce narratives that impact the nature of discourse in society.

II

Objective, Scope and Limits of the Study

The objectives of the study flow from the questions that one addresses above and the basic methodological contention that a simultaneous examination of production, representation and

consumption is necessary to comprehend the ways that media operates in India today. Moving away from both a focus on texts alone or the political economy alone, one seeks here to contextualize the changing historical milieu within which the Indian media has traversed. It thus seeks to therefore look at both the larger historical context as well as the minute details that go into the actual framing of stories, representation of texts, and finally the way that audiences see and consume these programmes. Schematically put, the objectives are fourfold;

- To trace the history of the growth and transformation of Indian media in general, and television news media in particular.
- To understand and analyze the nuances of production and representation of texts in the select news channels.
- To examine the nature of consumption of the stated texts by diverse audience constituencies.
- To interpret and analyze the production, representation and consumption of the stated texts, within the broader understanding of the relationship between media and democracy.

One of the primary reasons for including news audience reception in the study was their continued absence as an area of research in media studies especially television news media. Thus, the focus of the study was to juxtapose the three processes of production, representation and consumption together to understand how they work in tandem to frame the media discourse. First, it is quite likely that such an attempt could be construed as ambitious and encompassing as it would fail to register the minute dynamics which could be unearthed by focusing on one aspect only. For instance in the case of the organizational study of *NDTV 24x7*, the field data threw up some interesting aspects of its newsroom culture, like the recruitment policy, star anchor culture etc. These issues provide scope for future in-depth newsroom research. I have however, dealt with these issues at a rudimentary level while tracing the journey of the network. Second, in case of the organization specific interviews in *NDTV* and *Aaj Tak*, the initial focus was to interview all those journalists who are associated with the news shows under study. However, it was not possible to get access to all of them. For instance, I could not get access to Sreenivasan Jain and Vikram Chandra at *NDTV 24x7*. Similarly, repeated text messages and emails to Anjana Om Kashyap, at *Aaj Tak* went in vain. Third, is the limited enquiry into the state broadcaster

Doordarshan. Although, the functioning of the state broadcaster is one of the key areas of the study, I did not interview any employee of the organization. The primary reason was the lack of access to them. Being a government organization, it required a more formal approach to take permission from the organization to interview its employees. However, the insights on *Doordarshan* mentioned in the study are drawn from secondary literature and from interview with journalists who were associated with the organization long time ago.

III

Methodology

Fieldwork for this descriptive study was conducted in Delhi and NOIDA (New Okhla Industrial Development Authority) as all the national television news channels have their national bureau in this region. Delhi is the national capital of India. It is also the political capital of India. According to the 2011 Census Report, the population of Delhi is 16,349,831, of which males are 8,750,834, (53.52%) and female are 7,598,997 (46.47%) respectively⁴. Noida is a part of the National Capital Region (NCR) of India. It came into existence on 17th April, 1976. It is a part of the Gautam Budh Nagar District of Uttar Pradesh. The population of NOIDA is 642381, of which male are 352577 (54.88%) and female are 289804 (45.11%) respectively⁵. In recent years, Noida has emerged as an important destination for many educational, medical, information⁶ technology, banking, insurance and real estate ventures. People have migrated from all over India to Noida in search of educational and employment opportunities.

Within Delhi and Noida, the fieldwork for *NDTV 24x7* was conducted in its head office in *Greater Kailash*, South Delhi. Similarly, the fieldwork for *Aaj Tak* was conducted in its head office in *Film City*, Noida. In case of news audience, the selected respondents were residents of Sector 21 and sector 28 in Noida and Chittaranjan Park, Greater Kailash and Munirka in Delhi. The fieldwork was undertaken over a period of 10 months from September 2016 to June 2017.

⁴Census of Delhi city, available at <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/metropolitan/50-delhi.html>, accessed 10 February, 2018.

⁵Census of Noida, available at http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-proresults/paper2/data_files/India2/Table_2_PR_Cities_1Lakh_and_Above.pdf, accessed 10 February, 2018.

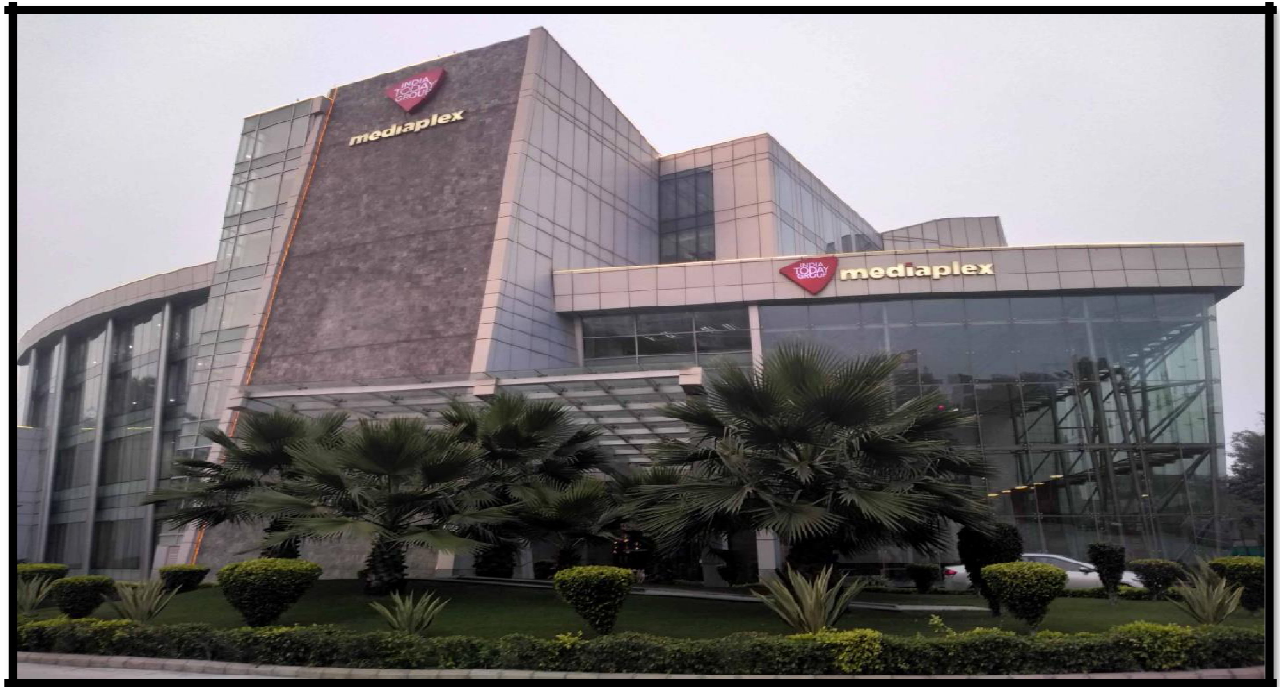
⁶These locations were not randomly selected. The respondents interviewed were selected through snowball sampling and they resided in these areas.

Figure 1: NDTV office at Greater Kailash, New Delhi



(Source: Image clicked by the Researcher)

Figure 2: India Today Mediaplex at Film City, Noida



(Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/technology/reviews/story/10-or-e-review-good-phone-but-design-is-boring-1070249-2017-10-24>)

The method of triangulation was undertaken for the collection of data. Trinagulation is broadly defined by Denzin (1978) as the ‘combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (ibid: 291). Accordingly, a mix of research techniques like semi-structured interview schedules, questionnaires and textual analysis were chosen for data collection⁷. The selection of research techniques was guided by the objectives of the study. This translated into dividing the process of data collection into four stages.

Table 1: Stages of the Field Study

Sl. No	Sample (nos)	Location	Research Technique
Stage 1	Journalists in Print, Broadcast and Digital Media(11)	New Delhi	Semi-structured Interview Schedule
Stage 2	Journalists and Media Professionals in <i>NDTV 24x7</i> and <i>Aaj Tak</i> (16)	New Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon	Semi-structured Interview Schedule
Stage 3	Current Affairs Programmes (1 month)	Noida	Textual Analysis
Stage 4	News Viewers (113) News Viewers (17)	New Delhi and Noida	Questionnaire Semi-structured Interview Schedule

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

First, the focus was to get a sense of the nature of the television news media in contemporary India. This was achieved by conducting in-depth interviews with a total of 11 respondents consisting of journalists and media owners who were based in the National Capital, New Delhi and have been associated with the profession for a long period of time. Besides, it was also important to talk to a mix of people who have been associated with different formats, namely, press, broadcast and digital mediums of news making. This provided insights into a how each medium is influencing and getting influenced by the others in a rapidly changing media ecosystem. Verbal permission was taken from each one of them for quoting them in the study.

The following table shows their names and affiliations.

⁷ Annexure I to IV are attached in the thesis.

Table 2: List of Journalists Interviewed in Print, Broadcast and Digital Platforms

Sl. No	Name	Designation
1.	Abhinandan Sekhri	Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer, <i>NewsLaundry</i>
2.	Chandan Mitra	Editor-in-Chief, <i>The Pioneer</i>
3.	Mrinal Pande	Former Chairperson <i>Prasar Bharti</i> and Former Editor, <i>Hindustan</i>
4.	Nalin Mehta	Consulting Editor, <i>The Times of India</i>
5.	Rajdeep Sardesai	Consulting Editor, <i>India Today</i>
6.	Sailaja Bajpai	Columnist, <i>Indian Express</i> ⁸
7.	Sevanti Ninan	Founder, <i>The Hoot</i>
8.	Sumit Awasthi	Deputy Managing Editor, <i>News18 India</i> ⁹
9.	Tathagata Satpathy	Ex- Member of Parliament Lok Sabha, (Biju Janta Dal) and Owner of <i>Dharitri</i> and <i>Odisha Post</i> ¹⁰
10.	Vinod Dua	Consulting Editor, <i>TheWire Hindi</i> ¹¹
11.	Zakka Jacob	Deputy News Editor, <i>CNN News18</i> ¹²

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

Second, the focus was on conducting interviews in the two sample news channels. The two channels selected for the study were *NDTV 24x7*(2003) and *Aaj Tak* (2000). The rationale

⁸ Sailaja Bajpai was interviewed on 29 September, 2016, while she was working at *Indian Express*. Currently, she is working in the digital news website *ThePrint*.

⁹ At the time of the interview, Sumit Awasthi worked as Deputy Managing Editor, *News18 India*. He quit *News18 India* in November 2018 and joined *ABP News* as Consulting Editor. Since the interview was conducted, when he was an employee of *News18*, I have retained his then designation in the thesis.

¹⁰ Tathagata Sathpathy was also a Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha from 2014-2019. He belonged to the Biju Janta Dal, a regional political outfit in Odisha.

¹¹ At the time of the interview, Vinod Dua worked as Consulting Editor, *TheWire Hindi*. He resigned from *TheWire* on account of a sexual harassment enquiry against him. At present he works at HW News Network, a digital news platform.

¹² Zakka Jacob is currently Editor-Output at *CNN-News18*. Since the interview was conducted, when he was a Deputy News Editor of *CNN-News18*, I have retained his then designation in the thesis.

for selecting the above mentioned channels were duration of operation, nature of content and language. Both the news channels have been operation for a fairly same amount of time. While *NDTV 24x7* was launched in 2003, *Aaj Tak* started its operation in 2000. Prior to these official launches, both the channels worked as independent production houses who commissioned shows for *Doordarshan*. The transition of both channels, from production houses to 24x7 news broadcaster also took place around the same time. The study maps the progression of both channels, as it offers insights into some of the key foundational strategies, policies and processes which eventually shaped their particular brand of journalism. The content policy of both the news channels was another important criteria for the selection of the two channels. Both the news channels offer a range of current affairs programs like panel discussions, studio debates, news documentaries, audience talk shows throughout the week. Since the study also intends to look at whether language plays a critical role in framing of media discourse, selection of two channels that have programming in different language, namely, Hindi and English, was important. Kumar (2019) suggests that English and Indian language media foster different subcultures of news which gives rise to different forms of news framing. While Indian language media has more power to foster social action and mass agitation, English language media is focused on buiding agendas and framing issues consequential to the elite power structure. Various studies have dealt with language and its relationship with aspects like- internal structure and work culture in newsrooms (Batabyal: 2012; Rao: 2010; Stahlberg: 2013); political mobilization (Kumar: 2011; Neyazi: 2018; Rajagopal: 2003), framing discourse (Parameswaran: 1997; Udupa: 2015b). These ideas have influenced the selection of two differing language news networks for the study. So, if *NDTV* is a 24x7 national English news channel, then *Aaj Tak* is a 24x7 national Hindi news channel. Thus, all these factors were clubbed together for the selection of the two news channels.

Within the two news organizations, the fieldwork was largely limited to interviewing journalists and other media professionals who were associated with the production and presentation of current affairs shows in both *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*. Before, proceeding further, a short note is presented on how a newsroom is structured¹³. A newsroom consists of reporters, cameramen, editors, managing editor and editor-in-chief who work together to gather

¹³Chapter 2 highlights some of the key sociological studies on newsroom structuring and routinization.

and broadcast news. It also has multiple departments or divisions like Editorial, Sales, Marketing and Human Resources, who are responsible for the smooth operation of a newsroom. Although the primary responsibility of creating news content lies with the Editorial team, other teams are also engaged in varying proportions towards producing the final content that goes onto the television screen. The editorial team is further split into two sections- News and Production. News is further split into input and output. Input or Assignment is responsible for assigning reporters, collecting/gathering news and collating it. Output is responsible for processing the incoming news and putting it on air. Output has various desks or teams that work under it. Thus, there exists a standard compartmentalization of new beats in news channels like- National Bureau¹⁴, Business¹⁵, Sports¹⁶, Entertainment¹⁷, Special Projects¹⁸ and Foreign Affairs¹⁹ that

¹⁴ National Bureau is the most vital team in any news organization. The journalists in this beat are political reporters who primarily report the political story of the day. The team keeps a tab on day to day functioning of the government, its ministries, government institutions etc. A major chunk of news also comes from reporting on happenings/occurrences in political parties across the country. The team also reports on the major happening of the day on issues like environment, health, education, crime, conflict and so on.

¹⁵ Business desk is entrusted with the task of providing news on the economic front. News concerning stock markets, foreign investment, financial institutions, national and global market and national and global economy etc figure in business reporting. In contemporary times, 24x7 business news channels like *CNBC TV18*, *CNBC Awaaz*, *ET Now*, *NDTV Profit*, *Zee Business*, *BTVI*, etc have emerged that cater primarily to a business specific segment of viewership.

¹⁶ Sports desk provides an everyday account of sporting action across the world. Sports journalists also cover important sports events like Olympics, Commonwealth games, Cricket leagues and domestic sporting events, offering on-site reporting.

¹⁷ Entertainment desk is responsible for providing news from the tinsel world. Film reviews, celebrity interviews, film promotion, soap operas, film awards are covered by journalists associated with this beat.

¹⁸ Special Projects is involved in producing special shows and documentaries. The shows involve a host of programs like studio discussions, audience shows, investigative reporting, feature stories and documentaries. Special projects, criss-cross, among the above listed teams. Journalists associated with a particular beat work on special projects too. For example, during elections, journalists working with the national bureau often travel to the states where elections are scheduled and do onsite reporting. Similarly, if there is any mega sports event scheduled, then journalists working with the sports desk produce special sports shows in addition to the regular bulletin. In my study, shows like *India Matters*, *Truth vs Hype*, *We the People*, *The Big Fight* aired on *NDTV 24x7* are classified as special projects. Similarly, shows like *Adhbhut*, *Awishwasneyan*, *Ajalpaniye*, *Vande Mataram*, *Swet Patra* aired on *Aaj Tak* are categorized as special projects.

¹⁹ Foreign Affairs desk is responsible for providing news relating to the international diplomatic affairs of countries across the world. The focus is primarily on India and its bilateral relations with other nations in the international forum. During the tenure of the previous government, journalists covering foreign affairs use to accompany the

work round the clock in a 24x7 news cycle. In the Indian context, the demand of a 24x7 news cycle has resulted in the evolution of these desks that cater to a specific kind of news content. The segmentation of content is visible in the functioning of various kinds of teams that are involved in creating news content. However, the sense one gets from the field is that the roles outlined are not water-tight and overlaps are the norm of the day.

Semi-structured interview schedules were prepared for collecting data. The interviews with 15 journalists and other newsroom professionals centered on issues like- need of opinion shows, relevance of their show, the production of the show (namely-selection of topic, selection of guest panel, research about the topic, influence of social media on content), their target audience, editorial stance of the channel on issues debated, relationship between ownership and editorial decisions. As both the news channels started initially as production houses, semi-structured interviews were conducted with few of the former employees in the channel to trace the history of the channel and the get an account of the emerging television news space in the early years. All the interviews were transcribed for the purpose of analysis.

Table 3: List of Present and Former Employees Interviewed in NDTV 24x7 and Aaj Tak

Sl.No	NDTV 24x7	Aaj Tak
1.	Nidhi Razdan, Executive Editor and Anchor, <i>Left, Right and Centre</i>	Mrityunjy Jha, Former Employee
2.	Radhika Bordia Anchor, <i>India Matters</i>	Punya Prasun Bajpai, ²⁰ Executive Editor and Anchor, <i>Dustak</i>
3.	Sandeep Bhushan, Former Employee	Rahul Kanwal, News Director
4.	Shivraj Parshad , Former Employee	Sanjay Bragta, ²¹ Head, Input
5.	Sunetra Choudhury, ²² Anchor, <i>Agenda</i>	Sweta Singh, Executive Editor and

Prime Minister during his/her visit to other nations. However, this practice has been severely curtailed under the current regime. Now only reporters working for the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* are allowed to accompany the Prime Minister on state visits.

²⁰Punya Prasun Bajpai quit *Aaj Tak* in 2018.

²¹Sanjay Bragta has quit *Aaj Tak*.

²²Sunetra Choudhary quit *NDTV* in May, 2019. She is presently National Political Editor, *Hindustan Times*.

		Anchor, <i>Khabardaar</i>
6.	Sonia Singh, Editorial Director and Anchor, <i>NDTV Dialogues</i>	Qamar Waheed Naqvi, Former Employee
7.	Team Member ²³ , <i>The Big Fight</i>	Team Member, Outreach and Guest Management
8.	Team Member, Audience Research Cell	-

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

The next step was the selection of the current affairs shows in the two channels. The aspect of framing of discourse is examined through the textual analysis of the current affairs shows aired by the two news channels. Textual analysis is a method of analysis which closely examines the content and meaning of written or visual matter in television, newspapers, magazines, blogs etc. In this study, texts refer to studio debates, news documentaries, and talk shows which report and debate on contemporary issues. Thus, in *NDTV 24x7*, shows like *Agenda*, *We the People*, *Left, Right and Centre*, *The Big Fight*, *India Matters*, *Truth vs Hype* and *Reality Check* and in *Aaj Tak* shows like *Dustak*, *Khabardaar* and *Halla Bol* were identified as the key texts for analysis²⁴. The texts were aired on both the news channels from 27th May 2017 to 26th June 2017. This led to 31 days of viewing data. The channels were viewed on alternative days resulting in 16 days of viewing *NDTV 24x7* and 15 days of *Aaj Tak*.

Table 4: List of Shows Aired on *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak* during the period 26th May-27th June, 2017

	<i>NDTV 24x7</i>	<i>Aaj Tak</i>
Talk Show	<i>The Big Fight</i> (Sat: 8.00-9.00pm), <i>We The People</i> (Sun: 8.00-9.00pm) <i>Agenda</i> (Mon-Fri: 7.00-7.30pm)	-
Studio Debate	<i>Left, Right & Centre</i> (Mon-Thurs: 9.00-10.00pm)	<i>Halla Bol</i> (all days: 6.00-7.00pm)

²³ As requested, the names of the team members, has not been disclosed.

²⁴ Textual analysis was undertaken in May-June 2017. At that time the shows that were televised were selected for the study. Currently, some of these shows are not on air. In some cases, the timings of the shows have also changed.

	<i>NDTV Dialogues</i> (Sun: 9.30-10.30pm)	
	<i>The Buck Stops Here</i> (Mon-Fri: 9.00-10.00pm)	
News Documentary	<i>India Matters</i> (Fri: 10.30-11.00pm), <i>Truth vs Hype</i> (Sun: 7.30-8.00pm)	<i>Khabardaar</i> (all days: 9.00-10.00pm) <i>Dustak</i> (all days:10.00-10.30 pm)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

The next table provides a list of the topics that were aired in the above selected shows.

Table 5: List of the Topics Aired on *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak* during the period 26th May-27th June, 2017

Sl.No	Name of Channel	Topic of the Show
1.	<i>NDTV 24x7</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Is the Army getting Politicized?’²⁵ - Aired on <i>The Big Fight</i> on 27th May, 2017 • ‘The Curse of caste?’²⁶ - Aired on <i>We The People</i> on 28th May, 2017 • ‘PM Modi’s Europe Outreach’²⁷ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 30th May, 2017 • Cattle Ban: Bending the Rules?’²⁸ - Aired on <i>Reality Check</i> on 30th May, 2017 • ‘Violence at IIT Madras: Is Beef the new campus flashpoint?’²⁹ - Aired on <i>The Buck Stops Here</i> on 30th May, 2017.

²⁵The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/the-big-fight/the-big-fight-is-the-army-getting-politicised-458386>, accessed 28 May, 2017.

²⁶ The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/we-the-people/we-the-people-the-curse-of-caste-458461>, accessed 29 May, 2017.

²⁷ The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/left-right-centre/pm-s-big-europe-tour-india-emerging-as-important-partner-for-europe-458670>, accessed 31 May, 2017.

²⁸ The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/shows/reality-check/ndtv-exclusive-did-government-misinterpret-the-supreme-court-order-458673>, accessed 31 May, 2017.

²⁹ The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/the-buck-stops-here/violence-at-iit-madras-is-beef-the-new-campus-flashpoint-458681>, accessed 31 May, 2017.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Political ramifications of Babri Masjid chargesheet?’³⁰ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Center</i> on 30th May, 2017 • ‘Will Beef Politics hurt BJP politically?’³¹ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 1st June, 2017. • ‘Is RTI being choked?’³² - Aired on <i>Agenda</i> on 1st June, 2017. • ‘After US Pullout from Paris Accord, Will Climate Change Fight Unravel?’³³ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Center</i> on 2nd June, 2017. • ‘Holy Cow, Unholy Politics?’³⁴ - Aired on <i>The Big Fight</i> on 3rd June, 2017 • ‘Cattle Ban: Behind the Numbers’³⁵ - Aired on <i>Truth vs Hype</i> on 3rd June, 2017 • ‘Beef and Bone of Contention’³⁶ - Aired on <i>We The People</i> on 4th June, 2017. • ‘Exam Scam: Bihar and Beyond’³⁷ - Aired on <i>Agenda</i> on 5th June, 2017. • ‘#bihartopperscam: Nitish Government in dock?’³⁸ - Aired on <i>The Buck Stops Here</i> on 5th June, 2017 • ‘Gurugram Shocker: No Country for Women’³⁹ - Aired on <i>Agenda</i> on 7th June, 2017.
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30 The episode is available at <https://www.INDTV.com/video/news/left-right-centre/will-babri-demolition-case-help-or-hurt-the-bjp-458656>, accessed 31 May, 2017.

31 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=htC9Fve0z1Y>, accessed 2 June, 2017

32 The episode is available at <https://www.INDTV.com/video/shows/agenda/is-rti-being-choked-460258>, accessed 16 June, 2017.

33 The episode is available at <https://www.INDTV.com/video/news/left-right-centre/after-us-pullout-of-paris-pact-will-climate-change-fight-unravel-458886>, accessed 2 June, 2017

34 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=duGvoSvoIus>, accessed 4 June, 2017.

35 The episode is available at <https://www.INDTV.com/video/news/truth-vs-hype/truth-vs-hype-myth-of-missing-cattle-459078>, accessed 4 June, 2017.

36 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=Tq0KEQtFqGg>, accessed 5 June, 2017.

37 The episode is available at <https://www.INDTV.com/video/shows/agenda/bihar-and-the-big-class-12-exam-scam-459239>, accessed 6 June, 2017.

38 The episode is available at <https://www.INDTV.com/video/news/the-buck-stops-here/bihar-topper-scam-resurfaces-nitish-kumar-government-in-the-dock-459260>, accessed 6 June, 2017.

39 The episode is available at <https://www.INDTV.com/video/shows/agenda/Gurugram-shocker-no-country-for-women-459476>, accessed 8 June, 2017.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Why Haryana’s school girls are on strike?’⁴⁰ - Aired on <i>Reality Check</i> on 7th June, 2017. • ‘Farmer unrest: Minimum support, maximum rhetoric?’⁴¹ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 7th June, 2017 • ‘Farmers in Distress: Politics at Play?’⁴² - Aired on <i>The Buck Stops Here</i> on 7th June, 2017. • ‘Weapon of war: The Women of Bastar’⁴³ - Aired on <i>India Matters</i> on 8th June, 2017. • ‘Jobless Growth: The New Normal?’⁴⁴ - Aired on <i>The Big Fight</i> on 10th June, 2017. • ‘The Unquiet Fields: Farmer Protest from Maharashtra to MP’⁴⁵ - Aired on <i>Truth vs Hype</i> on 11th June, 2017. • ‘Rajasthan text book row: Distorting History?’⁴⁶ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 12th June, 2017. • ‘Selective outrage over films on JNU and Kashmir?’⁴⁷ - Aired on <i>The Buck Stops Here</i> on 13th June, 2017. • ‘Farmer Distress: Political Opportunism?’⁴⁸ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 13th June, 2017. • ‘Hyper-nationalism growing: 65 former officers write open letter’⁴⁹ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 14th June, 2017
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40 The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/shows/reality-check/why-haryana-s-schoolgirls-are-on-strike-459504>, accessed 8 June, 2017.

41 The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/left-right-centre/farmer-distress-biggest-challenge-for-the-bjp-459499>, accessed 8 June, 2017.

42 The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/the-buck-stops-here/farmers-in-distress-politics-at-play-459509>, accessed 8 June, 2017.

43 The episode is available at https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=zv_xqHiN1Dk, accessed 9 June, 2017.

44 The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/the-big-fight/the-big-fight-high-on-growth-low-on-jobs-459792>, accessed 11 June, 2017.

45 The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/truth-vs-hype/truth-vs-hype-farmers-protests-unquiet-fields-459793>, accessed 12 June, 2017.

46 The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/left-right-centre/rajasthan-textbooks-row-distorting-history-459947>, accessed 13 June, 2017.

47 The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/left-right-centre/selective-outrage-over-films-on-jnu-kashmir-460053>, accessed 14 June, 2017.

48 The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/left-right-centre/farmer-distress-political-opportunism-460052>, accessed 14 June, 2017.

49 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=mInSLpQzRgU>, accessed 15 June, 2017.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘No meat, pure thought’: Ayush Ministry Pregnancy Advice,⁵⁰ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 14th June, 2017 • ‘Didigiri in Darjeeling: GJM crisis mishandled by TMC?’,⁵¹ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Center</i> on 15th June, 2017. • ‘Where are the Jobs? NITI Aayog’s Amitabh Kant on India’s missing jobs’,⁵² - Aired on <i>Truth vs. Hype</i> on 17th June, 2017. • ‘Only 9 % women entrepreneurs: Are startups ignoring women?’,⁵³ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 20th June, 2017. • ‘Maharashtra Handout: The Note ban hurdle’,⁵⁴ - Aired on <i>Reality Check</i> on 20th June, 2017. • ‘First ‘real’ Dalit President?’,⁵⁵ - Aired on <i>Agenda</i> on 20th June, 2017. • ‘Race to Raisina: Dalit Duel’,⁵⁶ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 22nd June, 2017. • ‘Policeman beaten to death by mob: Can Delhi delay talks anymore?’,⁵⁷ - Aired on <i>Left, Right and Centre</i> on 23rd June, 2017. • ‘Gorkhaland: Mountain Echo’,⁵⁸ - Aired on <i>We The People</i> on 25th June, 2017
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50 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=tJymu3Dgc8I>, accessed 15 June, 2017.

51 The episode is available at <https://www.NDTV.com/video/news/left-right-centre/didigiri-in-darjeeling-460269>, accessed 16 June, 2017.

52 The episode is available at <https://www.NDTV.com/video/news/truth-vs-hype/truth-vs-hype-special-edition-amitabh-kant-on-india-s-jobs-challenge-460438>, accessed 18 June, 2017.

53 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=DTOINsg2Ims>, accessed 21 June, 2017.

54 The episode is available at <https://www.NDTV.com/video/shows/reality-check/maharashtra-handout-the-notes-ban-hurdle-460716>, accessed 21 June, 2017.

55 The episode is available at https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=v7T_cps562k, accessed 21 June, 2017.

56 The episode is available at <https://special.NDTV.com/indian-presidential-election-2017-18/video-detail/presidential-election-turns-dalit-duel-tokenism-for-presidents-post-460917>, accessed 20 June, 2017.

57 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=g6Fqr-KCWAc>, accessed 24 June, 2017.

58 The episode is available at <https://www.NDTV.com/video/news/we-the-people/we-the-people-gorkhaland-pipe-dream-or-can-it-be-a-reality-461172>, accessed 26 June, 2017.

2.	<i>Aaj Tak</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Virod ke naam pe Gauvadh!’⁵⁹ - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 29th May, 2017. • ‘Aathank Par Prahar, Panch hai Tayaar’⁶⁰ - Aired on <i>Khabaraar</i> on 29th May, 2017. • ‘Siyasi pashu ya rashtriya pashu?’⁶¹ - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 31st May, 2017. • ‘Kaise Padhega Bihar?’⁶² (Intermediate Results of Bihar Board)- Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 1st June, 2017 • ‘Gaukashi, Beef Karobar aur Siyasat’⁶³ - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 2nd June, 2017. • ‘Patharbazon se pyar, Army Chief par vaar’⁶⁴ (Partha Chatterjee’s article) – Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 6th June, 2017. • ‘Kab aayenge kisano ke acche din?’⁶⁵ –Aired on <i>Dustak</i> on 6th June, 2017 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘POK: Bharat ka lalkar’⁶⁶ - Aired on <i>Khabardaar</i> on 8th June, 2017 • ‘Zameen Kisan Ki, Kheti Siyasatdan Ki’⁶⁷ - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 8th June, 2017. • ‘Na koi sarkar, na koi policy, phir bhi kaha ‘annadata bhavo’⁶⁸ – Aired on <i>Dustak</i> on 8th June, 2017.
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59 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=bpCCmH3c1OE>, accessed 30 May, 2017.

60 The episode is available at <https://aajtak.intoday.in/karyakram/video/strikes-on-terrorism-five-are-ready-1-932193.html>, accessed 30 May, 2017.

61 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=r34iQOKS3Ok>, accessed 1 June, 2017.

62 The episode is available at <http://aajtak.intoday.in/karyakram/video/hallabol-episode-on-1st-june-over-bihar-board-result-1-932854.html>, accessed 2 June, 2017.

63 The episode is available at <https://aajtak.intoday.in/karyakram/video/hallabol-episode-on-2nd-june-over-beef-ban-and-politics-in-india-1-933041.html>, accessed 3 June, 2017.

64 This episode is available at <http://aajtak.intoday.in/karyakram/video/halla-bol-06-june-2017-on-partha-chatterjee-army-cheif-dwyer-controversy-1-933811.html>, aired on *Halla Bol* on *Aaj Tak* on 6 June, 2017, accessed 10th June, 2017.

65 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=ZpPtAMD-t84&list=PLdDfg3olNpNLe5-BUdFyw3g5hVSLmXnbz&index=90&t=0s>, accessed 7 June, 2017.

66 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=0Y2rjW8GMuk>, accessed 9 June, 2017.

67 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=pd36kb9adA8>, accessed 9 June, 2017.

68 The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=Cv95pxO3x6c&list=PLdDfg3olNpNLe5-BUdFyw3g5hVSLmXnbz&index=88&t=0s>, accessed 9 June, 2017.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Rajya dar rajya sulagti andolan ki chingari!’⁶⁹ - Aired on <i>Dustak</i> on 12th June, 2017 • ‘Sena Par Sadak Chap Siyasat!’⁷⁰(Congress leader Sandeep Dixit’s comments on Army chief)- Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 12th June, 2017 • ‘Kisano ki maut aur akaadon ka khel’⁷¹ - Aired on <i>Dustak</i> on 14th June, 2017 • ‘Salman ko vivad pasand hai’⁷² - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 15th June, 2017. • ‘Darjeeling hinsa’⁷³ - Aired on <i>Khabardaar</i> on 15th June, 2017 • ‘AAP par vaar, CBI Hathyaar’⁷⁴ - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 16th June, 2017 • ‘Mahanama ki khoj’⁷⁵ - Aired on <i>Dustak</i> on 19th June, 2017 • ‘Pakistan ki jeet, deshdrohi ki ‘id’!’⁷⁶ - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 19th June, 2017. • ‘Seila tayaar, mandir ka intezaar!’⁷⁷ - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 21st June, 2017 • ‘Ram vs Meira’⁷⁸ - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 22nd June, 2017. • ‘Jaat hi pucho neta ki!’⁷⁹- Aired on <i>Dustak</i> on 22nd June, 2017
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⁶⁹ The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=oHOMKgUCZ6w&list=PLdDfg3olNpNLe5-BUdFyw3g5hVSLmXnbz&index=87&t=0s>, accessed 13 June, 2017.

⁷⁰This episode <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=mEAj7azSvo4>, was aired on the show *Halla Bol* on *Aaj Tak* on 12 June, 2017.

⁷¹ The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=BUEI9STaR8M&list=PLdDfg3olNpNLe5-BUdFyw3g5hVSLmXnbz&index=85&t=0s>, accessed 15 June, 2017.

⁷²The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=G6WSHzC2aA0>, accessed 15 June, 2017.

⁷³ The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=eW6CXcn5zrg>, accessed 16 June, 2017.

⁷⁴ The episode is available at <https://aajtak.intoday.in/karyakram/video/hallabol-episode-on-16-june-over-cbi-attack-on-aap-1-935849.html>, accessed 17 June, 2017.

⁷⁵ The episode is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNPkqqk_6-I, accessed 20 June, 2017.

⁷⁶ The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=wEl7YjB3nxU>, accessed 20 June, 2017.

⁷⁷The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=2GAH2iZ-fN4>, accessed 22 June, 2017.

⁷⁸The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=CkMCNjewYbc>, accessed 23 June, 2017.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Jab khuni bheed ne DSP Ayub ki hatya kar di’⁸⁰ - Aired on <i>Halla Bol</i> on 23rd June, 2017.
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(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

Lastly, the focus was on collecting data from news audience. The primary focus was on the selection of respondents who are regular viewers of news channels. This aspect was met with by selecting respondents who watched the selected news channels *NDTV24x7* and *AajTak* at least four or more times in a week (frequency) and at least one hour daily (duration). As a part of the study is focused on understanding the viewers interpretation of discourses on news channel in general and the two sample news channels *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak* in particular, effort was put in to identify those viewers who watched and were aware of the different kinds of discourse that news channels offer. For selecting such a sample, the technique of purposive snowball sampling appeared most appropriate. But here again the focus was on selecting a sample which was represented of diverse identities of age, sex, income, occupation, caste and religion. This was important, as previous research highlights, how such social locations, impinge the values, beliefs, life experiences which culminate together to influence the interpretation of media messages (Abu-Lughod: 2005; Morley and Brunson: 1999; Gillespie: 1995; Liebes and Katz: 1993).

The process of data collection was undertaken by using two research tools- Questionnaire and Interview Schedule⁸¹. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part I comprised of questions that mapped the social composition of the respondents. Part II comprised of questions on issues confronting the contemporary television news media. Responses of various aspects of news media like- corporate-media, regulation, relevance of state broadcaster *Doordarshan*, television rating points, content policy of news channels, media and government relations, social media etc. were collected. A total of 117 questionnaires were administered out of which 4 were

⁷⁹ The episode is available at https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=WNPkqgk_6-I&list=PLdDfg3olNpNLe5-BUdFyw3g5hVSLmXnbz&index=81&t=0s, accessed 23 June, 2017.

⁸⁰ The episode is available at <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=Z2ZtHgfnUE>, accessed 24 June, 2017.

⁸¹ The questionnaire and interview schedules are attached in the annexure.

invalid. Thus, data from the rest 113 questionnaires was used in the study. While the questionnaire was used to collect information about news channels in general, the interview schedule was used to collect channel specific data. A total of 17 respondents were interviewed, out of which 9 viewed *NDTV 24x7* and 8 viewed *Aaj Tak*. All the 17 respondents were asked to watch one episode from the selected shows on both the channels. Their responses on issues like relevance of the theme being aired, the nature of debate, opinion about the anchor, the panelists, presentation, impact on opinion formation, editorial positioning of the concerned channel on the theme being aired and suggestions for the channel concerned. These detailed responses helped in bringing forth the audience perspective on each issue of production, representation and consumption of the programmes aired on both the channels.

The following tables 5 and 6 highlight the social composition of both kind of news viewers, first those who were administered the questionnaire and second those who were interviewed.

Table 6: Social Composition of Viewers (Questionnaire)

Sl.No	Items	Categories	Total (113)
1.	Age	< 20	7
		21-40	65
		41-60	31
		>60	10
2.	Sex	Female	56
		Male	57
		Others	0
3.	Qualification	Matriculation	1
		Higher Secondary	3
		Graduation	50
		Post-Graduation	48
		Others	12
4.	Occupation	Student	31
		Homemaker	7
		Professional	61
		Retired	6
		Others	8
5.	Monthly Income	0	20
		<20,000	13
		21,000-40,000	21

		41,000-60,000	28
		61,000-80,0000	8
		>80,000	23
6.	Religion	Hindu	95
		Muslim	2
		Sikh	2
		Christian	7
		Others	2
		Not Applicable	5
7.	Caste	General	104
		OBC	2
		ST	2
		SC	1
		Not Applicable	4

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

In terms of age, the category 21-40 had the highest number of respondents. This was followed by 31 respondents in the 41-60 category, 10 in the above 60 category and 7 under the 20 category. The distribution of the respondents in terms of sex was almost equal with 57 male respondents and 56 female respondents. In terms of qualification, the sample consisted of 50 Graduates, 48 Post Graduates, 12 Others, 3 Higher Secondary and 1 Matriculation. On the occupational front, 61 respondents worked as professionals. This was followed by 31 students, 7 Homemakers, 6 Retired and 8 others. The income bracket 41,000-60,000 had the highest number of respondents at 28, followed by 23 respondents in the above 80,000 category. 21 respondents belonged to the 21,000-40,000 category, followed by 20 with zero income, 13 with less than 20 and 6 in the 61,000-80,000 income bracket. An overwhelming majority of the respondents i.e 95 were Hindus. This was followed by 7 Christian respondents and 2 Muslim and Sikh respondents. While 2 respondents chose the others category, 5 did not want to disclose their religious identity. Data on caste categorization points out that 104 respondents belonged to the general category. 2 respondents belonged to the OBC and SC category respectively. The survey had 1 ST respondents and 4 other respondents who preferred not to disclose their caste identity.

Table 7: Social Composition of Viewers (Interview Schedule)

Sl.No	Items	Categories	Total (17)
1.	Age	< 20	0
		21-40	11
		41-60	4
		>60	2
2.	Sex	Female	5
		Male	12
		Others	0
3.	Qualification	Matriculation	0
		Higher Secondary	0
		Graduation	6
		Post-Graduation	11
		Others	0
4.	Occupation	Student	1
		Homemaker	2
		Professional	13
		Retired	1
		Others	0
5.	Monthly Income	0	3
		<20,000	0
		21,000-40,000	2
		41,000-60,000	7
		61,000-80,0000	4
		>80,000	1
6.	Religion	Hindu	17
		Muslim	0
		Sikh	0
		Christian	0
		Others	0
		Not Applicable	0
7.	Caste	General	17
		OBC	0
		ST	0
		SC	0
		Not Applicable	0

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

A total of 17 respondents were interviewed. Their category-wise classification is as follows. The category 21-40 had the highest number of respondents at 11. This was followed by

4 respondents in the 41-60 category, 2 in the above 60 category. There was no respondent in the under the 20 category. The distribution of the respondents in terms of sex was 12 males 5 females In terms of qualification, the sample consisted of 11 Post Graduates and 6 Graduates only. On the occupational front, 13 respondents worked as professionals. This was followed by 2 Homemakers, 1 Retired and 1 Student. The income bracket 41,000-60,000 had the highest number of respondents at 7, followed by 4 respondents in the 61,000-80,000 category. 2 respondents belonged to the 21,000-40,000 category, followed by only 1 respondent in the above 80,000 income bracket. All the 17 respondents were Hindus. Similarly, data on caste categorization points out that all respondents belonged to the general category.

In the next section, I describe my experiences from the field.

IV

Reflections from the Field

Working on media has been a challenge, especially in terms of getting access to news organizations. A quick glance at some of the organizational studies on Indian media (Batabyal: 2012; Bhushan: 2019; Udupa: 2015b) reveals that journalists, who later turned into academics, have conducted them. These journalists were better placed in terms of undertaking studies of such nature due to their previous association with the industry. Some of their insights reflected their personal experience and understanding of how the media industry operates. Their professional networks and ties also helped them in accessing informants.

I was definitely lacking on this front. My only identity was a Researcher from Jawaharlal Nehru University. However, I was lucky enough to have family members and friends working in the media sector. This helped in gaining access to news organizations and conduct interviews. I feel that a study which requires organizational access, knowing people who work in that organization or similar organization helps tremendously. It is also quite fruitful to ask the respondents to suggest people who would be interested in contributing their thoughts to the ongoing research. The snowballing technique (accessing informants through contact provided by other informants) helps in forming a database of people, whom one could interview. Traditionally, snowballing sampling has been employed in studying population who are difficult

to reach or hidden (Atkinson and Flint: 2001, cited in Waters: 2015), or where information to be collected is sensitive (Biernacki and Waldorf: 1981, cited in Waters: 2015). In case of my study, the sample was neither hidden nor was I looking for sensitive information. But, working on media necessitated the use of ties and networks from accessing journalists. Snowball sampling was the most appropriate technique for accessing journalists, who would be willing to invest their time in share insights on the state of contemporary media. That being said, the important thing to keep in mind is, access does not always guarantee a thorough interview. I recollect an incident when I went to interview Rahul Kanwal, News Director, *Aaj Tak*. At the start of the interview, he asked me to show him the list of questions. He also informed that, I should wind up the interview in 15 minutes as he had to record a show. In such situations, the Researcher is completely at the mercy of the informants. Similarly, I had the same experience with journalist Nidhi Razdan from *NDTV 24x7*. I pursued her for over a period of 45 days for an interview. She finally agreed to give me an interview on phone and for 15 minutes! However, such instances can be limited to studies where the person being interviewed is indispensable (in my case, I had to interview Rahul Kanwal as he was the News Director of *Aaj Tak* and Nidhi Razdan, was Executive Editor, *NDTV 24x7*. Both are associated with prime time debate shows on their respective news channels). I also experienced a situation, where even access did not yield any result. This happened with a senior employee of *Aaj Tak* When I initially contacted him, his office got back to me saying that he would first, like to take a look at the questions. Accordingly, I mailed him the questions. But subsequently, there was no response from his side. Constant reminders went unanswered. These experiences highlight how difficult it is getting access to journalists and media professionals.

In my case, the question of indispensability took a backseat during my audience study, where, I came across two respondents who seemed rather disinterested in talking to me. There, I had the option to replace them with other audience respondents. Along with respondents who set the time frame for the interview, there were also some respondents who had a tendency to go off the track. I remember interviewing Qamar Naqvi, former employee, *Aaj Tak* for over two hours and 15 minutes. In such situations, it is important to intervene and get the interview back on track. However, there can be occasions when some new insights emerge from random discussions. I feel, in such situations, it is the interviewer who is the best judge of what is

relevant or irrelevant information. I would also like to point out how technology is increasingly playing a crucial role in contemporary research. I believe that technological access is changing the way fieldwork is being done, especially in areas like media studies. As mentioned before, I recorded a semi-structured interview on phone. Although it was a one off instance, it alters the sociological understanding of how semi-structured interviews ought to be conducted (Vogl: 2013). It obliterates the need of a face to face interaction. This omission then, does not allow the interviewer to ‘actively interview’,⁸² (Holstein and Gubrium: 1997, cited in Marvasti 2004: 29), resulting in the failure to capture dynamics like-location of the interview, process of physical access, observing the body language of the respondent, etc. However, in my case, all my organizational interviews were conducted in the offices of *NDTV* and *Aaj Tak*.

My fieldwork allowed me an opportunity to visit the newsrooms of both the news channels. The multistory head office of *Aaj Tak* is located within the *India Today Mediplex* in Film City, Noida. It is a very spacious building where all the departments of TV Today Network are located. I was informed that the newsrooms of *India Today* and *Aaj Tak* are in the second floor and the *India Today* magazine office is in the third floor. The security at the entry gate jotted down information about the person to meet and their telephone number and issued a visiting card. The visiting card allowed access only to the ground floor and the cafeteria. One enters the building through huge glass doors. On the left are the gates used by employees who swipe their cards to go inside. The reception is on the left. Guests are asked to wait in the reception area. There are neatly arranged chairs and an arm chair with massager in one corner. On one side of the glass building the following words are written in multi-colour fonts- ‘To Enlighten, Empower and Excite Minds’. Three of my interviews took place in the lounge area and two inside the newsroom. The *NDTV* office is located on the top floor of Archana Shopping Complex in Greater Kailash, New Delhi. *NDTV* office is much more cluttered. The newsroom is much smaller in comparison to *Aaj Tak*. As you enter the office there is a collection point for old clothes, shoes and blankets. As I went up to the reception, I was asked to fill my details on a computer desktop. Two of my interviews were conducted in the waiting room next to the reception. Along with the *India Today* and *Outlook* magazines, I was surprised to spot an issue of

⁸² According to Holstein and Gubrium, the interview is a social occasion, or an event, in its own right whereby Researchers and respondents jointly create social reality through interaction. Interview participants are practitioners of everyday life, constantly working to discern and communicate the recognizable and the orderly features of their experience’ (Holstein and Gubrium cited in Marvasti 2004: 29).

Economic and Political Weekly, in a news office. Two interviews took place in this room. The rest of the interviews were conducted in the newsroom. The newsroom consisted of small cabins in the mezzanine floor. As I waited for my respondents in a small cabin, I could hear constant buzz of words, ‘cut to live’, ‘breaking news’, ‘get a phono’. Conducting interviews in such a setting, allowed me to experience, as commonly referred to in journalistic circle ‘the madness of newsrooms.

Online videos are also useful in instances where one cannot access a particular journalist. It happened with me in the case of Siddharth Vardarajan, Founder, *TheWire*. I wanted to interview him as he had the experience of working in both print and digital media. Although, I could not interview him, I could access his public lectures on YouTube. These videos were extremely helpful in understanding his views on contemporary media. I had the same experienced while conducting interviews with news audience. Some of my respondents asked me to send them links of the shows which they could watch during their leisure hours and then respond to my questions.

There were also other advantages of getting access to shows on YouTube. It helped me analyzing the discussion on similar topics, like ‘Presidential Elections’, ‘Darjeeling Statehood Agitation’, ‘Farmer Protests’, ‘Bihar Education Scam’ etc (these were some of the major issues that made headlines during the period of the study), on both channels as it was not possible to follow discussion on both channels simultaneously. This helped in a comparative analysis of the themes that emerged from the textual analysis of the shows. One of the research tools used in the study was questionnaire. While questionnaire helped me in covering more number of respondents and get a sense of trends on some issues, it definitely had its limitations. I feel that while using a questionnaire, an interviewer is completely at the mercy of his/her respondents. This is because their responses are based on how they interpret the given questions. In my case, every questionnaire had a short note on the rationale of the study and instructions on filling the questionnaire. Yet, I came across a few questionnaires which were not filled correctly, especially those that required ranking of news watching preferences on ordinal scales. I had to discard those questionnaires as they did not provide proper data. Besides, questionnaires do not provide the leverage of understanding feelings and perceptions of respondents on issues being debated in the news channels. As mentioned earlier, questionnaires help in identifying a trend but fall short of

capturing the social and cultural dynamics of the audience's interpretation of media texts. Another important aspect of my data collection was linking up my research tools. Although, I had different interview schedules and questionnaires for my different set of respondents, I tried to link up the common issues in all the schedules and questionnaires to develop thematic narratives. For instance, I had one question in an interview schedule on how journalists view the role of media in democratic societies. This question was also asked to news audience, i.e, their views on the role of media in India. Similarly questions on the role of media as an agency of opinion formation was put to both journalists and news audiences. Such an exercise, helped in understanding the viewpoints of both journalists and citizens on similar issues.

V

Structure of the Study

Chapter 1, *Introduction*, has dealt with the context and significance of the need to study television news media in India. Along with listing the objectives and scope of the study, it has also described the methodological framework of the study. The process of data collection is a learning process which the section on field experience maps. Besides, the understanding that a Researcher gains from reading secondary literature, the first hand experiences from the field, also contribute towards enriching the understanding of 'doing research'.

Chapter 2, *Media, Democracy and Discourse: A Conceptual Framework*, provides the theoretical overview of the study. It engages with the key ideas of role of media in democracy and maps the sociological understanding of producing, representing and consuming media discourses. The research questions of the study are drawn from an engagement with the varied theoretical orientations.

Chapter 3, *Television News, State and Market: The Changing Dynamics* attempts to understand the changing nature of television news media with a special focus on the state broadcaster *Doordarshan*. Through a historical mapping of the functioning of *Doordarshan*, the chapter highlights how the state- media-market relationship has undergone major recastings due to the advent of the economic reforms in 1991.

Chapter 4, *Television News Media in Contemporary India*, examines how market capitalism has altered the nature of production, representation and consumption of news in contemporary times. Through a mapping of some key trends, namely, proliferation of news channels, changing content policy, advent of social media, digital journalism, new regulatory policies, it provides an account of the overcrowded and competitive television news industry in the country.

Chapter 5, *Production of Current Affairs Programming: A Study of NDTV 24x7*, provides an overview of the *NDTV* model of journalism. It maps the journey of the network from an independent production house to a 24x7 news broadcaster. It looks at the key turning points of the network, like, *The World This Week* (TWTW) years on *Doordarshan*, its partnering with the *STAR* network, launch of its own 24x7 English news channel *NDTV 24x7* and Hindi news channel *NDTV India* and the subsequent news channel war in television news media. With this anchoring, it then probes into the techniques and processes that undergo the production opinion programming focusing on debate and discussion based shows aired on the channel. Insights into issues like ownership, editorial policy, role of social media, it's relationship with successive governments are also provided. Finally, all these factors are woven together to provide an understanding of the *NDTV* brand of journalism.

Similarly, Chapter 6, *Production of Current Affairs Programming: A Study of Aaj Tak*, describes the journey of the Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak*. The beginnings of the channel are traced back to the days when *TV Today* operated as an independent production house that provided content, primarily to *Doordarshan*. Later, in 2000, the network launched its 24x7 Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak*. The chapter also traces the Hindi news channel sector that witnessed massive growth and intense competition in the post 2000 phase. This historical overview helps getting acquainted with the foundational logic of the *Aaj Tak* brand of journalism. Anchoring itself on this historical trajectory, it then probes into the techniques and processes that underlie the production of the current affairs shows aired on *Aaj Tak*. This is weaved together with a discussion on issues like ownership, editorial policy, relationship with government, influence of social media that together influence the *Aaj Tak* brand of journalism. All these aspects together help in understanding how media networks are influenced by internal (ownership of the institution, its editorial policies, the organizational structuring, work ethics, revenue model) and

external factors (social media, market, state policies, media regulations) that frame their discourse (s).

In, Chapter 7, *Framing of Narrative(s): A Thematic Analysis of NDTV 24x7 and Aaj Tak*, the focus shifts from the production to the representation of media texts in both channels. This is done by undertaking a textual analysis of the current affairs shows aired on *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*. The analysis helps in a comparative assessment of the thematic narratives that define the *NDTV* and *Aaj Tak* brand of journalism, respectively.

Chapter 8, *Consumption of Current Affairs Programming: Mapping Voices of Viewers*, focuses on consumption of the media texts aired on *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak* respectively. It approaches the issue of media consumption from two levels- organizational and viewership. At the organizational level, the focus is to examine how journalists and news professionals working in the two concerned news organizations, identify their viewership base. It probes into the kinds of processes, techniques, strategies used by them for producing content for their targeted audiences. At the viewership level, an attempt is made to make sense of how news audience understand and interpret news reporting by news channels in general. A probe into the nature of engagement of audiences with two concerned news channels is also undertaken. This helps to explore the role of television news media in making an informed citizenry.

Chapter 9, *Conclusion*, tries to sum up the salient features of this study.

Chapter 2

Media, Democracy and Discourse: A Conceptual Framework

A typical textbook take on the role of media⁸³ in a liberal democracy⁸⁴ is that it ought to provide a platform for informed, rational debates enabling the making of a cognizant citizenry. By creating space for the free expression of diverse opinions, media is supposed to help in the formation of an enlightened public opinion and to keep a check on the abuse of state power by corrupt or tyrannical governments. A market based free and independent press, it is believed, would play the role of a critical watchdog. Not only would it articulate a diversity of opinions and thereby enrich the sphere of knowledge and debate, but it would also expose and criticize the activities of those who rule and the principles on which their decisions are based. The liberty to express thoughts and opinion in the public, however uncomfortable they may be for established authorities, is a vital feature of a modern democratic order. This reasoning is largely drawn from classical liberal democratic understanding of the role of media as the fourth pillar of democracy (Dahlgren: 1997; Gans: 2003; Jenkins and Thorburn: 2003; Blumler and Gurevitch: 2001; Livingstone and Lunt: 1994; Keane: 1991; Leighley: 2004).

A key work which informs the idea of media as a dominant institution in a democracy, finds its roots in the theory of Public Sphere conceptualized by Jurgen Habermas (1989) in his authoritative work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Public sphere, Habermas

⁸³ Media generally refers to the means of mass communication. McQuail refers to media 'as organized technologies which make mass communication possible' (1994:10). Traditionally, radio, press and broadcasting were together referred to as media. These technologies allowed information and messages to simultaneously reach a large, heterogeneous audience. They allowed citizens to convey their opinions and participate in decision-making processes in democratic societies. With technological progress, new mediums like photography, mobile phone, internet, cinema etc. came to be considered as media too. Media are considered to be an integral and ever-present part of everyday life in many parts of the world. They increasingly play a central role in shaping our way of life. By informing us about events, occurrences and incidents, they keep us connected with world we inhabit. They influence and shape the beliefs, values and norms of our societies. Hence, they are also considered as important agents of socialization.

⁸⁴ In common parlance, democracy is generally understood as rule by the people. This implies a system of governance, in which the citizens participate either directly or through representatives, to voice opinion on matters that affect them. The direct participation of citizens or direct democracy was practised by the Ancient Greeks, where people participated directly in decision-making process, concerning their own affairs. However, with the rise of modern nation-states, a system of representative democracy is what is widely prevalent. Here, rather than participating directly, the citizens elect representatives, who are involved in decision-making (Bhambhri: 2007).

argued, signified specific social spaces like parliament, clubs, literary salons, coffee shops, meeting halls, pubs, and other public spaces where citizens met and deliberated about socio-political issues. It arose with the development of capitalism in Britain, France and Germany in the late 18th and 19th century. For Habermas, public sphere was an instrument for nurturing and transforming democracy. By providing space for public deliberation and discussion, free of domination and where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis, public sphere was making democracy participatory. The media facilitated this process by providing an arena of public debate, and by reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion. The structural transformation in public sphere came around with the advancement of modern industrialized states of advanced capitalism. He specifically talks about how newspapers were relegated from being providers of political information and ideas to practitioners of tabloid journalism. As mass media expanded powerful corporations came to control major media institutions like newspapers, radio, film, and television. These arms of the culture industry served the interests of the media conglomerates and the corporations and advertisers who financed them. The emergence of commercialized media was inimical to public sphere as it distorted communication. Commercialized media became an arena for advertising than creating a platform for rational critical debates. It led to degeneration of the public sphere (Habermas cited in Calhoun: 1996). This point reverberates with leading scholars like Carey: 1989; Putnam: 1996; Hart: 1994, who argue that commercial media results in commercial culture that subsumes the democratic objectives of a public sphere.

The Habermasian theorization of public sphere was subjected to a fair amount of criticism. It was stated that Habermas's public sphere was just restricted to the bourgeoisie and failed to include the working class men and women. The absence of multiple public spheres, made Habermas's public sphere exclusivist. Moreover, it also failed to include in equal power relations such as gender or race that are intrinsic to any society (Fraser in Calhoun: 1996; Keane: 1991; Thompson: 1995).

The critical view on Habermas's public sphere does not mean that the theory doesn't have any relevance in the understanding of the modern communication system. Habermas, argued that media should introspect its disintegration. For him, media ought to regain its platform of providing space to rational critical debate. Habermas's developed his idea of

communicative action in response to his earlier theorization of the degeneration of the public sphere. He spoke of nurturing and shaping an ideal public sphere on the basis of communicative action which he defined as, when the 'actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through the acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation' (Habermas, in Bohman and Rehg eds.1997:40). The practice of communicative action literally meant the removal of barriers that distort communication. Further, it also meant creating a platform for rational critical opinion and discourse. It ought to be taken into account that not all opinion is public opinion. Habermas conceived public opinion as a reasoned form of access to truth. It referred more positively to the views held by those who join in a rational-critical debate on an issue. Thus, reason and criticism were crucial for making of an educated opinion (Habermas cited in Calhoun: 1996).

Therefore, the question that arises is, how are modern media systems, facilitating communicative action? Kahn and Kellner opine (2001) that radio, television, and other electronic modes of communication are creating new mediated spheres of debate, discussion, and information. The rise of the internet has expanded the realm for democratic participation and debate and created new public spaces for political intervention. Such measures have the potential to invigorate democracy and to increase the dissemination of critical and progressive ideas. They further state that the political battles of the future may well be fought in the streets, factories, parliaments, and other sites of past conflict. But politics today is already mediated by media, computer, and information technologies and will increasingly be so in the future. Those interested in the politics and culture of the future should therefore be clear on the important role of the new public spheres and intervene accordingly. Similarly, Dahlgren (2005) argues that internet has facilitated the creation of a plural online public sphere. Internet has thousands of websites having to do with the political realm at the local, national and global level. One can find discussion groups, chat rooms, alternative journalism, civic organizations, NGOs, grass-roots advocacy sites, which allow participation of differences of all kinds. Citizens belonging to different political orientations and interest, gender, ethnicity, cultural capital, geography, have access to communicative spaces. Studies by Norris (2001); Pool (1983); Lawrence (1995), also

highlight how internet is opening up spaces for participatory democracy. Jeffrey (2000) celebrates the idea of media powered democracy through his analysis of print media in India. He argues that the newspaper revolution of the 1980s and 1990s provided the means by which a public sphere broadened to encompass tens of millions of people in small towns and country side. The spread of media has created platforms for deliberation which was previously non-existent. Echoing the same thought, Neyazi (2010; 2018) opines the media revolution spearheaded by the vernacular media in India has brought marginalised groups into the public arena, and posed serious challenges to the dominance of national political elites, who now cannot afford to ignore issues emanating from the regional public arena. Focusing on the production aspect, Neyazi argues that vernacular media is creating space for marginalised groups to raise their grievances in the public arena. Further, the resurgence of Hindi newspapers posed a serious challenge to the dominance of English newspapers. Hindi newspapers with strategies of localisation have been very successful in creating new constituencies of readership. Localisation of production, distribution and consumption of Hindi newspapers has helped in centre staging the concerns of the marginal sections in small towns and villages of North India. This has in turn, opened up political space for such groups. Their issues, concerns are now shared with the world through the local Hindi newspapers. By framing discourse (s) that reflects the issues and concerns of the rural populace, Hindi newspapers have made democracy, participatory for them. This concept of framing informs this study, as would be evident through all the chapters.

Focusing on the role of television, Cottle (2003b) opines that news and current affairs programs on television, potentially contribute invaluable resources for an overhearing and overbearing audience and can thereby be viewed as a key means of the extension of processes of democratic deepening (ibid: 163). Mehta (2008) argues that the genre of talk show based on the strong oral cultures and argumentative traditions is strengthening the link between media and democracy⁸⁵ in India. Such programs have greatly enhanced deliberative democracy. They have

⁸⁵ Mehta draws inspiration from the works on Amartya Sen (2005), C.A. Bayly (1996) and Ranajit Guha (1983) to claim that the Indian tradition of public reasoning makes the root of democracy stronger. Whether it be the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna in Mahabharat or Akbar's *rahe-aql*, the path of reason (Sen), the use of various mechanisms like poetic satire, puppetry, handbills, speeches and visual displays during festivals for spreading nationalist ideas (Bayly) and the use of rumour as a means for the peasant insurgency in Colonial India (Guha), there has been the presence of a vibrant and organic tradition of public reasoning, debate and dissent in the Indian way of life. News channels have tapped into this propensity for argumentation and political debate, and created a new platform for such deliberations by airing shows that debate on social issues effecting everyday life.

created a new space for political action; giving a new publicness to the older traditions of debates and dissent. Similarly, explaining the impact of satellite television, Munshi (2013) opines that the entry of satellite television has led to broad basing of choices for Indian viewers. Cutting across the social divide, television is the only medium that reaches a billion population immediately and simultaneously. By regenerating, hybridising, localising and eventually indianizing, the broadcasters invent new ways to create market for themselves. Unearthing stories of the marginalized sections, making politicians' accountable, making politics transparent are some of the positive offshoots of commercialized media landscape. Likewise for Gans (1979), today media is opening up new spaces of deliberations through television talk shows in which a host of experts engage in discussions on a wide range of issues. Although at times they are hosted by high-decibel anchors, such shows are paving way for discussions and debates on issues which concern everyday life. He further argues about the prevalence of dichotomous approaches to these mediated discussions. While one section, views these news programmes as public forum stimulating citizen discussion, the other section notes such engagements as providing voice to established political figures and conservative ideologues, offering audiences biased perspectives on issues and events. At such junctures, the voices of the audiences become critical. It is critical to raise the question "Do these programmes reach enough people to matter, and do they encourage public discussion or do they preach largely to the converted?" (ibid: 230).

It is within this context that this study seeks to understand the nature and significance of the, dominant genre of discussions based programming of two private national news channels *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak* in India. It primarily probes into the need, the nature and the likely impact of such programming. It analyses the role of television news media in framing discourse in contemporary India.

Taking a step back in history, it can be seen that media has, time and again, played a crucial role in the functioning of Indian democracy. It played a stellar role in arousing and mobilizing public opinion for Independence from the British Empire. During the early years of Independence, it acted as a vehicle for promoting social and economic development. The challenge to media freedom also stemmed from the state, as witnessed during the period of Emergency (1975-77). The reforms of 1991 brought in sweeping changes in media technology, revenue model, content policy etc. These transformations impinge on media organizations and

operations. The subsequent chapters discuss and analyze these macro changes. However, understanding the micro processes of production, representation and consumption of media that together influence the macro changes is also vital. Hence, an attempt is made to theoretically engage with each of the three processes which will help to gauge the macro role of contemporary media in Indian democracy.

Producing, Representing and Consuming Media

Before proceeding with understanding the role of media in framing discourse, I first look at the concept of discourse. I draw from Macdonald (2003) to understand discourse as referring to a 'system of communicative practices that are integrally related to the wider social and cultural practices, and that help to construct specific frameworks of thinking. These 'specific frameworks of thinking' are themselves provisional, open to contest and debate, making discourse more understandable as a process of making meaning, rather than a fixed position' (ibid: 1). The use of discourse for analyzing the role of media is dynamic for two reasons. First, media constructs reality by producing discourse(s). Second, such mediated constructions are open to contest. They do not remain static. They keep changing with time. So how are media discourses produced? Who has the power to shape media content and how do they do it? How are media products consumed? Different media theories, have examined the process of media production by focusing on aspects like, the nature of media organizations, their institutional structures and arrangements and their relationship with other social, political and cultural institutions. Similarly, the question of media representation has been addressed through key concepts of ideology, myths and discourse. Likewise, understanding of media consumption has been addressed by focusing on the values, experiences and interpretations of active viewers. The next section, engages with some of these key issues that offers us different vantage points to understand media.

Media Ownership and Control

A sociological understanding about the process of shaping of media messages is linked to the theorization about ownership, control and structure of media organizations. Within the Marxist tradition, the famous quote from *The German Ideology* (1846), written by Karl Marx and

Friedrich Engels, is the foundational approach to understanding and analysing the Marxist interpretation of media functioning. Marx and Engels argue,

the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of the society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (Marx and Engels 1846, in Cottle 2003a: 7)

The quote translates into the following- those who own and control material production, necessarily control mental production, i.e. the control over ideas, values and beliefs circulating in society. Such people by having ownership of media organizations, and by exercising their will within the media organizations, ensure that their views dominate the content of media output. These views primarily work to reinforce the dominant social norms and values that legitimize the unequal social system. While the broad idea remains the same, various strands of thinking, have emerged within the Marxist tradition that attempt to highlight different aspects for understanding the workings of the media industry.

In tune with the ideas of classical Marxism, the culture industry theorization describes the role of media as an expression of generalized culture of consumerism, underpinned by commodity fetishism. Based primarily on the Marxist theory of alienation, psychological effects of exploitation and division of labour, outlined in *The Economic and Political Manuscripts* (1844), this viewpoint describes how a generalised system of capitalist production reproduces itself, alienating both the worker and the ruling class from their true humanity, and where the intrinsic use-value of things is replaced by the pursuit of exchange value of commodities in the market. Capitalist production is realized in the moment of consumption and the capitalist system extends itself on the basis of the generation of 'false' needs. Unintentionally, but no less powerfully for that, capitalism ingratiates itself into the very core of individual human existence and desires (Cottle 2003a: 9). The term culture industry is closely associated with the Frankfurt School. The school consisted of a group of thinkers who worked in the German Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in the 1930s. Their core members were Jewish radicals who later went into exile to the United States after Hitler's rise to power. Establishing themselves in a small institute in New York affiliated with Columbia University, the Institute for Social Research, they developed analyses of the culture industries. Two theorists, Theodore Adorno and

Max Horkheimer, describe culture industry as a system debasing artistic creativity and undermining humanity through the production and circulation of commodified culture- ‘the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry, and enlightenment becomes mass deception’ (Horkheimer and Adorno cited in Durham and Kellner 2001). They further state that the standardized formats for television dramas and entertainment programs are producing more and more stereotypical⁸⁶ characters on the screen. This leads to the danger of people losing true insight of the reality. In contemporary media scenario, news networks of developed nations are extending beyond the national frontiers in the pursuit of new markets and profits. Such practices have also been described as cultural imperialism where the import of consumerist products and values into underdeveloped countries is seen as undermining the local authentic culture and way of life (Schiller 1991, 1992; Tomlinson 1991). Shifting away from the notion of west based media imperialism, Sonwalkar (2001) offers an interesting take on how Indian media products are now being viewed as imperialist and hegemonic in the South Asian region. He argues that after the novelty of foreign channels wore off in the early 1990s, Indian channels consolidated their position, recorded the highest audience ratings and forced foreign channels to adopt local programming in a big way. The late 1990s added a new dimension with language-/region-specific channels displacing pan-Indian networks in localized markets, and also reaching out to the large diaspora across continents. Besides, Indian media products due to their language and content were increasingly being viewed in terms of cultural imperialism within South Asia along the same lines that western products were during the 1960s-70s. India's media strengths and vibrancy appear to pose some challenge to the trope of media imperialism.

The political economy approach, focuses on how the actual operations and dynamics of media industries work under competitive market conditions to shape the production of media output and ‘ideology’. Murdock and Golding (1989) argue that, the mass media are first and foremost industrial and commercial organizations which produce and distribute commodities within a capitalist order. In addition, to commodities, mass media also disseminate ideas about economic and political structures. It is this second and ideological dimension of mass media production which gives it importance and centrality. It is important to demonstrate how the

⁸⁶The concept of stereotyping was developed by Walter Lippmann (1922). He used the concept of stereotyping to explain media’s misleading and manipulated representation of the world. Stereotyping is a process of rigid categorization of diverse groups often with easily identifiable, unchanging and negative characteristics.

ideology is produced in concrete practices. This is done by looking at the accruing organizational changes in media industries due to changes in the economic base. Cottle (2003a) describes this production as follows. For him, in the political economy approach, the impersonal laws (economic determinants) of the marketplace rather than the ideological motivations (instrumental agency) of media bosses and tycoons are said to explain much of the organizational structures, routine operations and output of the media. Competitive forces of the marketplace determine the success and long-term viability of media industries. This involves an inherent tendency towards media concentration/consolidation through buying up (or outpricing and ruining) competitors, processes of vertical integration (extending control over the entire production and distribution processes), and horizontal integration (combining related or complementary businesses) as a way of reducing costs, increasing market share and corporate control (ibid: 9). The concentration/consolidation of the media business in the hands of a few corporate creates barriers for entry of smaller players or alternate media in the market. Along with restrictions in the entry into the market, restrictions in terms of output are also imposed. The big media corporate, in their pursuit of profits and revenue from advertising, will produce a kind of products only for the section of audience that has high disposable income. Thus, soft news of entertainment, lifestyle, sports will get prominence over hard news of politics, conflict, civil society and audience will be treated as consumers and not citizen. Similarly, other media products like films, books, music will be produced mechanically leaving no scope for artistic creativity and cultural diversity. Such practices will not be limited to specific geographical regions but will transcend national boundaries (as one has discussed above). Thus, it is the market centric focus of media industries that facilitates the production and circulation of a particular set of ideas and practices which legitimize its mode of operation. Franklin (2007) cites the example of British news organizations that have increasingly become part of the entertainment industry by sidelining informed debates and discussions on issues of public concern. He observes, 'journalism's priorities have changed. Entertainment has superseded the provision of information; human interest has supplanted the public interest; measured judgment has succumbed to sensationalism; the trivial has triumphed over the weighty; the intimate relationships of celebrities, from soap operas, the world of sport or the royal family, are judged more 'newsworthy' than the reporting of significant issues and events of international consequence. Traditional news values have been undermined by new values; 'infotainment' is rampant' (Franklin cited in Thussu 2007a: 5). Using the terminology

'Murdochization' of news, Thussu argues how growing marketization and corporatization of television is adversely affecting the public-role of television in India. Focusing on the content policy of television news media, he observes that media networks have developed a new style of television broadcasting-bollywood news, cricket news, metropolitan new, sensationalism and crime news to propagate the agenda of the free market. The growing airtime given to news about corporate world reflects the growing privatization of media and its dependence on market for survival. Bollywood news has become an important segment of television programming. Starting from film reviews, star interviews, film gossip, film awards etc. television channels are cashing on the Indian audience love for Bollywood. Besides Bollywood, the strategy of Murdochization, recognizes the primacy of cricket, the support for which cuts across all sections of the society. Due to its large fan following, cricket is a sure shot profit making venture. Cricket-related stories appear everyday, hour-long discussions are held with experts on the nature of game, strategies to be adopted and so on. Likewise, metropolitan news reflects localization at its best with special programmes focusing on metropolitan cities. The issues range from civic administration to fashion shows to urban fads and frolics. Sensationalism and crime news involves reporting crime in a sensationalist manner that ensures higher TRPs for the channel. Murder, gore, rape are recurring themes. Expose done through hidden camera (sting operation) are claimed to bring truth to the public. This market- centric style of programming is rampant across news channels.

Explaining the implications of market-centric news model at a macro level, Chaudhuri (2010) argues that the role Indian media as a carrier of neoliberal capitalism has transformed the idea of public and public sphere. The present day media is corporate driven, explicitly articulating the neo liberal doctrine of free market. This model of privatized media has altered the nature of the representation of the public. There is increased visibility of politicians and the ordinary citizenry in talk shows/ studio debates, reality shows. The transformed 'publicness' is not just limited to national borders but extends beyond borders as well. However, the media has channelized this platform of democratization to its advantage. It has assumed the role of being the guardian and voice of the ordinary citizen. It has highlighted itself as the only institutions which the nation can trust on in case other organs of the state fail. Such a strategy is dangerous given ideological orientation of the media. Evidence today suggest that media often uses its

influence to mould public opinion in favour of their promoters, capitalist at one time or plain right wing, ideology, spewing hatred at another.

The role of capitalist media to act as a tool for propaganda has been argued by Herman and Chomsky (1998). The representatives of such interests have important elitist agendas and principles that they want to advance, and do so by controlling and shaping the policies of media organizations. The propaganda model works through five filters- size, ownership and profit orientation, reliance on advertising, the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power, “flak” as a means of disciplining the media, and “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism. These elements interact with and reinforce one another. The operation of these five filters results in an elite domination and marginalization of dissent in media. In such a scenario, media is seen as serving the interests of an elite class and failing in its mission of representing the interests of diverse sections of society. Banerjee (2008) equates the corporate control of media to the shrinking of democratic space for public discourse in India. He is especially critical of the talk shows, where the anchors whip up a security-obsessed nationalist xenophobic discourse against any dissenting voice that may protest against the Indian state’s anti-democratic policies. He cites the latest instance of witch-hunting of social activists and journalists who have been raising voices of dissent against the human rights violations in Kashmir. Such measures violate the democratic rights of citizens to put forward their views that may be in variance with those of the Indian state. He further states an ambience is deliberately being created to dumb down political dissent. The development of media markets, from this perspective, concentrates control of the media in the hands of business corporate and political powers, limiting the range of points of view represented.

Studies by Ghatak and Thakurta: 2012; Ranganathan: 2015 showcase the extent to which political parties have begun to dominate the trajectory of media development in India. Political party ownership of media is found to be present across all media platforms. In the light of weak regulatory structures, media ownership in a number of states in India is in the hands of a small group of influential media houses backed by political parties. Such channels are used for party propaganda especially during the time of elections. Examples of such media houses include *Sun TV* owned by *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (DMK) in Tamil Nadu, *Kalinga TV* backed by *Biju*

Janta Dal (BJD) in Odisha, *Kairali TV* owned by *Communist Party of India (Marxist)* (CPI (M)) in Kerala etc. This aspect has been dealt with in detail in chapter 4.

Summing up the impact of corporate and political party owned of media, Crabtree and Malhotra (2003) highlight three trends in the Indian news media ecology- the influence of hegemonic media practices on indigenous programming; development of western media tastes and consumer attitudes; undermining the development role of media and instead raising pitch for consumerism as a road map for future growth. They argue that increasing privatization and commercialization of media has significant consequences for social class relations. Media has become a tool for framing a discourse that privileges the dominant class at the cost of sidelining the marginalized sections of the society. Its promotion of the discourse of consumerism is widening the cultural gap between elites and poor. While one section of the population celebrates western lifestyle, the other sections stick to traditional beliefs and values. Such gaps are giving rise to interethnic and interreligious conflicts.

Media as an Organization: Processes and Techniques of News Production

The other strand of understanding media production is the organizational approach. Rooted in organizational sociology, this micro approach explores the processes that occur within media organizations and examines the occupational culture of the media in terms of the recruitment, career paths and norms and values of media workers (Williams: 2003). Media organizational studies approach the study and analysis of media institutions from inside, their entry point being, the process and techniques involved in production of news content and the professional practices and activities inside a newsroom. Exploring issues of journalistic values, daily routines, professional ideologies, hierarchy, credibility of sources, such ‘behind the scene’ studies have enriched the field of research on media organizations. Drawing upon research techniques like questionnaire, in-depth interviews and participant observations, these studies have helped to reveal the constraints, contingencies and complexities ‘at work’ and, in so doing, provided the means for a more adequate theorization of the operations of the news media and the production of the discourses ‘at play’ within news media representations – and possibly, by extension, the media more generally (Cottle 2003a: 2).

Curran et al (1977) argues that a systematic study of media organizations and occupation began in the late 1950s. This was due to number of external factors. First, the emergence of sociology of complex organizations in the 1950s yielded theories about organizational structure and behavior, and provided analytical tools that could be applied to the study of media organizations. Second, the struggle between the functionalist and neo-Marxist approaches focused attention on the extent to which media organizations and those working in them had autonomy from the dominant power structures of society. Third, increasing attention came to be paid to the role of media in politics, with scholars examining the interaction between media organizations and political institutions, and the way in which political communication is shaped by this interaction (Curran et al 1977 cited in Williams 2003: 97). These factors have separately and jointly have shaped the various kinds of studies of media organizations. The first set of studies, are micro-level investigations about media professionals or workers. They deal with issues like how social and cultural background of news professionals, their professional ideologies and experiences impinge their professional work.

A classic study *The Gate Keeper: A Case Study in the Selection of News* (1950) by David Manning White, looks at how a piece of information, through the process of gatekeeping, becomes a news item. White emphasized that news selection process involves a large number of gates through which news stories pass. His focus was, first to identify the gatekeepers in a news organization and second, to understand how these gatekeepers make use of their value judgments based on their experience, attitudes and expectations in selecting and rejecting a news item. White came to the conclusion that ‘public information was seen to be determined by the editorial gatekeepers who chose what news to use, with this selection procedure inevitably being a reflection of the personal background and beliefs of those individuals’ (McGregor, 1997, quoted in Williams 2003: 101). White’s model emphasized on the role of the individual not the media organization in the process of selection of information that deemed fit to be news. This model was criticized for offering a simplistic account of a rather more complex process. Subsequent studies (Gans: 1979, Johnstone et.al: 1976, Tunstall: 1971, Hood: 1972) have emphasized on the collective nature of the news production process. The group dynamics plays a crucial role in explaining what appears as news. This requires knowledge of the social characteristics, political

views, class background and cultural values of news professionals to be taken into account for a fruitful analysis of how news is selected and circulated.

The second set of studies, delve into the study of organizations and routines that influence media professionals and their work. The organizational approach focuses on the production of media products by examining the occupational culture of media in terms of recruitment, organization goals and structure and work culture. The studies carried out in 1970s and 1980s (Epstein 1973; Altheide 1976; Murphy 1976; Tuchman 1978; Fishman 1981; Gitlin 1980; Ericson et al. 1989; Soloski 1989) entered into the newsroom and did in-depth study of nature of news production. Based on extensive and intensive periods of newsroom observations and interviews, sometimes conducted across many years and different news outlets, Researchers became familiar with news-making processes. While issues like *newsroom* layouts, newsroom division of labour, corporate hierarchy and professional culture were widely researched, few aspects of news production that gained eminence are routinization, objectivity and news values. In contrast to earlier studies on individualistic and subjective explanation of news selection, these studies emphasized how news production was a collective accomplishment that was produced with predetermined formats. This structuring gave rise to news routines. All kinds of information follow into a news organization. Every news organization has certain procedures and guidelines laid down concerning the gathering, selection and processing of news. To be newsworthy, information must be compatible with these routines starting from its entry to the newsroom to it getting processed as a news item. Tuchman (1978) in her influential study *Making News*, outlines how journalists 'routinize the unexpected' in their daily work. From the plethora of information that seeps in, journalists have to select certain events and produce news stories about them by a certain deadline. For the news organizations, the focus is on maintaining a reliable flow of news to fill the time and space of their daily cycle. This is achieved via the 'news nets'. Journalists strategically organize themselves around certain locations more likely to generate news stories they can catch in their net. Hence the establishment of news beats. News organizations organize their new-gathering efforts around institutions like courts, police government, arts, science, sports, entertainment (Tuchman 1978, quoted in William 2003: 111). The news beat system means that 'the world is bureaucratically organized for journalists whose reliance on bureaucratic organizations enables them to have at their disposal a method for the continuous detection of

events and a map of relevant knowers for any topic of newsworthy happenings (Fishman, 1981: 51). Along with news nets, Tuchman also talks of several typifications/ specialization of news that have implications for news items are reported, understood and explained. Thus, some of the categories being hard or soft news, breaking or developing news, business, sports, entertainment, weather, foreign affairs etc. These distinctions assist news organizations to control news through prediction. News organizations generally have editorial meetings in the morning, where they discuss the events to be covered, such as press conferences, speeches, incidents and likewise. Tuchman (1978) also explains how objectivity assists reporters to report news in ways acceptable to other organizations. For her, objectivity is a 'strategic ritual' by which individual reporters and news organizations defend their product. There is also an economic rationale for objectivity. Perceptions of the product being biased can cost news outlets to lose their audience as well as their credibility.

Three significant studies on Indian newsrooms (Batabyal: 2012; Rao: 2010; Stahlberg: 2013) have added to the growing literature of media production in the non-western context. For Batabyal (2012), the complexities of newsroom practices impact the generation of content. The various corporate divisions like, sales, marketing, research and human resources, in news organizations, do not work in isolation. There is a constant pressure, from sales and marketing teams, to generate news that sells, for raking revenue as well as for garnering ratings, often comes at the cost of overriding editorial independence. Getting into one of the prominent aspect of organizational structuring- newsroom hierarchy, Rao (2010) showcases how newsroom hierarchies shape the nature of news generated in English and Hindi press. She argues that Hindi newspapers have elaborate hierarchical organized office space which imprints the social status of the news workers. This ordering also feeds into the hierarchical work culture. English newspapers have flat hierarchy and there is substantial independence in the work culture. Staff members of the Hindi medium newspapers are themselves aware of this and justify the need for more tight supervision with regard to the poor quality of Hindi education. The diametrically opposite work culture in the Hindi and English newspapers also relates to the process of regionalisation and commercialisation of the press. While Hindi newspapers push for regionalisation, English newspapers are driven by commercialisation. Picking on the regionalization and commercialization debate, Stahlberg (2013) study suggests that English press

is for the elites and the Hindi for common citizens. Doing an ethnographic research on the Hindi newspaper *Dainik Jagran*, he observes that the type of stories that the newspaper produces is solely catering to the interests of the common citizens. Regional newspapers focus more on local news. This representation of local news has helped in unearthing the stories of the common people who hardly find a space in national newspapers.

Communicative Frames and the Global TV Ecology

Another important contribution to understanding media production, is the ‘communicative frames’ model. Developed by Cottle and Rai (2008b) communicative frames refer to the established repertoire of communicative structures deployed by news professionals and which serve to organize and facilitate news presentations and delivery. These can often be more rooted in the pragmatics and conventions of news production than in the realm of discursive ideas or ideological commitments (ibid: 166). Communicative frames like, reporting, campaigning, investigation/expose, contest and contention, dominant, community service and mythic tales have become naturalized throughout the global TV news ecology though they may be used by every news outlet differently. The reporting frame is an in-depth communicative frame which provides thick description of an event or occurrence. It traces the history of the event, along with providing an insight into the experiences of the people who are associated/impacted by the event. The campaigning frame declares the news outlet’s stance on a particular issue or cause and typically seeks to galvanize sympathies and support for its intervention, political or otherwise, beyond the world of journalism. In the investigative frame, journalists actively set out to investigate, expose and uncover information and practices that would not otherwise be revealed. This frame includes, therefore, traditional investigative journalism based on intensive research and exploratory fact-finding as well as exposé journalism of public or private affairs. Likewise, dominant frame refers to news stories which are clearly dominated and defined by a single external news source. This source may derive from authority or challenger groups within the social hierarchy, but it is their perspective or view which clearly ‘dominates’ the communicative frame and which either remains unopposed or receives, at most, marginal challenge. When the latter, challenges are typically confined to responses that are prefigured by the agenda set by the dominant ‘framing’ source. Likewise, the contest and contention frame is one in which conflictual news stories are framed either in terms of binary opposition, with opposing views and

arguments generally given approximately equal weight or representation and structured in adversarial terms, or, more unusually, as a contention involving a more complex array of contending views, voices and interests. The community service frame is one which moves beyond the reporting frame to explicitly advise the audience on what a news story and its information may mean in terms of its possible impacts on them. Information that is essentially consensual is represented as useful or essential advice and may be presented in a pedagogic and/or paternalist way. Lastly, the mythic tales functions culturally, activating and displaying cultural myths that have resonance for contemporary cultures. It is not principally about imparting new information but resurrecting and/or recycling established values, symbols and affective narratives. Mythic tales may focus on people or objects that symbolize values or ideals that are exceptional or extraordinary in some way and/or which are felt to be normative cultural 'goods'. Stories here may include those focusing on war veterans and heroic tales, acts of selflessness or the pomp and pageantry, for example, of some anniversaries and special events (ibid: 169-72). Thus, for Cottle and Rai, news outlets around the world essentially engage with these diverse communicative frames to present their version of a news story. They advocate the use of communicative frames towards having a fruitful understanding of how news is produced. Todd Giltin (1980) too advocates the use of media frames that organize the world for both the journalists who report on it and for those who rely on such reports. The frames make information understandable by assisting journalists to process large quantities of information and numerous details and facts quickly by enabling them to be packaged in a particular way (Giltin 1980 quoted in William 2003: 112).

Thus, the various schools of thought focus on different aspect of news production. Drawing from these divergent ideas, this study enters into the newsrooms of *NDTV24x7* and *Aaj Tak* and examines the *production* aspect of the current affairs programmes by probing questions like: What kinds of issues/topics are being debated? What are the diverse sources through which information is accessed? How are experts selected for the discussions? How do different teams like production, research, guest coordination and logistics coordinate to produce such shows? What is the audience base of the news channels? How is audience preference met with? How does social media, influence the production of media discourse? Do such discussions further our

understanding of everyday issues? It also examines the influence of the boarder issues, of advertising, ratings, ownership, on the functioning of media organizations in contemporary India.

Framing Narratives: Understanding Media Representation

Media representation is concerned with how media builds or reflects realities of the social world. Croteau and Hoynes (1997) argue that media representation is the end product of ‘a process of selection that invariably means that certain aspects of reality are highlighted and others neglected (ibid: 134).

Marxist analysis of media representation has been through the concept of ideology. Ideology is defined as belief systems that help justify the actions of those in power by distorting and misrepresenting reality (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997:153). A key theoretical concept that is used in the study of ideology of media is hegemony. Antonio Gramsci’s argued that media plays an important role in establishing hegemony. Drawn from the work of Gramsci (1971), the notion of hegemony connects questions of culture, power and ideology. Gramsci was troubled by the grand generalizations of people being passive recipients of dominant class ideology of the bourgeoisie. He argued that diverse social groups attain domination or force and hegemony or consent to intellectual and moral leadership, at different times through inducing consent of majority of subordinate groups to a given social order. While, the unity of the prevailing groups is usually created through the state often with the use of force, civil society institutions like school, media, church, also play a role in establishing hegemony by inducing consent. Gramsci believed that dominance is not obtained through simple imposition of will of the ruling class but by the ability of the ruling class to present itself as the group best equipped to fulfill the interests of subordinate/subaltern classes. The dominant groups have to work continuously to gain acceptance of its ideology from all sections of society. Thus, mobilization of consent is an integral part of the strategy. Consent has to be earned from subordinate classes by accommodating their views and interests. Media acts an agency for mobilization of consent. There can be situations where this method may not work well. In such case, the dominant class or groups will resort to the use of force to discipline those who do not or will not accept their will. However, consent is a more effective way of governing society than coercion. Thus Gramsci’s hegemony theory works at two levels, one, analysis of current forms of domination

and the way they achieve hegemonic authority, and second, the delineation of counter hegemonic forces, groups, ideas that contest and overthrow the existing hegemony Gramsci further, talks of cultural hegemony, in his analysis of the role of media. Cultural Hegemony theory thus calls for historically specific socio-cultural analysis of particular contexts and forces, requiring dissection of how culture and a variety of social institutions from the media to the university facilitate broader social and political ends. Analyses of hegemony emphasize that a wide array of cultural institutions function, towards social reproduction, including the church, schools, traditional and elite culture, sports, and the entertainment media. The approach requires social contextualization of all ideas, representations, and cultural forms; it enjoins seeing societies as a locus of social contestation between competing groups who seek dominance and who manipulate reigning institutions and culture to promote their ends (Gramsci in Durham and Kellner 2006: xvi). Focusing on mediatised hegemony, few noteworthy studies by Mitra (1993), Mankekar (1998) and Rajagopal (2003) during the 1990s highlight how television became a platform for the resurgence of right-wing politics and the projection of a hegemonic Hindu nation state in India. Located within the wider socio-political upheaval of the pre-1991 reforms, namely the Mandal agitation, the separatist movements in Punjab, North-East and Kashmir and the Babri Masjid dispute, these studies argue that ideas like nation, womanhood, citizenship as represented in the epics were not mere abstract notions but sites of violent contestations. Culture wars were now fought on television screens. Through their depiction of a golden past, these televised epics normalized the hegemonic politics of a Hindu nation, Hindu womanhood, Hindu citizen as a way of life. The authors contend that the televization of these Hindu epics provided a fertile ground for the growth of majoritarian politics in India.

Louis Althusser's work on ideology has shaped much of the work on the role of media as an ideological apparatus of ruling ideas. His work 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus'(1970) is a revisioning of the Marxist work. Developing upon the Gramscian distinction between consent and coercion, Althusser draws a distinction between the 'repressive state apparatus', such as army, courts, police, who exercise direct coercion to ensure compliance of people to the established order and the 'ideological state apparatus' like church, school, media, religion, political system, which naturalize the process of subjugation by the dominant classes to certain rules and mode of thinking to ensure their superior position in society. Second,

he tries to understand how the various ideological apparatuses, in our case, the media played a role in reproducing the dominant ideology which shaped people's perception of the world. Althusser defined ideology as the 'representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals with the real conditions of their existence'. The media manufacture an imaginary picture of the real conditions of capitalism for their audiences thereby hiding the true nature of their exploitation. For him, ideology structured people's lived experience. It is not just about ideas or a mental state but something tangible and material in that it is carried out by groups and individuals, and inscribed in the practices and rituals of various institutions or apparatuses. The media as an ideological state apparatus is responsible for constructing the themes and representations through which people engage with the real world. This is primarily done through the process of 'interpellation', act of conferring social identities. The media thus produces certain ideas, views and beliefs and legitimize them as real and natural (Althusser, in Durham and Kellner 2006).

Stuart Hall's (1997) 'politics of signification' is also an important theoretical lens to understand and analyse the role of media in promoting ideology. Working within the Marxist culturalist approach, Hall describes the media as being part of the 'politics of signification' in that they are involved in giving meaning to events that happen in the world around them. He argues the media do not reflect reality but are engaged in defining reality. Rather than 'transmitting already-existing meaning' the media through the 'active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping' are 'making things mean' (ibid: 64). This is the essence of representation. As there are multiple meanings of reality the power of the media rests in how they decide to signify events. Ideology is not imposed on the media, but is something the media plays a role in creating and constructing. Along with ideology, some of the other key concepts that have significantly impacted media representation are Roland Barthes's 'Myths',⁸⁷ and Michael

⁸⁷ Drawing from Semiology (creating textual meanings through signs and cultural codes) Roland Barthes, argued that media plays a crucial part in making ideological representations as common-sense. He used the term 'myth' to describe the situation where latent or hidden meanings in media texts were accepted as 'natural' and 'normal' in making sense of the world. For Barthes, 'myth makes particular worldviews natural and unchallengeable. In modern society, myths primarily serve the interests of capitalism and bourgeois ideology, promoting ideology as obvious, taken for granted and inevitable. Something that is ideological is made into common-sense through the process of mythic representation. As mythic representation is seen as self-evident it is seldom questioned' (William 2003: 154).

Focault's 'Discourse'⁸⁸. However, this study makes use of Halls' signification theory to analyse how the two news channels frame their media discourse. The reason behind this is the agency that the theory accords to news media to shape their discourses. Media is seen as actively selecting and excluding realities that frame their narratives. In the contemporary context, television news is seen as following this path. A careful analysis of the varied kinds of discourse that runs through all news channels on a particular issue showcases the manner in which media constructs reality. The study through a thematic analysis of the issues debated on the two news channels, tries to bring forth the various similar and dissimilar narratives that news channels weave. Thus, on the *representation* aspect, the questions one raises as one analyses thematically the issues taken up the two channels are: How do the various processes of producing a media text impinge on the framing of media narratives? Are there any points of similarities or dissimilarities in the media narratives by both channels? What are the overarching frames within which narratives are constructed? How does the editorial positioning of a news channel impact its discourse?

The next section maps the theoretical orientations that deal with understanding media consumption.

Media Consumption: The Active Viewer

Besides understanding how different mass mediums are working to creating space for mediated deliberations, from the point of view of this study, an understanding of how such mediated deliberations are consumed is also required. Here, understanding and analyzing the relationship between media and audience assumes primacy.

Literature on audience studies has traversed the path of depicting audience as passive recipients to active engagers of television programming. The theorization of passive viewership largely derives from the engagement with the idea of media serving to transmit the ideas of the

⁸⁸ Michael Foucault's discourse theory became the dominant paradigm in the 1980s. Foucault defines discourse 'as a systematically organized set of statements that gives expression to the meanings and values of an institution. It describes, delimits and defines what is possible to say and to do and not possible to say and do with respect to an area of concern of that institution (William 2003: 160). For him, media are mechanisms or arrangements through which discursive power is exercised. Media are the means of exercising surveillance and control.

dominant groups in society⁸⁹. People are assumed to be indoctrinated by media in ways that they themselves do not realize this domination. The idea that the audience is active arose in opposition to the notion of all-encompassing ideological domination. Most theories of media manipulation and domination that were highly popular in the 1960s and part of the 1970s assumed that the media were all-powerful forces of social control and that they imposed a monolithic dominant ideology on their victims. Reacting against this model, many theories in recent years emphasized the power of audiences to resist media manipulation, to create their own meanings and uses, and to empower themselves with materials from their culture (Kellner 1995: 3). Proponents of the active audience theory argue that media cannot impose its pre-determined messages on audience and that audiences interpret media messages according to their social locations. The New Audience Research focused exclusively on the nature of the audience and the factors that shaped their sense of making diverse meanings of the media messages. This line of research attracted many scholars who undertook studies to emphasize the intelligence and capacity of audiences to make decisions for themselves.

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies made significant contribution to the theorising of the New Audience Research. Stuart Hall laid the foundation of what was later termed as reception paradigm within media studies. Hall's work was not a radical break from the earlier approaches. Like the older theories, Hall also looked at mass communication as a medium where messages are sent and received in certain manner. Influenced by the work of Karl Marx, Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci, Hall argued that mass media was used by the ruling class to promote or reinforce a particular set of dominant values. He rejected the theory of media pluralism and argued that certain groups have the power to impose their values on society and

⁸⁹ The early media theories of the 20th century theorised that media exerted considerable influence of its audience, its reception being uniform across all segments of the audience. Labelled as the Hypodermic Model, the theory claimed that media messages are received uniformly by every member of the audience and such reception elicits immediate and direct response. Lasswell (1927) and Hovland et al. (1953), in their studies of the effectiveness of propaganda and communication, both subscribe to the view the media could - under the right circumstance - stimulate specific behaviour amongst a target group of people. This theorization was rooted in the behavioural psychology that gained prominence in the first part of the 20th century. The stimuli-response model is an essential component of the hypodermic needle theory. This theory was subjected to severe criticism from several quarters. The primary criticism levelled against the theory was that it failed to take into account the various influences that intervene from the stages of production of media messages to its reception. They also denied the audience any capacity to interpret, discount or distort the media messages they receive, ignoring that people engage with media messages from their own ideas and prejudices.

media plays a crucial role in this process. For him, media messages are ideologically encoded, reflecting the interests of the powerful groups in society. However, he was not dismissive of audience agency and shifted the process of reception from a mere technical act to an interpretative act. He believed that audiences have the capacity to decode ideologically ridden messages in three significant ways. Firstly, the dominant mode in which there is acceptance of preferred meaning, secondly, the negotiated mode in which there is an adaptation to conveyed meanings and no outright rejection and thirdly, the oppositional mode in which the preferred readings are rejected and new readings are created on the basis of one's own values and beliefs. Hall's study paved the way for a series of empirical audience studies about the reception of television programs by different audience. One of the most pioneering work within this series was the Nationwide project of David Morley and Charlotte Brunson. The nationwide project resulted in the publication of two books, namely *Everyday Television: Nationwide* (1978), a textual analysis of a BBC program 'Nationwide' followed by *The Nationwide Audience* (1980) in which the same program was shown to different audience groups and their diverse readings analyzed. Morley and Brunson (1999) argued that audiences have power and freedom to interpret media messages. It is important to understand the capacity of audiences to appropriate and resist dominant meanings and generate their own subjective meanings. Further, meaning is not solely inscribed in the media texts, but is the outcome of the interaction between the audience and the media text. Shifting the focus from Halls' theorization of class as a determining factor in influencing the interpretation of media messages, Morley and Brunson argued that generation of meanings is not solely influenced by class but is also intrinsically linked to the other socio-cultural factors like age, gender⁹⁰, ethnicity⁹¹ etc. of the audiences. This led them to investigate the 'everyday lived arenas'⁹² like home, family, workplace where meanings had to be negotiated.

⁹⁰ Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (1984), examined how women readers of romantic novels interpreted what they read. Set in a small town of Smithon, near New York, the study attempts to understand the meanings women readers attach to the novels. Radway argued that it is important to understand the act of reading rather than the focussing on the meaning of the text. Despite the patriarchal thinking that underlies the texts, Radway states that reading such novels allowed the women to escape from the constraints of their social existence. By fantasising about the role of the heroine, the women were able to free themselves from their traditional roles and enjoy the pleasures of the stories. This act hinted at an element of empowerment in reading romantic novels. The meanings of text were not predetermined but were constructed by the women readers themselves. Similarly, Ien Ang's in her work *Watching Dallas: Soap Operas and the Melodramatic Imagination* (1985) argues that the appeal of watching these shows, rested on the enjoyment the women audience gained such shows. Although, such shows did not represent an accurate picture of the reality, it provided comfort from the everyday drudgery. For Ang, this experience was not escapism, rather discovering the means through which the

The expansion of the scope of the New Audience Research both in terms of physical location as well as new forms of content led to opening of novel avenues for research. Along with mainstreaming a crucial segment of the audience – women readers, viewers and listeners, it

women audience linked up their personal experiences with the characters portrayed in the television shows. The work of these feminist scholars introduced the notion of pleasure into the discussion of what audiences obtain from popular media and cultural forms. Fantasy, according to Ang, is a place where the 'unimaginable can be imagined'. She argues that consuming fantasies can be 'liberating' as it allows us to 'adopt positions and "try out" those positions without having to worry about their "reality value"' (Ien Ang, 1985: 134). The idea of escapism was also dealt by Dorothy Hobson in her study on the soap opera *Crossroads: the Drama of a Soap Opera* (1982). For her, 'the idea that viewers 'escape' into a program like Crossroads is invalid, or at least it is not escapism in the conventional sense of the world. Escapism suggests that someone is running away from their problems and seeking diversions, even if momentarily. There are, of course, programmes which do provide escapism for the audience but soap operas are definitely not in this category. They are precisely a way of understanding and coping with problems which are recognized as 'shared' by other women, both in the programme and in 'real life'. Differences in class on material possessions seem to be transcended in the realization that there are problems in everyday life which are common to all women and their families (1982:395)'. The above feminist writers strongly argued against the dismissal of women's viewing and interpretation of soap operas as escapism and instead called for it to be seen as a liberating experience.

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A different set of studies by Marie Gillespie, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* (1995) and Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas* (1993), explored the issue of the influence of television on identity construction of its audience. Working on the expat population of Punjabis in the city of Birmingham in London, Gillespie's research highlighted the how the consumption of transnational television programs and films stimulated a sense of awareness of cultural differences and accelerated the process of cultural change among the Punjabi youth. Similarly, Liebes and Katz (1993) in their study investigated how the melodrama *Dallas* is viewed, interpreted and discussed by international audience belonging to different ethnic background like Arabs, Russian Jews, Kibbutzniks and Moroccan Jews who resided in Israel and a non-ethnic American group who resided in Los Angeles. The study claims that ethnic identity plays a vital role in the diverse interpretation of media messages.

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Another tradition within the New Audience Research attempted at exploring the connections between television and its usage in the everyday life of its audience. Lull, in his article *Social Uses of Television* (1980), investigates the ways in which television viewing structures family relations. For Lull, television contributes to the structuring of the day- such as meal times, bed times, homework times and so on. Further, the different viewing time among family members is also intrinsically related to the different family duties and obligations that is assigned to each member. Lull goes on to give examples of the various types of families that can be extrapolated from the television viewing. Likewise, David Morley in a significant shift from his earlier studies, centre-stages the notion of understanding audiences in their 'lived arenas'. In *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (1986), he explored the social processes within which television viewing is occurred. His central thesis was 'that the changing patterns of television viewing could only be understood in the overall context of family leisure activity' (pg 13). He also makes significant interventions in focusing on how gender relations are shaped by television viewing in families. Taking cue from the works of Dorothy Hobson and Janice Radway, he concentrated on the relationship between television and gender, and the way in which the use and control of television in the home was determined by the social construction of gender roles in the family. He stressed that the patterns he observes are not essential about the sexual distinction between man and women but to the gendered notion of masculinity and femininity across cultures. Similarly, Ann Gray in *Video Playtime: The Gendering of a Leisure Technology* (1992) highlighted the gendered structure of media usage in the home. She found men were more technically knowledgeable than women when it came to operating the video cassette recorder and other media technologies at home. This is not because women are technically inept rather women's usage of media technology is dependent on the men's domination of the domestic sphere. Thus for Gray, media technology was gendered not because of any innate abilities but by its social and cultural usage.

brought in new kinds of media texts- soap operas, romantic novels, women's magazines as areas of research. Several feminist authors like Hobson (1982), Radway (1984) and Ang (1985) have made attempts to address the often neglected women constituency. Situating their analysis on media texts, these authors were interested in understanding why such large numbers of women consumed these texts which were sexist, patriarchal and capitalist in their content. In answering such questions feminist research emphasized the creative abilities and cultural competencies of the female audience to interpret media messages to suit their own needs. According to them, the interpretative activity of audiences is politically significant. Having fun, taking pleasure from and indulging in fantasy in the process of media consumption is an act of resistance, a politically progressive stance against the dominant ideology of the established order (William 2003: 198).

Along with the study of media representation Mankekar's (1999), ethnographic study offers an alternate discourse on gender and nation as opposed to their constructions in the televised narratives of the state broadcaster. The study points out that the viewers responses to the televised narratives are heterogenous and mediated through the notion of class, gender, age and ethnicity. Their engagement with television often blurs the line between fantasy and experience, fiction and reality. Viewers understanding of themselves as gendered and national subjects, was linked to the violence showcased on television. This in turn rendered significance of television narratives as political and not fictive and inconsequential. Two studies in the Indian context, highlight the acceptance of the dominant codes (Hall: 1980) in television. Rajagopal's (2003) study showcases how the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* through its portrayal of the two mythologies *Ramayan* and *Mahabharata*, paved the way for the rise of Hindutva nationalism in India. Rajagopal argues that the audience inclination to Hindu nationalism was accentuated by their viewing of the two mythologies. The themes and symbols showcased resonated with everyday life of many viewers. Drawing on myth and devotion, to portray a golden age of tradition, these mythologies appealed to diverse social groups, thus charting a course for assertion of Hindu identity. This study highlights the uncritical reception of the dominant code in the interpretation of media messages. Moving from mythologies to music videos, Juluri, (2003) argues that the reception of music video among youngsters engages with the acceptance of the dominant code in media messages. He argues that the active engagement of young viewers to music videos is dependent on their contextual understanding of such videos. Referring to a video

Made in India, released in 1995 and featuring the singer *Alisha Chinai*, the author states that reception of this video by his young respondents was solely through the prism of emotion and feeling of nationhood. The representation of India and its people as being superior to other nationalities, as in the video, does connect a cord with the viewers who uncritically accept this dominant reading.

Influenced by the theorization of investigating meaning making in the everyday arena, a few studies on movie audiences highlight the significance of the *context* in which the consumption of media texts is taking place. Dickey's (1993) study focuses on how the category of class audience, in this case, the urban poor skilled and unskilled labourers, rickshaw drivers, vegetable sellers, construction workers interpret and analyse issues of gender, family and class portrayed in Tamil movies. Dickey states that, 'much of the meaning derived from cinema has to do with the socially, culturally and economically subordinate position of the urban poor, and issues of class, power and dominance are central to understanding the relationship of viewer to the medium' (ibid: 7). Further, taking cue from the ideas of escapism and fantasy developed by Radway, Hobson and Ang, Dickey argues that, 'the significance of the movies appear to lie largely in an escape constituted through utopian fantasy, the pleasure of that escape derives from its roots in real-life social and psychological stresses and from the soothing of those stresses through melodramatic crisis resolution. This connection between escape and reality also appears in the viewers ready distillation and application of morals from film stories and in the concrete and very personal connections they see between those stories and their own lives' (ibid: 175). A similar study by Derne, (2000), is based on his earlier research of male film-goers in Dehradun, the capital of Uttrakhand, in 1991. He makes a strong argument for the need to ground the analysis of Hindi film audience within a distinctive socio-cultural context and an emphasis on that cultural context as central to the formation and expression of interpretation of film messages. Further, commenting on the efficacy of the 'fantasy' argument by many scholars working on audience, he states that 'While film provides a satisfying release for film-goers they do not usually generate changes in behaviour, but instead bolster existing hierarchies and world views. While young men and women enjoy the fantasy of bucking familial authority of marrying for love, few consider taking such a step. While Indians enjoy seeing corrupt authority defeated, few become politically active. In most circumstances, film-going appears to be a liminal period of

fantasy or wish fulfillment, a time to play with the ambiguities that Indian culture emphasizes, rather than a source of revolutionary change in Indian thinking or individual behaviour (ibid: 61)'.

Arguing about the influence of collective viewing on viewers reception, Srinivas (1998) in her article, states that movie viewers engagement with their text is dynamic and multi-dimensional. Not only do viewers engage and interpret the film based on their own socio-economic background, they also use their interactions with fellow viewers to interpret the messages. For her, 'film and viewing setting become a means for viewers to locate themselves and others in the larger society. Viewers create and participate in a public culture where the viewing setting becomes a public forum for the articulation of cultural similarities and differences. Active viewing raises question about the inter-subjectivity of the viewing experience. Although viewers appear to watching the same film, they are in fact watching various renderings of it and making different meanings of it. Their varied experiences of watching the film are also contingent on the activities of fellow viewers. Inter-subjectivity therefore cannot be a taken-for-granted (ibid: 347-48).

Thus, the New Audience Research theory stressed on the pre-eminence of audience rather than the media and cultural industries in the production of media meaning and popular culture. It laid emphasis on the fact that audiences derive pleasure that comes from their active engagement in interpreting media texts and generating meanings that oppose those of the dominant social, political and cultural order. This is empowering as it allows them, many of whom who do not have any have power in their daily lives, to subvert or counter the dominant ideology. Thus, the central concern of this school of thought was to understand how audiences make sense of television and how it integrates into their everyday life. The study uses this interpretive power of the news viewers to understand how the nature and significance of news consumption.

Therefore, on the *consumption* aspect, the questions that the study probes are- what are the different constituencies of viewership and how are they negotiating/ responding/reacting to the media constructions? How does their social location effect their interpretation of media texts? How does interpretation of media messages relate to the everyday lived experiences of the

audience? Does the proliferation of media texts necessarily represent an advance for audience in terms of viewing choices?

This chapter has attempted to map the conceptual framework needed for such a study. Along with understanding the relationship between media and democracy, it has delved into understanding the theoretical perspectives on the crucial role of producing, representing and consuming of media discourse. The subsequent chapters in the study (5,6,7,8) offer insight into how these processes work together to frame media discourse in contemporary India. These micro details are the building blocks to understand the macro issue of the nature of relationship between mediatized discourse and democracy in India.

Chapter 3

Television News, State and Market: The Changing Dynamics

This chapter attempts to understand the changing nature of Indian media in Independent India with a special focus on television news. The structure of this chapter rests on the assumption that Indian media has played a crucial role in the imagination of a nation at various points of time. The focus, therefore, is on modern media and communication. This is not to suggest that communication did not exist in earlier times⁹³. It is important however to underscore the fact that communication has a specific centrality in modernity. Anderson (1983) argues that the convergence of capitalism and the growth of print technology created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which set the stage for a modern nation in Europe. Print capitalism helped in the circulation of ideas which culminated in nationalism; they provided the technical means for representing the kind of imagined community that is a nation; print capitalism made possible for rapidly growing number of people to think about themselves and relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways. The story of modern media and communication, likewise, emerged in modern India but what was in a colonial mediated modernity.

There were two dimensions to the growth of media in modern India. One, its close links with the colonial rule; and two with the growth of the 19th century Indian social reform movement and subsequently in the anti colonial Indian nationalist movement. With the transformation of the East India Company, media in India, largely in the form of newspaper press, emerged in its institutional form⁹⁴. The Press was used by the British Empire to legitimize

⁹³ Guha (1999) in his work on the social history of communications in India, demonstrates the existence of various non-written forms of dense communication networks like *Daks* (native runners), traders, pilgrims, wedding parties, soldiers, wandering ascetics and artists, prior to the arrival of the East India Company. Due to these extensive social networks, news would move quickly from one part of the county to the other. The then Indian rulers discouraged the use of print, fearing it could erode their legitimacy.

⁹⁴ Israel (1994), describes how the arrival of the East India Company and the turn in the company's interest from trade to territory, led to a series of battles which stamped the Company's authority over the subcontinent. Its transformation to a political empire in the middle of the 18th century, led to the creation of a slew of institutions like courts, press, universities, government councils that would facilitate the administration of the empire. Similarly, Kaul (2003) in her historical account on the relationship between the British Empire and their media examines how the British-owned newspaper press, electric telegraph and news agencies worked in tandem to create a hegemonic informational empire. The flow of information from these channels along with the institutional and economic framework of the empire, were instrumental in determining the governing strategies of the Raj. The commercial

and strengthen their hold in the sub-continent⁹⁵. Subsequently, with the rise of the nationalist movement against the British Empire, the press was used by the leaders of the national movement, to criticize the British government's policies and build awareness of the ills of colonial rule and the imperative need of a national struggle against British rule. It was a weapon in the hands of the leaders for arousing and mobilizing nationalist public opinion in favour of an independent nation⁹⁶. Media played a crucial role in liberating the country from British rule⁹⁷.

The focus in this chapter however is the role of the state and its understanding of media and communication in nation building after 1947. An engagement with the historical context equips me to understand, how key ideas of Indian nationalism, defined the Indian state at Independence. Even a cursory look at state policies would show basic understanding of the Indian state towards its commitment to the role of media in development of the nation with a

environment-both communications as a process and its technological dimension-was integral to the functioning of the imperial political structure in London and in its colonies (ibid: 256).

⁹⁵ Barns (1940) describes how, the British Empire through the course of their political domination in India, recognized the power of the print medium for dissemination of pro-government information. Subsequently a series of English newspapers like the *Calcutta Gazette* (1784), *The Bengal Journal* (1785), *Weekly Madras Gazette* (1795), *India Herald* (1779), *Bombay Herald* (1789), *Bombay Courier* (1790), *Bombay Gazette* (1791) were published. These newspapers were primarily meant to disseminate news from London. They would print the Parliamentary reports of the House of Commons on subjects of interest to resident Britons, events in England on the army, newsletters and reports from Paris, Stockholm, Vienna, Madrid, reports on social events-arrivals and departures in the British community, announcements on births, deaths and marriages in the community and so forth. However, there was no mention of either India or Indians in any of these newspapers.

⁹⁶ A few liberal and educated Indians like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dadabhai Narouji, realized the potential of press as a medium for communication and social reformation. Press were no longer considered as just tool for dissemination of news but as a means for integrating citizens, spreading the message of self and national identity. The focus was on using press as a political weapon against the colonizers. Bhargava (2005) argued that Rammohan Roy was also an ardent advocate of the freedom of press. Towards achieving this goal, Roy staged a four point agenda in front of the East India Company. First, freedom of press would make laws correspond to public opinion. Second, a free press would be a safety valve against revolution, which would result from unrepresented and unaddressed grievances of the people. Third, a free press would enable the people of India to appeal to the honour and justice against any possible oppressive and tyrannical act of the government. Fourth, the court of directors of the East India Company would be enabled by a free press to ascertain correctly, whether the systems introduced in their possessions prove so beneficial to the natives of the country and whether such rules and regulations are strictly put into practice (ibid: 10).

⁹⁷ A.R Desai (1948) opines that along with the reformatory role, the press played a key role in the nation's struggle for independence. The national movement emerged from the fact that leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Gokhale, Tilak, Pherozshah Mehta, C.R. Das, Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjee, C.Y. Chintamani, Moti Lal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malaviya, M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru used it as a medium for arousing and mobilizing nationalist public opinion. They criticized government's policies and educated the public in the understanding of political problems through the press. It was a weapon in the hands of the nationalist leaders to popularize among the people, their political programs and methods of struggle. This accounts for the remarkable growth of the press in India in both daily and periodical at that time (ibid: 236-237).

special emphasis on reach out to the mass of people, address poverty and develop an inclusive society.⁹⁸ Not surprisingly, The Constitution of India guaranteed freedom of press under Article 19⁹⁹. Likewise, the Five Years Plan that was initiated by the Indian state reflected this. A quick recap maybe in order before one directly enters the discussion on the role of the Indian television.

The First Five Year Plan (1950-56) recognized the necessity to develop all the available methods of communication. People were to be communicated through the written and spoken words. Steps were to be taken to provide literature and information to the people in simple language and on a scale equal to the needs of the country. The Second Five Year Plan document stressed ‘the plan to be carried into every home in the language and the symbol of the people and expressed in terms of their common needs and problems.’ It also outlined the measures for expansion of publicity of the plan through the mass media. The Third Five Year Plan laid stress on the intensification of the existing arrangements for bringing home the implications of rapid development and carrying the message of the plan to the masses throughout the country. The Fourth plan expanded the scope of information dissemination and spelt out the need to inform the people in the rural areas and particularly those in backward regions, about the specific schemes in agriculture, forestry, road construction, marketing, the supply of credit and other inputs so that the benefits of these programmes were more widely stressed. Expansion of television network to provide much needed support to education and to promote social and economic development was stressed in the Fifth Five Year Plan. The Sixth Five Year Plan focused on fund allocation for electronic media and particularly television which progressively led to its massive expansion (Reddy: 2001)

This historical background is crucial to fully appreciate the wide ranging transformation in news media in India in recent years, particularly with the new economic policies of 1991 that ushered India into the globalized era. The changed nature of the television news media is the

⁹⁸For a discussion on the core values of Indian nationalism and its bearing on the Indian state policy see Chaudhuri 2017 (Chapters 1 and 2).

⁹⁹The Constitution of India provides the right of freedom, given in articles 19, 20, 21 and 22, with the view of guaranteeing individual rights that were considered vital by the framers of the constitution. The right to freedom in Article 19 guarantees the Freedom of speech and expression, as one of its six freedoms.

object of inquiry of this study. This chapter will largely focus on the role of the state broadcaster *Doordarshan*, as it was the sole player in the broadcast media scene till 1991. It was only after the opening up of the Indian economy, as a result of the New Economic Policy of 1991, that private and foreign news channels like *BBC*, *CNN*, *Zee News*, *STAR News* entered the Indian broadcast terrain. During the nineties, a diverse range of programs like serials, movies, chat shows, sports, music show, soap operas, news and current affairs shows continued to be aired on *Doordarshan*. However, it was only in 2003 that the state broadcaster launched a separate 24x7 news and current affairs channel called *DD News*. The exposition in the sections below, are drawn from both a review of secondary literature, official reports as well as interviews and discussions with media professionals.

This chapter is therefore broadly divided into four parts. *First*, it will provide an overview of the efforts of the new government in the early years of independence to use the ‘communication for development’ model for achieving the social and economic wellbeing of a young nation. The three mediums of communication- print, radio and broadcasting were ably supported and promoted towards realizing this goal. *Second*, it will focus on the use of media as a propaganda tool, thus, grossly undermining its role as the fourth pillar of a democratic nation. The imposition of Emergency (1975-1977), leading to suspension of civil and democratic rights of citizens, curbing of dissent and free speech, was one of the worst instances of this. While a large section of media fell in line with the government directives, a small section revolted against such diktats. *Third*, it will look at the developments since the 1980s- the showcasing of India as a power house in the global platform by organizing the Asian Games in 1982; widespread internal disturbances like the separatists movements in Punjab, Kashmir and the North-east which threatened its territorial unity; and the *Mandal* agitation and the *Ram Jhanmabhoomi* movement, which sowed internal discord. To counter what was seen as divisionary tendencies, the State used the medium of television to spread the message of unity, peace and love. The launch of ‘national programming’ with an aim to spread values of brotherhood, compassion, empathy was a step in this direction. However, the public broadcaster *Doordarshan* continued to be plagued by excessive government interference, leading to the erosion of its credibility. *Fourth*, it will examine the fallout of the new economic policies in 1991 on media in general and television news in particular. Riding on the wave of loosening of government control over airwaves, private

participation in television became a reality. Along with private entertainment, private news made its entry into the Indian television setup. The satellite revolution broke the monopoly of the *Doordarshan* as being the sole broadcast news provider. It pitted *Doordarshan* against a host of private players, thereby, rendering the broadcast media sector as overcrowded and competitive.

I

Press, Television and Radio: Tools for Nation Building

1947 witnessed the end of the British rule and the birth of a new nation. After attaining freedom from British colonial rule, Indian leaders had their task cut out- political, economic and social progress of independent India. On the political front, the most important task was to preserve, consolidate and strengthen India's unity. Indian unity was to be strengthened by recognizing and accepting its immense regional, linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity. An identity of Indianess that acknowledged and accommodated multiple identities was to be nurtured. On the economic front, technological and productivity level of agriculture and industry was to be constantly raised. Promoting self-reliance in the international economic stage was to the key mantra of economic development. While private sector continued to operate, the task of economic development was primarily on the shoulders of the public sector. Large scale investment in public enterprises, infrastructure and communication network were part of this exercise. On the social front, the huge challenge of fighting caste oppression, women oppression, illiteracy, ignorance was to be tackled on a priority basis (Chandra et al 2008). It has been argued that the main ideas in the nation building exercise were 'secularism and democracy' followed by 'statism, socialism and non-alignment'. They were regarded as the hallmarks of a modernizing and progressive Indian nation-state eager to cast aside both its traditional and colonial past. By adopting them, India would, in Nehru's telling phrase, be able to clothe herself in the 'grab of modernity' (Talbot 2000:167). India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, placed emphasis on an inclusive and secular state, which would provide equality of opportunity for everyone, regardless of his or her gender, caste, or religion. The goals of such a state would be reached through legislative enactments, the state-controlled media-All India Radio (AIR) and *Doordarshan* (DD)-and by the positive discrimination for the 'untouchable' (Chatterjee 1991:

171). The idea that media in all its form-print, radio and broadcast can be used as a tool for social, cultural and economic development gained primacy. Nehru followed a 'communication for development' approach which along with the press focused on radio and television as a powerful tool for nation-building and national integration. This mode of thinking was influenced by the dominant development paradigms of the 1960s, presented by scholars like Wilbur Schramm, Daniel Lerner and Everett Rogers. The dominant paradigm of development was mainly concerned with what a government did to and for its people. It stressed on economic growth through industrialization, technological innovation, infrastructure development, urbanization and mass communication. Mass communication was considered a powerful, direct force of development. It was to act as a one-way, linear transmitter of information from governmental development agencies to the people. The mass media seemed ideally suited for this role. They could rapidly reach large audience with informative and persuasive messages (Singhal and Rogers 1989:20). In India, the dual system of private press and the state-controlled radio and broadcasting was to act as platform to disseminate the government's policies and initiatives on addressing vital issues like education, agriculture, health, economy, transport, and so on. While the press and radio played an equally crucial role in the communication model of development, I specifically look into the role of audio-visual medium, television, in carrying forward the goals of developing a young nation.

In the post-independence phase, the role of television was clearly defined, first, television was to be a medium of education that would promote all-round growth and development, and second, it would function under direct government control. Chatterjee (1991) states that while the birth of television, officially took place in 1959 with the launch of *Doordarshan*, television in its rudimentary form was present since 1923. By 1927, broadcast stations were established by the Indian Broadcasting Company in the metropolises of Bombay and Calcutta. The company heavily relied on radio licenses for revenue generation. As the radio licenses continued to decline in through the 1920s, the company's finances took a hit and it went into liquidation in 1930. The then Indian government acquired the company assets and the Indian State Broadcasting Service came into existence. Broadcasting in India, largely in the form of All India Radio (AIR), got a fillip under the leadership of Lionel Fielden of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), who took charge as Controller of Broadcasting in 1935. Under Fielden's guidance, the All India

Radio (AIR) consisting of medium-wave radio stations at major centers like Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Tiruchirapalli and Lucknow. Studies by Das (2005) and Page and Crawley (2001) showcase how the outbreak of the Second World War had a significant impact on the development of All India Radio. Because of the war, broadcasting assumed a central role in the government's propaganda-both in India, where it had to contend with nationalist opposition to the war effort, and abroad, where the propaganda of Axis powers had to be countered. This led to substantial investment in upgrading the transmission facilities.

As previously stated, the leaders of the newly-independent nation had a massive task of uplifting the lives of millions of their citizens out of subsistence existence. The policy makers under the stewardship of then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, were convinced that the task of wealth generation via industrialization could not be left to the private sector, which might spend resources on the production of consumer goods rather than build infrastructure required in the country. Therefore, the government at that time adopted a state driven developmental model of a mixed economy where public and private sector worked together in unison. The government envisioned mass media as a vital ingredient in moving a nation towards development. For this to be achieved, communication had to be strictly under government control as private participation would encourage consumerist values and beliefs. It was envisaged that government controlled audio-visual medium would promote economic and social development through education and attitude change in a country which was plagued by traditional beliefs of caste system and mass literacy often acting as an hindrance to peoples participation in development activities (Singhal and Rogers: 2001). Television, in this phase, was not considered as a medium of entertainment but primarily as a pedagogic tool.

Television was introduced in India as an experimental educational service in Delhi in 1959. The initial broadcasts consisted of two one-hour transmissions a week centering on themes like road sense, food adulteration, care of public property. They were watched by 'teleclubs' organized Delhi. It took another six years for a regular daily one-hour service to appear. This began in 1965 with help from the West German government. The transmission consisted of news bulletins in Hindi and agricultural programmes for farmers. Regular news bulletins in English were introduced in 1971 (Mehta 2008: 30). During this phase, television viewing was largely restricted to only a few bureaucrats, politicians and a few select localities in Delhi. For the rest of

India, television simply did not exist. The number of television sets in operation was miniscule. The first Indian television factory opened only in 1969 in Kanpur, and produced just 1250 sets in its first year of manufacture, but by 1977, forty manufacturers were producing nearly a quarter of a million sets in a year (Page and Crawley 2001: 56). Television remained a wing of the All India Radio right up to 1976, when a separate organization, with a separate name-*Doordarshan*-came into existence. Vinod Dua, Consulting Editor¹⁰⁰, *TheWire Hindi*, recalls,

There was only *Doordarshan* and it was not called *Doordarshan* then, and it was an attached office of the All India Radio. It used to be called television center and it was confined to Delhi only. Then came the Bombay centre. The Amritsar television center came in to counter PTV from Lahore, and then slowly different centers started opening up. At that time the technology was of terrestrial transmission. It was not satellite.

Ninan (1995) remarks that Indira Gandhi's association with Indian television, first as Minister of Information and Broadcasting (1964-66) and later as Prime Minister (1966-77 and 1980-84), marked a change in the state's relationship with the medium. She recalls an old joke about India's first three Prime Ministers: 'Nehru was a visionary, Lal Bahadur was a revisionary and Indira Gandhi was a televisionary' (ibid: 20). Indira Gandhi believed in using television as the state's visual messenger. The messenger was used both to showcase the achievements of the government as well as to tide over critical voices, particularly during the days of Emergency (discussed in the next section). Mehta (2008) notes that as minister of Information and Broadcasting, 1964-66, Indira Gandhi, injected new energy into broadcasting, by instituting the first official inquiry into the state of Indian broadcasting. Referred to as the Chanda Committee 1964, headed by the former Auditor General of India, Ashok Chanda, the committee recommended the whole-scale changes to the broadcasting structure and rapid expansion of television, blaming insufficient funding of mass media for the inadequate information, poor motivation and insufficient participation of the masses in the country's development. But it also questioned the government's stranglehold on the medium; prominent among its 219 recommendations was one that called for the setting up of an autonomous national television service (ibid: 33). Given the geographical spread as well as the ideological impact of television over audiences, giving up on its control, was an idea to perilous for governments of all hues to

¹⁰⁰The designation and institutional affiliation of the journalists interviewed are mentioned only once, when their quotes are cited for the first time in the study. The designation and institutional affiliations mentioned here were held by these journalists at the time of the field study. Some of these designation and affiliations have changed over time. However, their then designation and affiliation have been retained for the purpose of this study.

execute. Mitra (1993) describes the government and broadcast media relationship as that of exercising control. He says, ‘the critical point to note is that any government, be it the Congress or the National Front¹⁰¹, is basically unwilling to give up total control of the powerful broadcast media. Every government recognizes the effective role of television in maintaining the social-political bloc in power. During the National Emergency, Indira’s government took this to its hegemonic extreme when the media was made completely ineffective by the government. Moraji Desai’s party tried to liberalize it to some extent, as did the National Front, but their sincerity was always doubtful. Given the role that television could play in the social-political-cultural map, no government is willing to completely give up control’ (ibid: 24). This exercise continues till date, and subsequent discussions in this study, highlight how the autonomy of public broadcaster continues to be transgressed by every government that comes into power.

The use of television for government propaganda was another defining feature of the Indira Gandhi years of governance. At this juncture, I take a short departure from television history and take a peek into the imposition of Emergency by Indira Gandhi from 1975-77. It was during this phase, that the role of television was altered from being a pedagogic tool to a propaganda tool for political means.

II

The State, Media and Emergency (1975-77)

The imposition of Emergency was a landmark event in the history of Indian media and does call for our attention. The use of two mediums of communication- radio and broadcast (under government control) to suppress dissenting voices in the other medium –print (private ownership) as well as the opposition in the Parliament and civil society at large, was the hallmark of this dark period. The misuse of radio by Indira Gandhi gave rise to the nomenclature *All Indira Radio* instead of *All India Radio*.

Many remember Indira Gandhi and her relationship with media through the prism of Emergency. While broadcast media and radio were under government control, print media was

¹⁰¹The National Front was a coalition government of regional parties with outside support of the BJP and the CPI(M), headed by V.P Singh, at the center from May 1989 to November 1990.

relatively free. With the imposition of Emergency, Indira Gandhi targeted the print media. She declared Emergency on 25th June 1975. It authorized the government to impose press censorship, suspend all civil rights. Chandan Mitra, Editor-in-chief, *The Pioneer*, considers the imposition of Emergency from 1975 to 1977 a defining moment in the history of India media. He remarks,

The imposition of Emergency was imposition of censorship on press which was largely limited to the press, as within the television industry, there was only one channel, and it was government-owned. The censorship on press was quite a shocking experience. Many senior journalists were taken into custody. Censor officers would visit newspaper offices and allow only government regulated news to be published. All articles and opinion pieces were scanned by censor officers and there was no scope for any government criticism. It was a traumatic time and media was completely muzzled. The press kind of regained its role only in 1977 when Janata Party came into power. There was a firm resolve then, in the press, that they will not allow themselves to be brow beaten like this again.

Reiterating the famous L.K.Advani quote, Vinod Dua says,

L.K.Advani of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, there was no BJP then, made a statement after the Emergency that when media was asked to bend, it chose to crawl. That shows that the role of the print media during emergency. Except for a few token protests in the editorial column like a blank page, I don't remember there was any organized resistance through print media. Television was out of question because it was a government mouthpiece.

Ninan (1995) argues that television worked as a government mouthpiece during the imposition of Emergency. She says, 'the Emergency saw Mrs. Gandhi and those who advised her warm to the idea of TV propoganda. The government mantra during the Emergency was the 20-point programme, each point of which represented a development goal such as irrigation, education, family planning, and so on. Zealous effort was made to imprint this list of goals on the consciousness of every citizen, literate or otherwise. That is when television came handy: such television production facilities as existed in the newly installed centres of *Doordarshan* were utilized in churning out dozens of quickies on every aspect of 20-point programme. All *Doordarshan* centres in the country had to produce statistics on how many films they had produced on each point and these were monitored to ensure that each of these heroic goals was done justice to' (ibid: 25). One prominent example of how the government made use of television to promote its development and political agenda was the launch of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) experiment in 1975-76 which was implemented a few months after the imposition of Emergency. Under this experiment, India became the first country in the world to use an American broadcast satellite to reach remote villages directly with

educational information. This satellite was used to transmit four hours of educational programming a day to 2,338 villages spread across the six states- Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The primary objective was to spread the government's message of family planning, agricultural practices, infrastructure development and contribute towards national integration (Mehta 2008: 35). While the SITE experiment was an important landmark in the communication for development model pursued by previous governments, it was also cunningly used by the Indira Gandhi government to showcase its development agenda. It was used to silence the critical voices against the government's model of governance, thereby strengthening its political hold in the country.

The misuse of television and radio and censorship of press, led to widespread call for press freedom. With Indira's Gandhi fall from power in 1977, and the Janata Party gaining office, the B.G.Vergheese Committee was set-up to look into the issue of autonomy of AIR and *Doordarshan*. The committee submitted its 'Report of the Working Group on Autonomy and Akashvani and Doordarshan' in 1978. The Committee reaffirmed the opinion that broadcast media necessarily has to be part and parcel of the larger process of national planning and development. For this to be achieved, Doordarshan had to spread its wings from the urban to the semi-urban and rural areas, and develop a pan-Indian character. Along with addressing the needs to the urban areas, it had to make inroads into the rural population to make them part of the development process. It envisaged a national broadcasting service predominantly 'Indian' in character and content. It further recommended the creation of an autonomous corporation called the Prasar Bharati or the Broadcasting Corporation of India to prevent its misuse for government propaganda. This proposal struck a compromise between a privately owned, commercially motivated media and a government regulated and owned media. The term 'autonomy' meant that the media would be supervised by the government with an independent board of directors who would have decision making powers (Mitra 1993:23). The political uncertainty during the late seventies, at the center, ensured that the issue of autonomy failed to see the light of the day for a long time. The Prasar Bharati Act was eventually passed in 1997.

Doordarshan came into existence as a separate television organization in 1976, but within the control of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. This was also when advertising was allowed on television. Until the advent of advertising, *Doordarshan* had been funded

exclusively by TV licenses and allocations from the national budget. But later TV licensing was abolished and advertising was to fill the budgetary shortfall. This set the stage for commercialization of *Doordarshan*. Private funding was approved for the first time in the state broadcaster. During this phase, there was rapid development in television infrastructure in the country. Television technology was indigenously produced and an increasing number of domestically built black-and-white sets were available in the market. This led to acquisition of personal sets by upper and upper-middle class viewers and increasingly promoted private viewing over community viewing (Mitra 1993:15). The programming content on *Doordarshan* also changed significantly. The educational fare of the sixties was supplemented by large a variety of other programmes. These included sports, news, feature films, musical shows, plays, comedies, quiz etc. The entertainment mode of programming started attracting advertisers to the medium. Thus, the process of commercialization of the state broadcaster set in motion. Sponsorship based programming expounded in the next phase.

III

‘National Programming’, State and the Market

India hosted the Asian Games in 1982. This event led to two significant changes in television-the advent of colour and national programming. The games were a stage for the government to showcase a shining India to itself and the world. As a host country, it was up to India to provide live telecast of the games in colour feed to other participating nations. The advent of colour television led to significant policy changes. Mitra (1993) states, ‘many policy changes started to take place after the ASIAD. First, the government realized that the development of television in the nation pivoted around concerns of economics, and one huge source of revenue were the private advertisers. This led to an increasing number of commercial spots on television. The advent of commercials led to significant development, namely, an increase in entertainment programs. The earlier reticence for entertainment was replaced by a ‘liberalization’ of the policies, and more entertainment programs began to emerge. The second development was the adoption of sponsored programs, where the advertisers independently produced programs for television, and the government sold time to the advertisers to air these independently produced programs. This quasi-commercialization saw the advent of a greater number of entertainment

programs of several different kinds, from live sports to serialized soap operas to powerful serials (ibid: 37). Sailaja Bajpai, Columnist¹⁰², *Indian Express*, recalls,

Asian Games was telecast live by Doordarshan. Sponsored programmes were allowed in the entertainment section. The then I and B Secretary Mr. S.S.Gill took the decision to allow entertainment programmes in the evening time slot. A lot of educative serials like *Buniyaad*, *Hum Log* were screened. Allowing sponsored programme became crucial to raise revenues. So there was a compulsion for public broadcaster to go commercial. Public broadcasters have to be commercially viable. This opened up the space for commercialization of *Doordarshan*, the justification being that a public broadcaster should both educate and entertain.

The national telecast of such programmes began in 1982. The launch of indigenous satellites INSAT-1A, and later INSAT-1B, allowed the creation and transmission of national programming from Delhi. Several regional centers located in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Bangalore, along with numerous satellite centers in small towns, were all interconnected to each other through satellite and terrestrial links. For the first time, all of India could see the same image at the same time. The first nationally telecast programme in colour was the Prime Minister's address to the nation from the ramparts of the historic Red Fort in Delhi on August 15th, 1982. It was the first time that people could see a televised version of the Prime Minister's Independence Day speech. This was followed by a spate of sponsored national programmes. Ranging from news bulletins, soap operas, feature films, talk shows, musical programs, cartoon shows, current affairs and serials, such programs, besides generating revenue, attempted to cater to a large section of audience across the country. Commenting on the nature and scope of national programming, Thomas (2005) remarks, 'the entertainment oriented programming gradually usurped education's place as a prime objective of television content, and this ideological somersault was a pivotal moment in Indian television history. It ushered in a new audience that until now had lures of the medium; the small Indian middle class got interested and television soon became the primary form of household entertainment (ibid: 100).

Now, the State envisioned television not only as a tool for education but as a tool for education and entertainment. The scheme of national programming incorporated both these goals in its fold. As part of this exercise, the first Indian soap opera, *Hum Log*, was aired on national television on 15th July, 1984. It was the first attempt to blend entertainment with promotion of social values through the medium of television. *Hum Log* set the precedent for similar shows like

¹⁰² Sailaja Bajpai has quit *Indian Express*. She currently works with the digital news website *ThePrint*.

Buniyaad, *Nukaad*, *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* that hit the screen subsequently. The main lesson from the *Hum Log* experience was that indigenous soap operas in India could attract large audience and big profits. *Buniyaad*, a historical soap opera centered around the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, followed by *Hum Log* in 1986-87. Written by the same scriptwriter and featuring several of the same actors, it overshadowed even *Hum Log* in its popularity. Feature films based on musical shows like *Chitrahari* and *Chitramala* were also instant hits among audiences. Private producers like Prannoy Roy and Vinod Dua marked their entry into television during this period. Vinod Dua, recalls doing two sponsored current affairs shows - *Newsline* and *Janvaani* on *Doordarshan*. He says,

I produced a current affairs program *Newsline*. It was promoted by Ananda Bazaar Group. M.J.Akbar was my anchor person. That was the first time a current affairs magazine or a current affairs venture, magazine format was aired on television. I also moderated a talk show *Janvaani*. In *Janvaani*, a minister was called into the studio where he would face the audience who would ask him questions. But it was discontinued after some time as, I was not playing go the gallery. It was a tough program and ministers were asked questions which were tough, unlike today's phony court trials and all.

Bhatt (1994) states, 'the Janavani programme of the eighties often resulted in some senior ministers discomfiture in front of an invited audience and the TV viewers at large as they failed to come up with satisfactory answers brought up by the audience members. Rajiv Gandhi, who was the Prime Minister then and had not yet succumbed to the temptation of misusing the DD medium for his party and personal ends, had himself asked DD to put out the programmes and some of his ministers who were later sacked owed that fate to their failure on the Janavani appearance (ibid: 33).

As mentioned earlier, this was also the phase where the two most popular epics- *Ramayan*¹⁰³ and *Mahabharata* were aired for the first time on television. Studies by Mitra (1993),

¹⁰³ Singhal and Roger (1989) describe the craze and popularity that followed the televisionization of the serial. They say, 'for 18 months in 1987-88, Ramanand Sagar's TV serial, *Ramayan* based on India's legendary religious epic, was broadcast by *Doordarshan* every Sunday morning. Sixty million Indians watched it, many Hindus taking a bath to purify themselves prior to the serial's broadcast. During the sacred 45 minute *Ramayan* broadcasts, many viewers lit incense-sticks before their TV sets, crowds thinned on city streets, and trains screeched to unscheduled halts at railroad stations with public TV sets. *Doordarshan* earned \$20 million in advertising revenues, and the serial's audience ratings reached 95% in several North Indian towns and cities. *Ramayan*'s tremendous popularity helped sell videotapes of the serial, books about the epic, and packaged toys like bows and arrows, which earned heavy profits for Sagar and his business associates. Overseas Indians in the UK and the Us watched *Ramayan* videotapes, rented from Indian grocery stores. When *Ramayan* went off air in July, 1998, 2,000 street-cleaners in Jalandhar, Punjab, went on a brooms-down strike, demanding that the serial continue. *Doordarshan*, the major beneficiary of

Mankekar (1998) and Rajagopal (2003) showcase how televisization of these Hindu epics became a rallying point for the consolidation of Hindutva politics in India.

Within the news genre, Prannoy Roy, initially, came up with election analysis. His production house, *New Delhi Television Network (NDTV)* along with *Doordarshan* and the National Informatics Center, Delhi worked together for the coverage of the Tamil Nadu assembly election in 1989. This was followed by successive national elections in 1989 and 1991. The team produced election show, where the analysis of elections was done immediately after voting. Trends in voting, seat share, positioning of political parties were discussed and debated in special election shows. Recalling his experience of handling news on the *Doordarshan* platform, Prannoy Roy, says, ‘The first challenge we faced as journalists, which many journalists in Third World countries face even today, was that we were not allowed to report news on or about our own country. Although the Indian Press was free, television news, because of its greater reach, was a government monopoly. When we were granted permission to cover only international news, the warning was reiterated: ‘Nothing on India’ (Roy in Kagal 2016:3).

Adding to, how the notion of news in the nineties stands in complete contrast to contemporary times, Rajdeep Sardesai says,

The pre-1991 years were like Neolithic or Paleolithic age for television news. In the absence of 24x7 news television and relatively fewer newspapers both national and regional, the notion of news stood out in complete contrast to the current times. News in real time, news as it happens, which is instantaneous like fast food, wasn’t there in the early period. There was certain slowness to the whole news making process. One consciously did a story to understand its complexities, reflect on it before it was put in out in the public domain. There was no urgency to put it out in the fastest possible time. The notion of truth and accuracy was important, which to my mind was one of the strengths of that period. The possible weakness was that the energy levels were less. Today in contrast, the energy is much more frenetic and frenzy, there is no place to hide, its 24x7, it’s round the clock, and cameras are everywhere. I think pre-1991 was a slow paced world. It was a world which allowed you time to actually digest information before putting it out in the public domain. Today you don’t have that time, the luxury of time is gone and that is a big difference quite apart from the frenzied competition between then and now.

With innovative programming and influx of revenue, *Doordarshan* did try to reform itself and de-tag itself from being a government mouthpiece to being a credible public service broadcaster. The appointment of Bhaskar Ghose as Director General, *Doordarshan* by Rajeev

theRamayan advertising incomes, seriously considered reviving the serial in late 1988 to coincide with the Indian Dusshera festival, which celebrates Lord Ram’s victory over the Demon King Ravan (ibid: 70-71).

Gandhi, was one such initiative towards achieving that goal. Recounting the appointment of Ghose, Vinod Dua, remarks,

When Bhaskar Ghose became the DG of *Doordarshan*, he had some ideas that he wanted to professionalize the news gathering of *Doordarshan* but that fizzled out. It is not in the DNA of *Doordarshan* to free itself. The government also does not want to lose control over it.

Ghose (2005), recounts in his memories, 'Rajiv Gandhi's instructions in our very first meeting could not have been more clearer: 'I think the government has got its fingers too far inside *Doordarshan*, you'll have to pull them out' (ibid: 8). The task was easier said than done. Mehta (2008), talks about the blueprint for reforming *Doordarshan*. Much focus was laid on inducting new professionals and giving them functional autonomy. Up till now, the news staff was mainly government officials from the Indian Information Service, the Indian Police Service, and other allied central services, who were sent on deputation and occupied senior editorial positions. They were government officials first, and broadcasters second. Steps were taken to hire dedicated team of professional journalists from outside the restricted government pool. However, this revamping was stuck in the face of the Bofors scandal that engulfed the Congress Party. Mehta remarks, 'at the height of the Bofors scandal, *Doordarshan*'s coverage of the 1987 Allahabad by-election angered senior Congress ministers because they were asked difficult questions in a live panel discussion after the loss. They made it clear that they perceived such journalism as subversive activity that could not be allowed on a sensitive medium like television. This incident hastened the end of *Doordarshan*'s revamping' (ibid:49).

Along with the issue of institutional autonomy, the content aired on *Doordarshan* did create resentment among viewers. While national programming did broaden the viewership base of *Doordarshan*, it did create resentment in regions where the language in which it was being broadcast had little takers. Describing the repercussions in lieu of national programming, Mehta states, 'national programming created a great deal of resentment in non-Hindi speaking areas. Between 8.30 pm and 11pm daily, all regional stations had to perforce link up to the National programme from Delhi, which was largely in Hindi. Bhaskar Ghose, recalls how the chief secretary of Tamil Nadu accused him of dividing the country and the chief minister of Karnataka sarcastically thanked him for reducing the load-shedding in his state as all television sets were switched off after 8.30pm as soon as the National Programme started (2008: 40). Gupta (1998),

highlights another factor that added to the denting the image of the state broadcaster. She argues, ‘the most obvious manifestation of Doordarshan’s inability to address diversity or opposition was due to its consistent attempt to impose a narrow political vision on the country. Doordarshan insisted on presenting the ruling Congress party and its functionaries as the true political leadership of the country, even when the phenomenon of political regionalism was developing. In addition, for a long period of time in post-Independence Indian history, the Nehru-Gandhi family was projected as the ruling family of the country and Doordarshan played a role in the process of its glorification (ibid: 43-44).

Besides, lack of institutional autonomy, Hindi-centric programming, Delhi focused policy and programming decisions and blatant promotion of the ruling party, the state broadcaster continued to be plagued by a host of other issues that prevented it from establishing itself as a credible public broadcaster. Summing up the *Doordarshan* years, in the pre-1991 era, Sevanthi Ninan, Founder, *The Hoot*, says,

It did well in the first three decades starting 1959 as it had a lot of talent who had no where else to go. But it really took off in the 1980s with the introduction of colour television. Soaps like *Hum Log* and *Buniyaad* were well received. The epics like *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* in the later-half of 1980s also did well. Private players came with news on *Doordarshan* in 1998. Ratikant Basu, the Director General during that period made a huge difference to the functioning of *Doordarshan*. He was the guy who decided to get private players in *Doordarshan*. So came in Prannoy Roy and Arun Poorie, the current head of *Aaj Tak*. *Aaj Tak* in its first avatar started from DD. Then Prannoy Roy defected to Star News.

This was the period when the sample news channels of the study- *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*, started as production houses and produced content for *Doordarshan*. While *NDTV* produced *The World This Week*, *Aaj Tak* produced *Newstrack*. The fourth chapter provides a detailed account of the journey of both *NDTV* and *Aaj Tak* from being production houses to 24x7 national news channels.

IV

Liberalization and the Beginning of Private News: Post 1991

In 1991, an acute fiscal crisis, led to the opening of Indian economy. The Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization model was sought to put Indian economy back on track. Steps like

lowering and simplifying import tariffs and quotas imposed to protect domestic industries, removing licensing raj, and providing incentives exports and foreign investment were undertaken. To show its utmost commitment to liberalization, the Indian government allowed entry of foreign players into the broadcasting sector (Ghosh 1998). However, this decision was laced with its own set of apprehensions. First, the state perceived a threat to its national sovereignty from a new source- translational satellite television. Page and Crawley (2001) argue that the use of satellite for transmitting air-waves was not a novel experiment in Indian soil. But the intrusion of private international television broadcasters into field, which was always assumed to be a national prerogative was highly unwelcome. Broadcasting institutions were entrenched as a national monopoly. The government's commitment to liberalization reduced its monopolistic hold. Second, the issue of flow of externally mediated information, and alien cultural influences did cause uneasiness among the corridors of power in India. The fears of the dilution of Indian cultural values also led to invocation of phrases like cultural invasion, westernization, Americanization. The government and policy makers felt that western programming would corrupt Indian sensibilities. Bhatt (1994) states that K.P. Singh Deo, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, 1993-95, once made a speech in the Lok Sabha describing the programming by foreign media as 'diabolical invasion from the sky'. But he also made it clear that there would be no effort to ban these broadcasts (ibid: 86). Instead, the government sought to give a befitting response to challenge by foreign broadcasters by bringing in changes in its programming and advertising policy. The government allowed *Doordarshan* to expand its reach, by multiplying the number of channels available to national and regional viewers and increasing the number of entertainment programmes to be broadcast. The launch of *DD Metro* as an entertainment- centric channel was part of this endeavor. As part of its entertainment package- fictions, serials, musical shows, sports, films, talk shows, youth programmes were regularly aired. Asthana (2013) argues that rise of sponsored entertainment programmes in the state broadcaster Doordarshan, indicated a shift from state-led developmentalism to market-based consumerism. While a certain form of entrenched state capital was visible in the development of broadcasting until 1982, the seven-year period 1983-90, and the period post-1991 demonstrates the rise of transnational capital (ibid: 527). Mazarella (2003) too agrees with the theorization. Through his study on representations in advertisements, he demonstrates how the media in the 1990s heavily contributed towards advancing a shift in the

national imagery from a developmentalist to a consumerist vision of the India nation (ibid:71). The global media conglomerates riding on the wave of transnational capital saw India as a key emerging market. The developing national satellite network and the increasingly advertisement driven broadcasting, provided them with enormous possibilities for business expansion. Focusing on, how the advent of satellite television evoked debates around cultural change in India, Butcher's (2003) study showcases how transnational television opened India's connection to the global. With global images in the form of movies, soap operas, music freely flowing in, concerns were raised regarding its effect on the local population. Butcher sees this interplay, not as subjugation, but rather that of interaction of local and global. Foreign transnational television channels reflected the trend of localization, recognizing the importance of situating a product within a familiar cultural milieu by taking audience preference into account. The ideological apparatus consisting of State, religion, culture, market etc. have all been determining factors in the way identity construction through television took place. It produced ideas, views and beliefs that legitimized Indianness.

With the liberalization of the economy, the market led model of governance entered into various sectors like education, health, planning, agriculture, to name a few. It too made its entry into media via private and foreign players who transmitted signals into India through satellite transmission. The loosening up of the airwaves allowed these broadcasters to beam news from across borders. There is no official record to know when satellite television began in India. But the American network *CNN* was transmitting signals into India in the early nineties. However, it took the Gulf War to really interest viewers in the concept of satellite television (Gupta 1998:64). The Gulf War, 1990-91, started between Iraq and the US led coalition force due to the annexation of Kuwait by Iraq. *CNN* started beaming live images of the war. Recalling the reception of the telecast of the Gulf War in India by *CNN*, Mrinal Pande, Former Chairperson *Prasar Bharti* and Former Editor, *Hindustan* remarks,

Government's hold over airwaves tripped with the outbreak of the Gulf War. Till that time watching television news used to be elite business. So the war was beamed live in all the five star hotels and in all social gatherings in Delhi. People admired it saying oh what a lovely war. Everybody who was somebody said that we must have television like this, so the peer pressure in the elite group built and these people permitted cable television. They could not have stopped it for too long either, the pressure was so much and then they tried to keep their hold on private cable channels by controlling up-linking and down-linking. Till then up-linking and down-linking

was all done at the behest of the Prime Minister's office, so it was still a very much mandarin controlled phenomena.

Adding to the war euphoria, Abhinandan Sekri, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, *Newslandry*, says,

The Iraq War changed everything. In 1991, Iraq had invaded Libya, and these dish antennas had come up. It was the first live war that people saw and they were very excited. Very rich people used to own that dish whose cost was 1 to 1.5lakhs. Then some enterprising men started a cable distribution business. So it was neither liberalization nor anything else that got us hooked on to news. It was Mr. Saddam Hussain. Once that happened there was no going back.

Mrityunjay Jha, former employee, *Aaj Tak*, narrates his experience of covering the war from the Maurya Sheraton Hotel in Delhi. He says,

CNN channel used to come in the Maurya Sheraton Hotel, Delhi, where a huge dish was installed. I used to go there to record the Gulf War as we were doing stories on the war. *Zee* had also started, but as an entertainment channel. So everyone had an inkling that the government is slightly opening up, and it was going to be the future.

While the televization of the Gulf War raked up the Indian appetite for satellite news, it was the entry of STAR TV that capitalized on this hunger and opened up a whole new market for satellite television news in India. Thussu (2007a) argues that, 'the Indian elite, raised on a bland diet of *Doordarshan*, was now in a position to receive international news on television, first through the live coverage of the 1990-91 Gulf crisis by CNN (Cable News Network) and later through the Hong-Kong based STAR (Satellite Television Asian Region) TV, owned by the billionaire Li Ka-Shing. The loosening of government control was instantly cashed on up by STAR TV. STAR TV was the first major global player to recognize the demand for western, mainly American programming, when in October 1991 it started beaming a five channel satellite service in English (Star Plus, Prime Sports, Channel V, BBC World and Star Movies). A year later in 1992, *Zee TV* was added to this pack. This became an instant hit with the English-fluent urban elite. Critically, the advertisers saw in these channels an easy way to reach India's affluent middle classes' (ibid: 96). This free to air service was expected to earn revenue through advertising alone, as it covered the entire region which included the quickly expanding markets of Asia, from Bahrain to Beijing. However, this basket of channels soon ran into financial difficulties and in July 1993, the global media moghal, Rupert Murdoch bought 63.6% of STAR from the Li family for US\$ 525 million in a combination of cash and Newscorp stock (Gupta

1998: 64). This was a phase that witnessed the end of *Doordarshan's* monopoly with the advent of private and foreign players like *CNN*, *BBC*, *STAR* and *Zee*. The entry of private and foreign players into the television sector led to mushrooming of news channels.

I now provide a synoptic account of how the television news market at the national level has evolved in India. The first private television channel that entered the scene was *Zee TV*. In his biography *The Z Factor* (2016), Subhash Chandra provides a ringside view of his entry into the television business. He talks about he got the idea of using satellite dish for television transmission from his experience of watching CNN's coverage of the Gulf War in five star hotels of Delhi. He narrates his experience of how he clinched the deal with STAR (was eyeing the Indian market but could not find partners) after a series of negotiations. A company Asia Today Ltd was formed and registered in British Virgin Islands with its operations in Hong Kong. This company launched *Zee TV* on 2nd October, 1992 from the STAR's uplinking center using the AsiaSat satellite. This was an illegal move as Indian Laws did not allow a foreign channel to be shown in India using a foreign satellite. Broadcasting as an activity, was reserved only for the Government of India or the public sector. Chandra says he was lucky to by-pass government scrutiny. Over the course of next few years, he invested money in creating new producers for the programming on *Zee TV*. The idea of starting the weekly news bulletin *Ghoomta Aaina*, came about during a chance meeting with the owner of Asian News International (ANI), a TV news agency in India in 1993. ANI gathered news content on India and supplied it to global news networks. Next came in the famous television talk show *Aap Ki Adalat* in 1994. The success of these two shows showed the seed of launching a news based show in Chandra's mind. Since, domestic private networks were not allowed to air news, Zee partnered with ANI to circumvent the news broadcast rules. *Zee TV* would produce and give the news bulletin to ANI and then ANI would uplink the bulletin to Hong Kong and then *Zee TV* would download it and play it a couple of seconds later. Few years later, *Zee News* was launched as 24x7 news channel in 1995-96. With *Zee News* laying the foundation, the era of 24x7 private national news channels *bazaar* took off in 1998 when *NDTV* partnered with *STAR* to start *STAR's* 24-hour news channel. This partnership lasted for five years, ending in 2003, due to conflict over editorial rights. After parting ways with *NDTV*, *STAR* entered into a joint venture with the *Ananda Bazaar Patrika* group to form a media company Media Content and Communications Service Pvt. Ld (MCCS)

which ran *STAR News*. In 2012, the ABP and STAR partnership broke and MCCS renamed *STAR News* as *ABP News*. *Aaj Tak* was launched in 2000. Initially *Aaj Tak* held talks with *CNN*, which like *STAR* was eyeing an entry to the lucrative Indian market. The partnership sustained was a short time and it was ultimately called off over editorial issues. Some well know Hindi broadcast journalists like Rajat Sharma, Dibang, Deepak Chaurasia were associated with the channel for some period of time. Its sister channel, *Headlines Today* (now *India Today*), 24x7 English news channel was launched on 2003. 2003 appears to busy year with the launch of two more national channels from the *NDTV* group- *NDTV 24x7* in English and *NDTV India* in Hindi. Like Hindi broadcast journalists, few prominent English broadcast journalists too, worked in the *NDTV* group, like, Barkha Dutt, Arnab Goswami, Rajdeep Sardesai. Rajat Sharma launched the 24x7 Hindi news channel, *India TV* in 2004. After it failed talks with the TV Today group, *CNN* ventured into a partnership with Global Broadcast News (currently TV18 Broadcast Company) and launched *CNN-IBN* (now *News18*). Its Hindi counterpart, *News18 India* was first launched in 2007 by the *Dainik Jagran* Group as *Channel 7*. It was acquired in 2006 by Network 18 and rebranded *IBN7*. Currently the channel operates under the name *News18 India*. *Times Now* made its entry into the India broadcast media scene in 2006. Belonging to the *The Times Group* it collaborated with *Reuters*, an international news agency which is part of the *Reuters Group*. Another channel from *The Times Group* is *Mirror Now*. *Mirror Now* was initially launched in 2015 as *MagicBricks Now*, a news channel with focus on real estate. In 2017, *MagicBricks Now* was replaced with *Mirror Now*. *NewsX* owned by ITV Network was launched in 2012. *News Nation*, a 24x7 Hindi news channel was launched in 2013 by the News Nation Network Pvt. Ltd. In 2016, Arnab Goswami resigned from the Times Now channel and launched a new 24x7 English news channel *Republic TV* in collaboration with BJP Rajya Sabha MP Rajeev Chandrasekhar and T. Mohandas Pai, Chairman of Manipal Global Education. This description provides a brief insight into the existing scenario in the national news channel segment in contemporary times. There has been tremendous growth of news channels in the regional level also. Year after year, news channels of various hues and colours are being launched. The satellite revolution of the 1990s has propelled the entry of private players in the news space. Private participation primarily through corporate funding is now driving the growth in the broadcast media sector. It is the market that has become a central player in how media operates. Private media works in complete contrast to state owned media. Newer forms of participation in news

framing bring in newer forms of ‘articulations’. Amidst such a situation, it is significant to look at how is the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* poised in the contemporary television news media scenario in India.

V

The State of Public Broadcaster *Doordarshan*

In today’s broadcast media scene, *Doordarshan* has lost the prerogative of being the sole information provider. Now it is competing with a large segment of private media. Although in terms of geographical reach, *Doordarshan* occupies the top spot, the continuing monopolistic hold of the government over it, makes it a government’s mouthpiece. As stated earlier, successive governments have used the platform of the state broadcaster to pursue their ideological goals. Mrinal Pande cites the bureaucratic overreach of the government as a primary factor responsible for the steady decline of credibility *Doordarshan*. For her,

The term public broadcaster is a misnomer primarily because the Prasar Bharti Act of 1996 needs to be amended big time. Both *Doordarshan* and *All India Radio* are controlled by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and thus have no autonomy. For a long time, Prasar Bharti did not have a functioning Chairman. During this time, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued a notification stating that in the absence of Chairman, the Secretary of Information and Broadcasting Ministry would chair all meetings and have the final say in appointments and revenue generation plans. This dented the financial and functional autonomy of the Prasar Bharati. The bureaucratic overreach has made public broadcasting in India incompetent.

The recent confrontation between the Smriti Irani, Minister of Information and Broadcasting and A. Surya Prakash, Chairperson, *Prasar Bharti Board*, on a series of issues like the non-implementation of a resolution recommended by the ministry concerning the appointment of an IAS officer to the Board, blocking of the move to fill two key editorial posts with journalists whose salaries were higher than what the Board could pay and the rejection of the ministry’s demand that the Board pay a private company Rs 2.92crore to cover the International Film Festival of India in Goa, points out to the fact that lack of autonomy in operational and financial matters still eludes the public broadcaster¹⁰⁴. Similarly, the highhandedness of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was observed during the tenure

¹⁰⁴ For more, read, <http://www.thehoot.org/media-watch/media-practice/prasar-bharatis-autonomy-is-it-only-about-smriti-irani-10538>, accessed 22 March, 2018.

of the former Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, when he appointed Veena Jain, an Information Service Officer, of the additional secretary rank as Director General News in *Doordarshan*. Jain was also instructed to report to the ministry for all operational purposes. This ran contrary to the operational and financial autonomy granted to *Doordarshan* under the Prasar Bharti Act of 1996. Ghose (2005), talks of how successive governments have used *Doordarshan* according to their whims and fancies. He says, ‘in the 1970s the government took that monumentally foolish decision to abolish licence fees for radio and television sets. The reason given was that the cost of collection, which was done through post offices, was greater than the amount collected. The real reason was that someone, possibly the finance minister of the day, wanted some cheap popularity. With the abolition of licence fees, *Doordarshan* and AIR became a financial liability for the government, specifically, to the Ministry of information and broadcasting. As an inevitable consequence, the ministry began instructing *Doordarshan* not only in matters relating to the acquisition of hardware but also the kind of programmes it should broadcast. As the years passed, *Doordarshan* degenerated into nothing more than a propaganda machine for the government, carrying boring programmes on different development schemes, on what is happening abroad and in the country as given to them by the Ministry of External affairs and Ministry of Home affairs, and broadcasting ‘cultural’ programmes that someone influential wanted shown, irrespective of how disgracefully shoddy and cheap they were. To call *Doordarshan* a public service broadcaster was to invite a great deal of amusement among professional broadcasters around the world (ibid: 210-211). The government interference in an autonomous institution continues till date. Nalin Mehta, Consulting Editor, *The Times of India*, feels that this interference is primarily due to the lack of financial autonomy of *Doordarshan*. For him,

Public broadcasting is important but not in the way it is at present in India. Here it is the mouthpiece of the government in power. As its purse strings are controlled by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, it lacks autonomy. Hence, the need of the hour is to keep the government at arm’s length from public broadcasting. This will ensure that it becomes more professional and can compete with other international broadcasters like the British Broadcasting Corporation in United Kingdom or Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Canada or Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Australia.

Rajdeep Sardesai, Consulting Editor, *India Today*, too, makes case for institutional autonomy. He opines,

The tragedy of public broadcasting in India is that every government has tried to control it and push its own agenda. The idea of an independent public broadcaster cannot happen till the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting continues to exercise financial and functional control over it. The equivalent of a *BBC* or *ABC* does not exist in India. Moreover, the viewers are also not willing to pay any subscription fees for public broadcasting. This makes the issue of raising revenues more challenging.

Chandan Mitra, also raises the issue of license fees. He compares *Doordarshan* with *BBC* and remarks,

The latter is also a public broadcaster but is fiercely independent. *BBC* does get revenue from government but also gets revenue from license fees. So anybody who owns a television in Britain has to pay a license fee. Since *BBC* raises money from public it has to cater to public taste. This is not the case with *Doordarshan* and hence it offers lower quality of content. In earlier times *Doordarshan* offered very imaginative programming. There were talk shows like *Janmat* hosted by Vinod Dua, epics like *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* and soap operas like *Hum Log* and *Buniyaad*. However, with increasing competition, *Doordarshan* lagged behind due to the bureaucratic control over it.

Arguing that the state broadcaster offers varied content vis-à-vis other channels but it bogged down by governmental interference, Sailaja Bajpai says,

Doordarshan offers more and varied kind of news in comparison to other news channels. However, the discussions on *Doordarshan* are more toned down in comparison to others. This is understandable as it survives on government's money and has to act as its mouthpiece. This is a sad state of affair for a public broadcaster.

There is a pervasive thinking among media professionals that the autonomy granted to the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* is a misnomer. The autonomy finds its place only on paper and not in practice. Moreover, the biggest tragedy concerning the institution is that successive governments, through various tactics, have exercised their monopolistic control to further their political agendas. This has severely undermined the autonomy and independence of the state broadcaster. In the contemporary scenario, *Doordarshan* is operating in a highly overcrowded and competitive media market. Private television news is growing at a rapid pace. Studies by Batabyal (2012), Saeed (2013), Udupa (2015b), argue that market centric form of news media functions in contrast to state led media. This has repercussions on how news is formulated, represented and circulated.

To conclude, this chapter has traced the journey of the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* since its inception in India. The historical account helps in contextualizing the transformations in

television news media in the 21st century. The use of the medium by successive governments to propagate *their* visions of the Indian nation continues till date. The overriding of the institutional autonomy of *Doordarshan* has severely dented its credibility. In the contemporary scenario, *Doordarshan* faces stiff competition from private broadcast news media. The advent of private players in news making has brought in significant transformations in the news media scenario. In the next chapter, I attempt to engage with some vital emerging trends which would generate a more grounded understanding of the transformation in the television news media.

Chapter 4

Television News in Contemporary India

In the last chapter, one sought to delineate a chronicle of the Indian media and television over time, particularly since India's Independence in 1947 and with a specific focus over the decades. It provided an account of how the state in newly independent India occupied a commanding height running the economy and in nation building. What is important to flag off is also the state vision of nation building as one that was committed to recognize India's diversities and address India's inequalities. This was the vision that was developed over the decades of the national movement and the one that informed the idea of development in independent India which accorded equal attention to growth as well as equity. The media too was seen as the fourth pillar of democracy as well as a pillar for development. This media-state-market relationship underwent major recastings from the 1990s when the Indian state sought to initiate new economic reforms that opened up the Indian market to global capitalism. Not surprisingly this implied dramatic changes in the television news space. From being a state led institution in the pre liberalization era, the television media was increasingly being driven by private players. Private participation has ensured that functioning of the television news sector was in sync with the logic of market capitalism. Market capitalism heralded rapid growth, changed ownership structures and the made use of modern technology in the news business. These trends in turn have radically altered the nature of production, representation and consumption of news.

This chapter seeks to map some key emerging trends in the television news media space in such a context- contemporary India. These trends impinge on the way news media is structured and operates. The chapter is divided into seven parts. *First*, it will engage with the issue of the massive growth in the television news space in India. It will examine the reasons that have stimulated the growth of news channels both at the regional and national level in India. *Second*, it will deal with the issue of the content policy of news channels. It will primarily look into the nature and significance of the content being aired in news channels. *Third*, it will look into the genre of current affairs that currently occupies significant position across all news channels. It will delve into the reasons, the nature and the impact of such programming. *Fourth*, it will look at how social media platforms like facebook, instagram, whatsapp are impacting the

content policy of news channels. *Fifth*, it will look into the emerging format of digital journalism, with a focus on its impact on the traditional forms of news making and its emergence as an alternative to the traditional media. *Sixth*, it will focus on the rapid expansion of media that raises concerns about its regulation, especially in the current scenario where the phenomenon of paid news and fake news are becoming the norm. While the Indian constitution guarantees freedom of press, how does one ensure that this freedom is not misused for spreading false information? Herein, comes the question of the responsibility of media to ensure checks and balances are maintained to curtail disinformation. This section looks at what form of regulation is desirable in the Indian context. *Seventh*, it will address the government and television news media relationship in the current context. Past instances are witness to the fact that the television news media in India has always been impacted by state intervention. Successive governments at the centre have eroded the autonomy of the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* and turned it into a propaganda tool. Within such a context, how does one understand the state-private television news linkage in contemporary times?

I

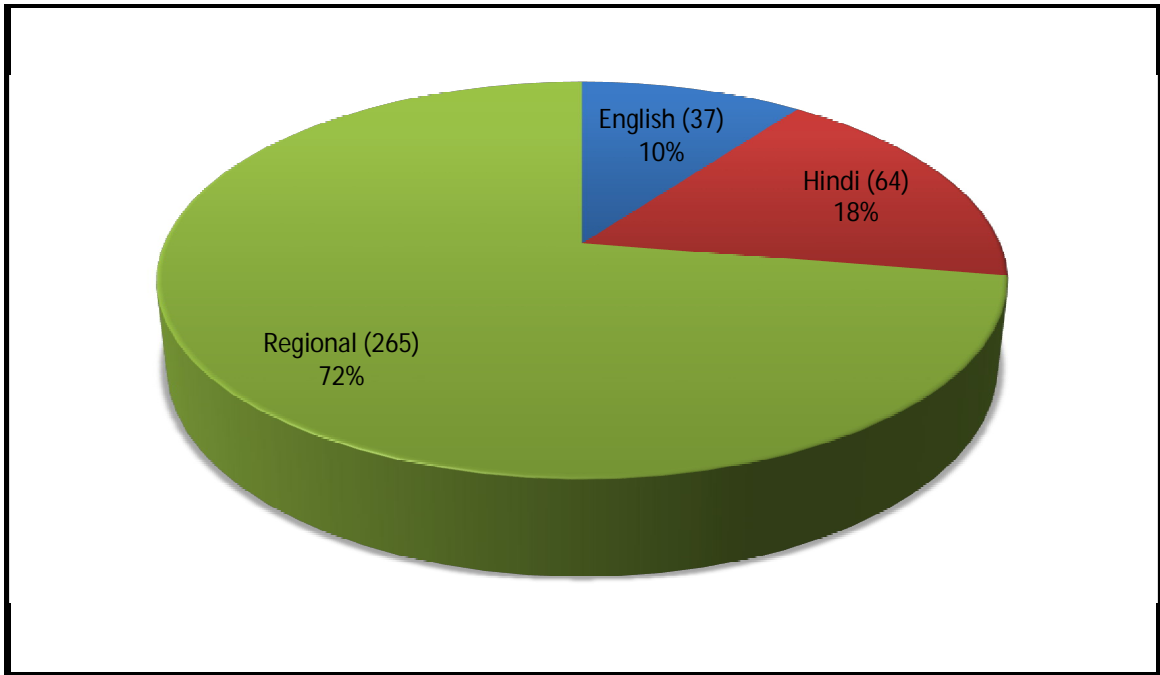
Proliferation of News Channels

The satellite revolution of the nineties has propelled the growth of news channels in India. The journey from government-owned *Doordarshan* to multiple private and foreign channels like *NDTV 24x7*, *Times Now*, *India Today*, *BBC World*, *Al-Jazeera*, *CNN* etc. has been phenomenal. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, states a figure of 866 private television channels (366 news channels and 500 non-news channels) that have permit to operate as of March 2018¹⁰⁵. The number of news channels operating different languages, are as follows: English-37, Hindi-64, Regional-265. The category of English news channels consists of the national English news channels, English business channels and foreign channels. Similarly, the category of Hindi news channels consists of national Hindi news channels and regional Hindi news channels. Likewise, the category of regional news channels

¹⁰⁵ The latest list for the permitted number of satellite news channels is available at <https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Master%20List%20of%20Permitted%20Private%20%20satellite%20TV%20Channels%20as%20on%20%2031.10.2018.pdf>, accessed 21 April, 2018.

consists of all non-English and non-Hindi news channels. The statistics indicate that the Indian broadcast media is growing at a fast pace.

Figure 3: Number of English, Hindi and Regional News Channels in India



(Source: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2018. Available at <https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Master%20List%20of%20Permitted%20Private%20%20state%20TV%20Channels%20as%20on%202031.10.2018.pdf>, accessed 21 April, 2018)

The explosion of news channels is happening at both the national and regional level in the country. An important question to be raised is-what is fuelling the growth in the broadcast media sector? A number of factors have been attributed to the rapid proliferation of the television news media in India. For Rajdeep Sardesai, the easing of the government restrictions on airwaves in the second half of the 1990s propelled this uncontrolled expansion in the television sector. According to him,

What happened was this sense of freedom that one could actually now use television, which was emerging as a powerful medium, to tell a story you wanted. You were no longer restricted by government. This sense of liberation resulted in the mushrooming of news channel both at national and regional level. Everyone wanted to be a part of this sort of revolution, the revolution that destroyed the monopoly of *Doordarshan*.

The loosening of government restrictions did pave the way for the mushrooming of the broadcast sector. However, as stated in the previous chapter, the potential of television as a powerful audio-visual medium was first realized during the 1970s and 1980s when governments at the centre used the medium for furthering their political agendas. This trend gained momentum in post 2000 when private players entered the news space. Broadcast media was seen as a new avenue for accessing political power and influence. Nalin Mehta, reiterates the point of how factors others like wanting political power and influence have led to the mushrooming of news channels, especially in the regional market. He says,

If one looks at the ownership patterns of news channels, one will find that almost 80% of news channels are run by three categories of people- political parties, real estate companies and chit fund companies. In some states like Andhra Pradesh such ownership patterns are as high as 90%. The primary reason for this is, political parties own news channel for party propoganda and the real estate and chit fund companies are in news business to roll over black money and also for political influence. In many cases, news channels are essentially a back door way to blackmail ministers. This is certainly the case in the vast majority of regional channels.

Mehta's theorization of the news channel-political patronage linkage finds resonance with Maya Ranganathan's argument. According to Ranganathan (2015), in post economic liberalization, commercial motives began to drive private television. A flood of entrepreneurs got into the media business. Along with commercialization of media, there was politicization (political parties owning media ventures) of media, pushing television to center stage of events in the country. The minimal regulations, that governed the set-up of private television allowed entrepreneurs of all hues, even those with political party affiliations and political parties themselves, to own and operate the medium. For these entrepreneurs, owning a television channel became the most powerful tool for political propoganda. Citing, the example of Tamil Nadu, Ranganathan says, owning a television channel is seen as a natural progression for any political party envisioning a serious role for itself in the state's politics (ibid:35). A cursory look at a few instances in the regional television news space adds credence to this fact. In Tamil Nadu, while the *Sun News* is owned by Kalanidhi Maran who is the grand nephew of M. Karunanidhi, chief of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), *Kalaignar TV* is owned by M. Karunanidhi's family, *Jaya Plus* is owned by All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), *Captain News* is owned by Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), *Makkal TV* is the mouthpiece of Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), *Vasanth TV* is owned by Congress leader

Vasanth Kumar and likewise¹⁰⁶. In Kerala, while the *Kiarali TV* is owned by Malayalam Communications Limited, a company owned by Communist Party of India –Marxist (CPI (M)), *Jai Hindi* news channel is promoted by Indian National Congress, *Indiavision* is owned by M.K. Muneer, former Muslim League Minister and *Asianet* and *Asianet Plus* is owned by Rajeev Chandrasekhar, who has right-wing leanings. Similarly in Odisha, while *OTV* is owned by Baijayant Panda, Former Lok Sabha MP from Biju Janta Dal (BJD), *Kanak TV* is owned by Soumya Ranjan Patnaik, Rajya Sabha MP, BJD, *Kalinga TV* is owned by Achyut Samanta, Rajya Sabha MP, BJD, *Dharitri* and *Orissa Post* is owned by Tathagata Satpathy, Lok Sabha Member, BJD¹⁰⁷. These instances showcase that politicians and political parties in almost every state have ventured into the news media business. A news channel has more geographical reach at minimal cost. This makes it an attractive option for political parties to invest in it and use it for political gains. Adding to the promoting party propaganda aspect, Sailaja Bajpai, states,

There are a lot of political parties that have their own news channels especially in states like Kerala or Punjab or West Bengal. In such regions, political parties compete to launch news channels to gain political influence and to reach the voter.

Sevanti Ninan, concurs with this proposition. She remarks,

A lot of such news channels are launched keeping in mind the elections. If a political party owns a news channel then it does not have to look out for other avenues for its political campaigns. If one carefully observes these channels during elections, then one can notice the kind of stories that play out. News channels are used to slime and malign opponents. The tussle between Naveen Jindal's *Focus TV* and Subhash Chandra's *Zee News* and *DNA* newspaper that played out during the Haryana assembly elections in 2014 is a case in point. While *Zee News* ran a couple of stories implicating Naveen Jindal in the alleged irregularities in the coal block allocation scam, Naveen Jindal countered it by running a sting operation on *Zee News* editors and sued them for extortion¹⁰⁸.

106 The article 'All you need to know about who owns Tamil news channels' lists out the ownership patterns of news channels in the state of Tamil Nadu. Almost all the news channels mentioned are owned by politicians across party lines. For more refer to, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/tamils/245>, accessed 23 February, 2018.

107 This article by Debi Mohanty (2019) describes the political, business and media nexus in Odisha. For more read, https://www.firstpost.com/india/in-odisha-politically-owned-media-houses-sing-to-tunes-of-patron-parties-as-objectivity-takes-backseat-in-poll-discourse-6396791.html/amp?_twitter_impression=true, accessed 7 April, 2019.

108 The article 'Media and Politics in Haryana' by Sevanti Ninan dissects the media and politics convergence in the state of Haryana. By this convergence operates in a similar manner in every other regional media market in India. For more on this refer to the link, <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/DoOxBh78eh1aAvoHK9qXCJ/Media-and-politics-in-Haryana.html>, accessed 26 February, 2018.

There is a pervasive thinking that there has been a rapid increase in news channels, especially in the regional market due to the entry of political parties into the media business. News channels provide a wide and affordable avenue for political campaigns. Hence, they have become mouthpieces of political parties. Mrinal Pande, believes that news channels are playing a dominant role in regional politics. She says,

In regional politics, there are usually two dominant political players and each one of them is under the impression that it is incumbent on them to have their own channel. For example, in Tamil Nadu we see *Jaya TV* and *Sun TV* at loggerheads. Political power is milched out of news channels.

It has been observed that along with political parties, real estate owner and chit fund company owners are also increasingly getting into the media business. Bhushan (2015a) showcases the close nexus between the alleged scamsters (a combination of chit fund operators and politicians) and the media, pointing not for the first time to the growing importance of the media both print and television, to political parties and to the political process in general. He argues that these scams point towards an issue that was flagged off by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) in 2014, identifying the take-over of media space by ‘non-media corporate’ in order to alter the business environment to their advantage. Explaining why the non-media corporates are trying to move into media space, the report says, “backward” or “forward” linkages to their existing businesses could be a reason, “but in most cases as journalists and media experts point out, the intent of owning the news media goes far beyond returns on investment, given that the media itself complains about the financial difficulties they face”. “Arguably it is the easiest and quickest path to reach a position of power”, the report adds (ibid: 22). So the primary economic consideration is the routing of their black money from other dealings to the media business to act as fronts for politicians and their narrow political agendas. Sailaja Bajpai states,

In contrast to the 1980s and early 1990s, the cost of setting up a news channel is relatively less now. This has encouraged a lot of players especially from the real estate sector and the mining sector to invest their black money in establishing a media venture. Along with taking care of their black money, it also buys them political influence. People generally do not mess with media owners. So it gives them protection too.

Private players with dubious backgrounds have made an entry into the television news space by taking advantage of the loopholes in the existing media regulations. Tathagata Satpathy,

ex-Lok Sabha MP, Biju Janata Dal and owner of *Dharitri* and *Orissa Post*, opines that despite the prevalence of strict regulations on setting up news channels, many individuals from dubious background have launched news channels, especially in the regional market. According to him,

A lot of local channels came up because there was plenty of new money in new sectors such as construction and mining. So while on one hand, people with new money wanted to protect their money, on the other, they wanted to gain political influence. By entering into media, both these goals are achieved. But the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has very strict guidelines for issuing licenses for news channels. A license for an entertainment channel does not warrant much scrutiny but a license for a news channel undergoes strict scrutiny. Factors like routing out terror funding, upholding national interest, prohibiting players with criminal backgrounds etc. are weighed in before granting a license. But interestingly in India in the past 15 years, mostly criminals have got licenses and unless one has that kind of clout one cannot get a news channel license.

The mushrooming of news channels of all hues and colours also points out to the failure on the part of government to ensure proper checks and balances in granting license for starting a news channel. Chandan Mitra, argues that unprecedented growth signals a worrying sign. For him,

It is important to be careful about the motive on the part of the promoters of such news channels or newspapers. There have been instances where many news channels are promoted by unscrupulous people like builders, shady characters who have started these channels with the intent that their media concern should be a shield against their illegal activities. Such news channels also indulge in showing concocted stories or highly exaggerated sensationalized stories to rake up ratings. Such practices defeat the purpose of the independence of the media because they become mouthpieces of corruption and illegality.

Some journalists also argue that the line dividing the profession of journalism from other business ventures is fast eroding. Journalism is being reduced to a business enterprise. This in turn has repercussions on how the profession upholds its values and principles against the onslaught on money and political power. As discussed above, people from mining, real estate and chit fund companies are investing in news channels in the regional market. However, it does not mean that such ownership patterns do not exist in the national news market. Siddharth Vardarajan, Founder, *TheWire*, in a speech titled *New Age Media: Journalistic Freedom on the Internet*¹⁰⁹ delivered National Law University in 2015, argues that involvement of some big media houses, in secondary or tertiary business enterprises are noticeable, that it becomes

¹⁰⁹ Talk delivered by Siddharth Vardarajan, Founder, TheWire, on 'New Age Media- Journalistic Freedom on the Internet' at National Law University, New Delhi on 1 June, 2015. For more on this, refer to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tBS9DEsuQY> accessed 26 October, 2016.

difficult to say whether a particular media house is in the media business or investment or mining or construction or manufacturing business. For instance, *Hindustan Times* makes more profits from investment in mutual funds and stock markets than publishing a newspaper. *Dainik Bhaskar* is involved in power generation and some media houses in the south have mining interests. *Network 18* owned by Reliance has stake in manufacturing, petroleum, communication. Such business linkages tend to have their impact on the editorial operations of a media house. If a story that is critical of the investors or advertisers of a media house unearths then at such junctures the editors have a crucial call to take, whether to buckle under pressure or continue reporting in a fair manner. The inclusion of big money and political power grossly undermines the fair and objective functioning of the institution of media¹¹⁰.

Another factor that has been cited as one of the reasons for the mushrooming of news channels in the regional market is the preference for regional language. Mrinal Pande brings in the issue of centrality of regional languages as one of the factors that has propelled the growth of news channels. The preference for people to watch news in their preferred language created demand for the growth of news channels in the regional sphere. Sailaja Bajpai argues that growing literacy propelled the growth of regional press. This regionalization of press strategy was picked up by television media also, thus leading to mushrooming of news channels. Similarly, Zakka Jacob, Deputy News Editor, *CNN-News18* likens the growth of news channels to a growing appetite for news across the country. He says,

There is certainly an appetite for news. There is a market, there is demand and that is why these news channels have come up. I think at last count there were almost more than 400 channels across India. A majority of them are in the regional languages. In English, now I think there are 7 to 8 channels mainstream national channels which are based out of either Delhi or Mumbai. Again, we clock in on an average night of 4 to 5 million people. So obviously it is lucrative, for advertisers it is lucrative, they want to target their products to these 4 or 5 million people. This is in the English segment. Hindi is over a 100 million market. So obviously there is a huge market out there, there is demand for news and that is why these news channels exists.

The growing appetite for staying updated with events happening within and across the country is also a key factor propelling the growth in broadcast media. News channels work with a 24x7 news cycle. Events and incidents are reported within minutes of their occurrence. While from the production point of view, it is the race for ratings that dictates the urgency and hence

the ‘breaking news’ format, from a point of view of consumption, it is the immediacy of information that runs supreme. Instant information has been the driving force of communications in the 21st century and television news caters to this need.

The ‘opening up the skies’, in early 1990s, led to proliferation of news channels. The availability of cheaper technology and relaxation in government regulations opened up the broadcast news space for private participation. Over a period of time, ownership of a news channel became a ladder for achieving political power, state patronage and influence. Many news channels became fronts for political and business interests. This happened more in the regional broadcast media space in comparison to the national broadcast media. One of the positive off-shoots of this growth has been the availability of news in regional languages. The geographical spread of news channels has meant that viewers now have access to localized news and events. So while national news channels are criticized for being metro-centric, regional news channels, in comparison provide information of news and events across small towns and rural areas. However, the concerns of regulating the rapid proliferation cannot be brushed under the carpet. Instead it has to be dealt with utmost urgency.

II

The Content Policy of News Channels

Along with reasons for the multiplication of news channels, it is also crucial to look at the kind of programming that goes on air. While addressing the issue of content policy in news channels, a few questions that arise are- What is the nature of content that is being produced and aired on the television screen? With the growth of market-centric media, how are factors like advertising and sales influencing the content policy of news channels? How has the creation and representation of news content lead to branding of news channels?

Thussu (2007a) argues that the nature of programming in news channels has been largely ‘infotainment’ based. Merging information and entertainment, this US style ratings-driven television journalism privileges privatized soft news-about celebrities, crime, corruption and violence-and presents it as a form of spectacle, at the expense of news about political, civic and public affairs. Such news is debasing the quality of public discourse. A cursory look at the

ownership patterns in the media sector will reveal that almost all the major national and regional news channels are owned by corporate houses who have diverse business interests. The corporate interest in media business, is premised on notion of media as a business venture that must reap profit. Within the media industry, this business logic is put into practice through the ratings model-the baseline of the model being- higher ratings, higher revenues, higher profits and vice-versa. The corporate media functions according to this principle. It produces content that must generate higher ratings. Hence, commerce becomes the guiding principle that dictates the kind of content that is produced. The increasing commercialization of media is blurring the line between news and entertainment. This is evident in the growing proportion of entertainment related stories in conventional news bulletins itself and the large chunks of entertainment programming in serious 24x7 news channels. Entertainment-centric television news has come at the cost of withering of development reportage. Justifying the need for infotainment model of news, Sumit Awasthi, Deputy Managing Editor, *News18 India*, remarks,

Mostly audience bahut self-centric hai, who bahut badi picture ke bare main sochte nahi hai aur roz ki maara maari main inte uljhe hai ki. Toh is chakar main yeh hota hai ki is tarah ke jo topics hai jisko hum heavy doses kehte hai, jaise ki mujhe yaad hai, *NDTV* pe discussion tha- kya Hindutva ne secularism ko replace kar diya hai?¹¹¹ waise topic peeche reh jati hai. Yeh har jagah pe ho rahi hai, aap newspaper main dekhiye, joh aajkal ek naya leaflet aata hai bade akhbaro main, front page ke upar, joh one-fourth hota hai uska, usme koi news nahi hoti hai, usme mostly information hoti hai, kabhi koi trend ke bare main, kabhi kisi satellite ke bare main, koi science ka innovation hua hai, ya koi IPL ka match hai, so it can be anything, toh unko samajh main aa raha hai ki in chezzon ke demand hai aur unhe front main chapo aur andar ki pages main news do, kyunki koi paper kharedta nahi hai. Hamara toh news channel ja hi raha hai aapke ghar main, apse humko subscription mil hi raha hai, par aap humko dekh rahen hai ki nahi? Aap 20 channelon ke bheed main aap mera channel kaise dekhenge? Toh uske liya mujhe kuch content dena padega aur woh aisa ho jo aapko pasand ho, jo maximum jo pasand ho. Toh isiliye jo serials ke shows hain yeh trend 10-12 saal phele shuru hua, aur woh public dekhna chahati hai. Bahut si audience main bahut si ladies hain aur woh dekhna chahati hai ki agar kal sham ka unka episode chut gaya toh usme kya hua tha ya aaj sham ko jo aane wala hai usme kya hone wala hai. Woh shows channel ke driver shows hain, agar aap yeh shows ratings se minus kar denge toh woh channels dhadam se gir jayenge. These shows are the main drivers. Toh agar ek ko success milti hai toh yahan toh copycat ki parampara bhi hain hamare yahaan. Ek toh ki kisi ek akele ko kyun sara mal khane do, toh do ya teen log usme ghussa jate hai taki har koi apne hiss thoda sa mal le sake. Aur audience ka bhi interest hai.

(People are consuming news according to their requirements. Audiences have become self-centric and they are just concerned about issues that affect them directly and not about the bigger picture. So in many news channels, heavy dose topics take a back seat. This is happening across all news

111 For more see, <https://www.ndtv.com/video/shows/the-NDTV-dialogues/the-NDTV-dialogues-has-hindutva-replaced-secularism-455902>, aired on 30 April, 2017.

channels and newspapers. These days we see a one-fourth leaflet on some newspapers which provide snippets on issues of technology, science, sports. So such kind of news is in the front page because there is demand for it. Among news channels, the question arises-in this overcrowded market, why will you watch us? So then we have to offer you something that you will like. Talking of serials on news channels, this trend started 10 to 12 years ago. Many viewers, especially ladies want to know what will happen next in the serial or want to catch up on what they have missed. Such shows are the driver shows of news channels. If you remove them then ratings will fall dramatically. Another aspect is, among news channels there is a copy cat culture. So if one channel is getting higher ratings by showing a particular kind of content, then rest will follow).

Within the television news industry, there is an overwhelming acceptance that all kind of news is *relevant* news as there is an audience for such news. Sanjay Bragta, Executive Editor-Input, *Aaj Tak*, argues that the primary function of a news channel is to report every kind of issue. Dismissing the contention that the content of news channels is infotainment based, he says,

There is nothing as serious and non-serious news. News is news. For example, Sasikala lived in Poes Garden for ages, she has acquired crores of money, we know the facts and that is why she has been convicted. She wears saree worth 10 to 15,000 rupees. Everybody knows that in Tamil Nadu. Ours is a deprived society and by showing how Sasikala in staying in jail, we appeal to the sadistic pleasure of our viewers. And it is also warning to people, ki bhai, hello, agar tum gadbad karoge toh yeh haal hoga tumhara (if you indulge in wrong-doing, then this will happen to you too). There is nothing as serious and non-serious news. This is just an approach.

Within the broadcast media industry, there is a prevalent perception that the distinction between *hard*¹¹² news and *soft* news is irrelevant and that as information providers, news channels must provide all kinds of information. This is done to cater to the diverse segments of viewership which exists across the geographical and demographic divide. There is also the prevalence of a gender bias in the perception that it is only women who like to access serial and soap operas related information. However, Vinod Dua, veteran television journalist, is critical of the reasoning that news channels offer infotainment news due to audience demand. He remarks,

Information is also a social need. So if it is a need, people will consume whatever they get. To say that there is a demand, you are the one's that have dumbed down the audience and people will accept whatever you give. To twist the logic and say there is a demand is not right. If you give them better things they will love it. If you give them nonsensical thing, it is a need and they will accept it. It is bogus argument that there is a demand.

Mrinal Pande, too negates the audience demand proposition and says,

¹¹²In media studies (Allan: 2004, Batabyal: 2012, Cottle: 2003, Gans: 1979, Saeed: 2013, Thussu:2007), hard news refers to reporting on issues like politics, economy, environment, foreign relations, national security whereas soft news refers to reporting on issues like sports, cinema, lifestyle, food, tourism, health.

I don't agree with this reasoning of audience demand. It is a self denigrating thing. This happened earlier in print media and I have been witnessed to it. You are asked to bring a pull-out to the main newspaper because there was a lot of regional news that remained uncovered and we happily went in for that. Slowly we noticed the marketing people cornering more and more of the pull-outs and today all the major newspapers have pull-outs which are covered with nothing but bollywood news and that is all paid for news. Even the parties that they talk about in those pull-outs are paid for news. So that becomes the cross-subsidy portion of the newspaper and it pays for the news gathering cost of the main book.

This tendency of news channels to justify trivialization of content on air, as audience demand, has made its appearance, time and again. It is generally seen that whenever there is uproar due to sensational and dramatic reporting of an event or an incident, news channels justify their act by passing on the buck to audience demand for such content. Leys (1999), negates the audience demand theory and argues that the tabloidization of news fits well into the market model of media business. According to him, 'two features of the market-driven media should be noted: the drive to entertain and the drive to widen audiences. Market research, dictates the themes and treatments chosen to attract the readerships and audiences that, in effect, are being constructed for sale to advertisers. This dictates the further 'dumbing down' tendency- reducing the intellectual demands made on the reader, listener or viewer, by ruthless simplified and a heavy reliance on 'human interest' stories, the cult of celebrity-and emotional appeal-anxiety, shock and sex; and once habituated to this, audiences are seen as being resistant to anything else. A further twist has been provided by the development of a global market for feature programmes; producers are under increasing pressure to make programmes with international sales appeal. On this calculus what is specifically national, especially what is specifically political, in feature programmes, must be reduced, if not eliminated. The subordination of the public sphere to the market is made explicit here (ibid: 323).

Along with the issue of the nature of content being aired, addressing the issue of language used to frame the content is also vital. Within the Indian broadcast media, a differentiation is made in the content policy of national English and Hindi news channels, primarily on the basis of language. Commenting on the content policy of Hindi news channels, Sailaja Bajpai remarks,

Earlier Hindi news channels used to do a lot of entertainment content like serials, superstition, astrology to attract viewers. The Hindi audience is quite vast, it extends to all class groups in our society. Another aspect that was taken into consideration in Hindi news programming was the women audience. Large number of women did not fundamentally engage with news. So to capture this section of the audience, creating content catering to their taste was developed. And

hence the soap operas, cinema etc. became news content in Hindi channels. But slowly many Hindi channels have decided to slow down this content and focus on news. In fact Hindi news channels have more news content than English news channels. The primetime slot in English news channels is just reserved for debates and discussions. Earlier Hindi news channels used to have big panel of experts but now they have shortened the numbers and English channels have increased the numbers.

Hindi news channels have been accused of tabloidization of news with focus on superstition, astrology, myths, cinema and lifestyle laced content. Zakka Jacob, feels that there was a phase in Hindi news channels where a lot of tabloid content was aired. He says,

I think there was a phase in Hindi channels where they used to a lot of Saap seedhi kind of thing. I don't think they do it as much anymore. It was a phase started by *India TV*, and *Aaj Tak* followed it. Now it is largely news and I don't see much of saap seedhi these days. It is largely political news. They do have afternoon shows on serials which are very popular, astrology but other than that their content is around news or some controversy or the other.

Along with the difference in the nature of content aired, another vital factor that differentiates the news channels in both the mediums is the issue of advertising revenue. According to Sailaja Bajpai,

The other major point of difference between English and Hindi news channels is the advertising revenue that they receive. While English news channels have less viewership in comparison to Hindi news channels, they receive more advertising revenue. The logic behind it that the viewers who watch English news channels can afford to buy the products advertised and hence they comprise the target group for advertisers.

It is worth reiterating the well known fact that the revenue model of television news media is highly skewed in favour of advertising. Siddharth Vardarajan, talks about the business model of Indian media. He argues that Indian media is excessive dependent on advertising. Unlike other countries, in India, readers are charged a fraction of the costs that are incurred for producing a single newspaper copy¹¹³. Hence, the marginal revenue from sale of every copy is negative. So in such a scenario how does a newspaper make profit? This is done by relying on advertising revenue. While the global norm is 60% revenue comes from advertising and 40% from subscription, in India the norm is 90% revenue from advertising and 10% from

¹¹³The monthly rental of national news channels is as follows. *NDTV 24x7* – Rs 3.54/, *Times Now*- Rs. 3.54/, *Mirror Now*- Rs. 2.36/, *BBC World*- Rs. 1.18/, *WION*- Rs.1.18/, *CNN News18*- Rs 0.59/, *Republic TV*- Free to Air, *Zee News*- Rs 0.12/, *Aaj Tak*- Rs. 0.89/, *India TV*- Free to Air, *R Bharat*- Free to Air, *NDTV India*- Rs. 1.18/, *News18 India*- Rs 0.12/, *News24*- Free to Air, *ABP News*- Free to Air, *TV9 Bharatvarsh*- Free to Air. Source: Telecom Regulatory Authority of India.

subscriptions. This allows the publisher to subsidize the cost of each edition and increase circulation rather than have high cost and low circulation. The production costs are covered by selling advertising space. While it does make newspapers affordable but it prioritizes advertisements over news and it colours the kind of news that is produced. He recalls that the Managing Editor of *The Times of India* once said in an interview to *The New Yorker* that his paper is not in the business of news but in the business of advertisements¹¹⁴. Thus, minimal revenues from subscription, force news channels to generate revenue from advertising¹¹⁵. Under such circumstances, channels that attract higher viewership become the first priority for advertising and marketing companies. However, Sailaja Bajpai, raises an interesting aspect of ‘affordability’ of viewers. From the advertiser’s point of view, viewers of English news channels should be the target audience as they can be potential consumers of their products in the future. This strategy also brings forth the issue of treating viewers as consumers. The market focused news media has transformed the relationship between media and its readers/ viewers. Readers/ viewers are no longer considered as citizens who are entitled to receive fair and objective news. Instead, they are treated as consumers who are bombarded with advertisements with news in between. I discuss this aspect in detail in subsequent chapters. Vinod Dua, argues that the language differentiation is a fraud which has been perpetuated by the marketing and advertising agencies. For him,

This is fraud perpetrated by marketing guys that for Hindi walas naag and nagin, bhoot and bhootni etc. like Hindi walas are idiots and this is what they appreciate and for English, where all the intelligence resides. You can discuss Indo-China relations, GSLV and stuff like that. This is dividing the universes.

Dua hints at the elitist approach that is deeply entrenched in the functioning of news channels. English news channels believe that they cater to the niche audience- cities, upwardly mobile class and Hindi news channels believe that they cater to the mass audience- towns and

¹¹⁴ This is an interview of Vineet Jain, Managing Director, Bennett, Coleman and Company Limited, to the New Yorker Magazine, where Jain explained the business model of his company. For more refer to, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/08/citizens-jain>, accessed 15 May, 2018.

¹¹⁵ The chaos at *Tiranga TV* showcases the repercussions of an advertising based revenue model of news media. Failing short of getting any advertising from both government and private companies, the channel resorted to laying off its employees. For more on this, read <https://www.newslandry.com/2019/07/12/tiranga-media-business-advertisements>, accessed 15 July, 2019.

villages, working class. Rao's (2010) ethnographic study on the India press, deals at length on the dichotomy of the English-Hindi linguistic divide. According to her, Hindi newspapers have elaborate hierarchical organised office space which imprints the social status of the news workers. This ordering also feeds into the hierarchical work culture. On the other hand, English newspapers have flat hierarchy and there is substantial independence in the work culture. Staff members of the Hindi medium newspapers are themselves aware of this and justify the need for more tight supervision with regard to the poor quality of Hindi education. The diametrically opposite work culture in the Hindi and English newspapers also relates to the process of regionalisation and commercialisation of the press. While Hindi newspapers push for regionalisation, English newspapers are driven by commercialisation. Rao argues that the regionalisation of news has led to the representation of multiple voices. People lobby through the Hindi newspapers to gain status as leaders, to manipulate relations or to improve their living conditions. The power of the press is used by the citizens for social mobility. This capacity of the Hindi press to bring about social change is reflected in the content that is produced and circulated¹¹⁶.

It appears that the public service aspect of journalism seems to have been taken over by the private interests of media houses in collusion with advertising and marketing firms. The relegation of stories on issues of poverty, health, education, employment and center staging of issues on entertainment, lifestyle, stock markets, automobiles, demonstrates that news channels are preoccupied with issues which garner more ratings and in-turn bring in revenues. Thus, it can be seen that Television Rating Points (TRPs)¹¹⁷ are a crucial source of revenue generation for news channels. Given the primacy attached to ratings, it becomes pertinent to ask a question- what is the nature of the impact of rating points on the content policy of news channels?

¹¹⁶ An important area of enquiry in the sociological studies of media, is analyzing the dynamics of linguistic diversity on journalistic subcultures. Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's (2005) journalistic doxa and habitus, studies by Kumar (2011), Rao (2009) and Udupa (2015b), investigate how the profession of journalism, is influenced by the social sensibilities, cultural practices of journalists and media professionals.

¹¹⁷ Television Ratings Points (TRP) is a tool to measure the viewership index of television channels. TRPs are collected by the Broadcast Research Council of India (BARC), an industry body which is authorized to collect, analyse and circulate the ratings points to television channels. The channels use these ratings to strategize their programming content. Ratings are also used to fetch revenue for the channels.

Zakka Jacob remarks,

The influence of market on content is huge. For instance, the Tamil Nadu story of Sasikala and OPS would not be wall to wall coverage in the way English channels are covering unless there was a good reason for it and the reason is simple. Chennai is the biggest market for English viewership and since it is a small audience, 5 million out of a billion plus is not much and you have 6 to 7 channels competing for it, so everybody wants to be catering to where the biggest market is, so yes absolutely I am not going to make any bones about it. Market plays a huge role in deciding what story you play and what you don't.

According to Rajdeep Sardesai,

It is TRPs only that determine content. Such a trend started with Hindi news channels and now has spread to the English. In Hindi it started with TRP fetching content like superstition, astrology, sensationalism, trivialization, '*choti khabar ko badi khabar banao*'. That was the growth model. The English channels took their cue from Hindi and focused on TRPs by being noisy, aggressive and constantly breaking news. So, the English news channels essentially adopted the Hindi model.

Tathagata Satpathy, also speaks of the primacy of ratings in the television news business. He says,

TRPs are important in the news business or else how will a channel fend for itself? It is only when TRPs are high that revenues flow in and it determines the way news is produced. But he also believes that the drive for higher TRPS should be tempered with some supposedly nobler agenda. This nobler agenda is for the ownership and editorial team to decide. In some media houses, owners override editorial independence and in others editorial independence is allowed.

Chandan Mitra, adds to this argument by stating,

TRPs play a crucial role in the programming of news channels. However, TRPs alone do not determine content. If that was the case then every news channel would only telecast Bollywood, crime, sleaze etc. do rake up TRPs. Such type of content can sustain high TRPs for a day or two. But news channels cannot survive on such content for a longer duration. He recalls a joke circulating in the print media circles that when circulation of a newspaper takes a hit, then that particular newspaper should do a cover story on issue like sex or crime because such stories generate high viewership. But one cannot sustain journalism by doing such stories. Likewise in television, a news channel has to be in the business of serious news to survive. For example, the Sheena Bora murder case was covered day in and day out by all major news channels. It led to spiking of their TRPs for a few days but eventually it got supplanted by other stories. So therefore, TRPs have a limited role in the sense they definitely decide the placement of news stories i.e. which story should take a lead over the rest.

There appears to be a universal acknowledgement that TRPs are important in the television news market. As said before, the business model of news channels is structured around TRPs. But it would be unwise, to discount another vital factor that plays a key role in how news

channels frame their content policy. The framing of content policy of news channels is also impacted by their ownership and the ideological leanings of the owners. Within the Indian media setup, the fine line between ownership and editorial stance is blurred. Hence, as is often the case, the ideological leanings of the owner, becomes the editorial line of the news channel she/he owns. Mrinal Pande remarks,

The content of a news channel is influenced by both TRPs and the owner's predilection. For example, Pranoy Roy and Radhika Roy's (NDTV) political thinking impacts their channel. The kind of debates, the coverage and the choice of experts are all impacted by how the owners take stand on an issue. Likewise Subhash Chandra (Zee News) and Rajat Sharma (India TV) have their own ideological positions that impact their news framework. But then in today's competitive scenario, TRPs also do matter as all the owners are also investors in their respective companies and do expect returns from their investment. They rely on advertisements for raising revenue and advertisers flock to those channels that raise the maximum eyeballs. Arnab Goswami (Ex-*Times Now*) reigned supreme for a while and then took a dip. So now, that channel is looking for another sales pitch. Sadly, within such circumstances there is no organic growth for thoughtfulness or creativity. Symbolically speaking, every news channel has two sources of funding. One is the declared source of funding through advertisements and the other is the undeclared source of funding through political parties. So TRPs feed to the declared sources of funding and ideological positioning to the undeclared sources of funding. So both aspects are important. When political leaders appearing on debate shows taunt the anchors that they are TRPs gatherers, they actually mean that '*Aap unse bhi paisa let ho aur hamse bhi, isiliye hamari bhi baat kar liya karo* (you take money from us, so you should listen to us too).

Sevanthi Ninan echoes the above thought. She opines,

The editorial stance is greatly determined by the ideological positioning of the owners. The owners of *NDTV* (Prannoy Roy and Radhika Roy) are from a left liberal background and hence the channel is positioned accordingly. The owners of *India TV* (Rajat Sharma) and *Zee News* (Subhash Chandra) have right-wing inclination and hence, their channel mirrors their political beliefs. Arnab Goswami invokes nationalism in every issue he debates. His nationalism has shades of the right-wing orientation.

Thus, it can be said that two important factors that determine the content policy of news channels is ratings and its editorial stance. While a market led model does necessitate the reliance on ratings, the increasing ownership of news channels by politicians and political parties is erasing the boundary ownership and editorial content. Such biases raise concern over issues of news values-objectivity, neutrality and impartiality.

Nalin Mehta, brings in an interesting aspect of 'channel branding'. He argues that a crowded and competitive media market necessitates news channels to brand themselves to

succeed in the competition. This branding dictates the content policy that is adopted by news channels. Emphasizing on this aspect, he remarks,

The ownership of a news channel is reflective of news choices to that extent that they will not clearly state what is to be covered but will be very clear on what is not to be covered. The ownership is relevant the point off what gets excluded and not particularly interested in what gets included. For example, if a media house has certain business interest then it will definitely not cover the excesses due to that business. But in a competitive market, excluding issues could cost viewership. So in such a scenario that issue will be taken up in consonance with how that channel has branded itself. For example if one does an analysis of the type of coverage by *Times Now* and *Mirror Now*, then one will find dissimilar coverage between the two sister concerns. So here ownership is exactly the same but coverage is totally different. Content generated is reflective of the approach the channel has adopted for itself.

Commenting on the issue of branding of news channels, Tathagata Satpathy says,

Viewers will watch a channel or a newspaper will have readership only if it develops an identity for itself. Every news channel attempts to build its own base of viewers. People may term the editorial stance of a news channel as liberal, right, center etc. all this is centered on perception. But in the business of news what matters is capturing the market which is justified. In today's scenario, if a new channel is launched then it will certainly look for the unaddressed market to create its base. To achieve this, it will try to create an identity for itself.

A look at the functioning of news channels reinforces the argument about their branding. In a cluttered market, every channel keeps reinventing new strategy, plans to gain its foothold in an overcrowded market. Positioning itself as left, right, center or neutral in its editorial approach, is done largely to cap large section of the viewing population. This is not a new phenomenon, as historically, Indian media has always taken sides to pursue their agendas. However, under the new regime of market dominated journalism, this branding is largely a marketing strategy. The segmented nature of viewership in India, offers immense potential to a news channel to carve out its own audience base. This is achieved by branding itself in a particular manner.

Along with the aspect of ratings and channel branding, discussion on the issue of diversity or plurality in content policy, must also figure in. One may be under the impression that with the availability of multitude of news channels, different varieties of news programming will be accessible for viewing. Hence, the question- Does the availability of huge number of news channels offer diverse content? Sevanthi Ninan remarks,

More news channel does not mean that is more and diverse content on offer. News channels cannot afford diverse content as they are all competing for the same ratings. There could be

different content from in regional languages but not in the national channels. It would be great if some channel took the initiative to stand out. NDTV does dwell on issues differently as they are not playing the game as Times Now and NewsX do. NewsX does not have any ideology and just screeches.

For Rajdeep Sardesai,

The paradox in Indian media is that quantity has not transformed into quality. Instead of raising the bar, competition has lowered the bar. There is lot of quantity, with less quality and less diversity. There is certain sameness in news making. The same experts will be shifting from studio to the other, same issues being debated every night, large number of people waving India first flag. This is the kind of universe that we inhabit today.

Here, the sameness in the content aired on news channels is largely in terms of the framing of the content being produced. In recent years, a *split*¹¹⁸ has emerged in the broadcast media. This split among media networks is largely in terms of supporting or being critical of the current dispensation. Those media houses that support the government, always frame their news which parrots the government stance. They use of cloak of nationalism to dismiss and discredit dissenting voices.

However, Sailaja Bajpai does believe that with 400 channels on the offering, there is some space for diverse content. For her,

A lot of regional channels do offer programs that mainstream national news channels do not. There is diversity in content, in language, in political affiliation. So this is the only saving grace in a crowded market.

Reacting to the accusation that national news channels offer metro-centric content at the cost of overriding news from rural India, Rajdeep Sardesai says,

National news is more and more metro centric. It is more and more centered around issues of so called high metropolitan concern. It is certainly less about India which is geographically distant. That is what he refers to the tyranny of distance. Whether it is about Jharkhand, Orissa or North-east, the distance makes the story less appealing. Is it important to think why Arvind Kejriwal is so much in news? It is because he is the Chief Minister of Delhi and all major news channels are

¹¹⁸I borrow the term from Arvind Rajagopal's (2003) 'split public'. Rajagopal theorized about how a split, primarily linguistic, in the Indian media sphere, provided impetus to the rise of politics of Hindu nationalism in the nineties. I build up on his argument, and showcase, how the split in Indian media in contemporary India, cannot only be understood through the prism of linguistic divide but also includes editorial orientation and market logic of media networks.

based in Delhi. Delhi does get disproportionate news but so do our major metros. They take almost 60% of our news space.

The viewership of news channels cuts across varied demographic sections of viewership. In an attempt to capture a large viewership market, news channels constantly work on the kind of content that they should offer to viewers. Along with the segmentation of content, the issue of framing of the content gets center-staged. As the above discussion shows, the framing of content policy of news channels is influenced by two factors- owner's ideological leanings and revenue considerations. Thus, while ownership leanings accrue political power, market leanings accrue monetary power.

III

The Rise of Current Affairs Programming in News Channels¹¹⁹

Current affairs programming currently occupy significant position within news networks. Such programming aired during the prime-time slot, is increasingly being dominated by views/opinions/discussions¹²⁰ based shows. Night after night, news channels across the country, start debating on issues like Triple Talaq, Gau Rakshaks, Kashmir conflict, VVIP culture, Maoist attacks, corruption scandals, etc. The main stories that evolve through the day become the talking points at night. Within the English news segment, *NDTV 24x7* is seen as offering a range of such shows like *Left, Right and Centre*, *The Big Fight*, *We The People*, *The Buck Stops Here*. Documentaries like *India Matters* and interview based shows like *Walk the Talk* are also aired every week. *Times Now*, the market leader in the English news segment offers programmes like *India Upfront*, *The Newshour*. *CNN-News18* offers shows like *The Crux*, *Face-Off* and *Viewpoint*. Its Hindi equivalent *News18 India* offers shows like *Aar Paar*, *Hum Toh Puchenge* and *Sau Baat Ki Ek Baat*. *Aaj Tak*, the market leader in the Hindi segment offers programmes like *Halla Bol*, *Vishesh*, *Dustak* and its English equivalent *India Today* offers *To the Point*, *India First*, *Newsroom* and *News Today*. *Zee News* offers shows like *Daily News and Analysis* and *Taal Thoke Ke*.

¹¹⁹ This section was published by me as a research article titled 'Making Sense of Views Culture in Television News Media in India' in the journal *Journalism Practice*. The article is available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1635041>, accessed 1 July, 2019.

¹²⁰The terms are used interchangeably.

The three most obvious reasons that have led to growth of current affairs programming are as follows. First, such programming is cheap to produce. Sevanthi Ninan, explains that the increase in opinion based shows is due to low production costs. For her, the whole news model is in shambles. There is too much media and everyone is competing for the same slice of advertising. So under such intense competitive conditions, news channels attempt to minimize costs. This often comes by under cutting reportage costs. She recalls, how in earlier times, *NDTV* used to do lot of field reporting. Now that has reduced because of the changing dynamics of the economics of news television. This new model has forced programming to shift gears to opinion based shows as they are cheaper to produce. Zakka Jacob, also opines that debate shows are cost effective. Debate shows are basically about getting a few talking heads on the issue and getting them to spar on a particular topic. This involves minimal costs as news organizations do not have to spend money in physically sending a reporter to cover a story. Vinod Dua, feels that the 2008 recession hit Indian media badly. As news channels rely heavily on advertising revenues due to the minimal subscription fees, the recession severely dented the revenue flow. News organization initiated cost cutting by curbing on field reportage. This paved the way for the growth of studio based discussions shows that were much cheaper to produce.

Second, opinion shows fill in the space of an 'extra' that needs to be provided with news. This extra refers to views, opinions or perspectives around issues of the day. This trend which is already under operation by media houses in the west, is finding its foot in the Indian mediascape. For Rajdeep Sardesai, there is urgency among news channels to appear distinctive in a cluttered market. This distinctiveness can be achieved by doing investigative journalism. But that costs time and money. So the other option adopted is to create debate based shows where every news channels take a position on issues with a hope that a certain section of the viewership will accept that position. This in turn creates a base for loyal viewers. According to him,

If our original aim was to protect and preserve constitutional values, today it is not providing information or education to people based on those constitutional values but based on what we think will sell. That is the big difference. We are guided more by popular opinion rather than actually influencing public opinion in a constructive way. Moreover the growth of the views culture is not unique to the Indian news market, it is happening globally. Ten years ago, *CNN* would have two to three experts in their studios for discussion. Now that number has increased to six or seven per show. Such changes are happening world over as the economics of news making is creaking.'

Chandan Mitra also highlights this international trend in news making that has crept into the Indian news media space as well. He states that the growth of debates and discussions in television news is not unique to India. It is happening all over the world. He states that many organizations feel that just news is unexciting beyond a point. A channel cannot just sustain on news. Evolving new strategies to compete in the market is the need of the hour. He feels that if news channels just provide news then they might as well turn into a news agency or *Doordarshan*. So gradually there has been movement away from strictly disseminating news to mixing news with views which is an international trend. Zakka Jacob, also talks of the effort to dish out instant opinions as the key mantra behind such programming. He states that news stories evolve through the day. So the consumers of news are already familiar with what is making news throughout the day. To keep this segment engaged with the primetime viewing, the effort is made to create shows that weave opinions around the top stories of the day. There is also a kind of segmentation that exists regarding the kind of opinion shows that news channels air. Radhika Bordia, Anchor, *NDTV 24x7*, the host of the documentary *India Matters* aired on *NDTV 24x7*, speaks about the different kinds of shows being offered on the *NDTV 24x7* platform. They have debate show (*Left, Right and Centre, Agenda, The Buck Stops Here, NDTV Dialogues, Reality Check*), studio based audience shows (*We the People and The Big Fight*), news documentaries (*India Matters* and *Truth Vs. Hype*) and each format serves a different purpose. So while debate shows involve speaking to different representatives consisting of party spokespersons, activists, academicians, professionals), studio based audience shows also follow the same format with the addition of audience participation in the studio. Documentaries on the other hand, are a more in-depth format where a narrative is woven around a particular person, a place or an event. All these provided the *extra* along with the news.

Third, the ever increasing ratings impact over news content has also given rise to the view culture. Talking about the primacy of ratings, Batabyal (2012) believes that ratings are the lifeline of news channels and there is always a mad scramble to top the ranking table. Higher ratings guarantee higher advertising revenues. The advertisers also benefit as they get the television space for advertising their products. Therefore, it is a mutual win-win situation for both the parties. Nalin Mehta, believes that the seeping of ratings based content in news production has given rise to the views culture. He remarks,

My experience in media industry shows that the notion of good news does not exist. So within this backdrop, TRPs depend on opinions and the more extreme the opinion the higher the TRP. The TRPs work on a week to week basis unlike newspapers where the ratings by a survey come out once in a month. So in a situation where news channels live on TRPs week to week, advertising comes in on the marketability of a programme. The producers make programme not on the basis of quality but based on whether it sold in the past week or not. If that particular programme did not sell, then it will be dropped. So in such a scenario, it is easy to work with opinion shows.

So, the reasons stated behind the growth of opinion shows range from low production cost to the need to provide something extra with news to raking up TRPs. The issue of ratings translates into framing of sharp and polarized views on issues being debated on news channels. This aspect is discussed in the next section which deals with dissecting the nature of this shift.

The Nature of Current Affairs Programming

Now that debate/opinion shows have gained a pivotal role in news programming, it becomes crucial to also understand the *nature* of the shift from news to news and views. One of the starkly visible facets of the nature of the shift is the ‘emergence of sharp polarized views’. Rajdeep Sardesai lucidly explains the aspect. He believes that the intense competition in the television business has lowered the quality of news being produced. In order to retain the eyeballs and prevent its viewership from switching to rival channels, every news channel invented new means of retaining its viewership. He says,

Regular news was like dal-chawal, very basic, so there was a need to top it up with some masala. Just sustaining on news was not a feasible option. There was the need for something extra. One of the options was to play sensationalizing stories. Many Hindi channels opted for this path. That is when superstition based content crept into news making. Stories about ghosts, spirits, astrology found ready audience. The period 2005-08 was all about such stories. On the other hand, English news channels thought that instead of engaging in superstition and sensationalism based content, they would provide sharp views on contemporary issues. This would enable the viewer to identify possibly with the opinion of the anchors of news channels.

He recalls doing the show *The Big Fight* from 1998 to 2004. At that time the purpose was to have a debate show once a week. He repeats the *extra* argument by saying that while news remained the core programming of the channel, debate was something extra that was being offered to the viewers. Over the years, he says that the extra has become the main course. Many news channels felt that it is difficult to retain viewership just on news because essentially news is the same on all platforms. So in order to give a bit extra to the viewers, the fine balance between

news and views was lost. News was relegated to the background and views occupied the center-stage. Sandeep Bhushan, extends this argument by saying that while the Hindi channels indulged in soft news like the Saas-Bahu (mother-in-law and daughter-in-law based soap operas), Dharam (religion) saga, English news channels, instead of borrowing on cinematic content, made their studios powerful. This empowerment of the studio came at the cost of the disempowering of the reporters. The anchor driven opinion shows controlled the news discourse. He cites the example of Arnab Goswami and says,

If Arnab is the anchor then he is either going to reinforce his argument or create a pointless dialectic like the way he did with Umar Khalid in one of the studio discussions. He did not allow Umar Khalid to speak, by either screaming at him or toning down his mike. He just used Umar Khalid as a punching bag to prove his point.¹²¹

Within the center-staging of views, the ability to have sharp polarized views became the focal point on news programming. Sailaja Bajpai, furthers the argument on this aspect, by citing the example of *Times Now* and *NewsX*. She particularly refers to their coverage of the Surgical Strikes in September 2016 (On 29th September 2016, the Indian army launched a surgical strike on the terror launch pads across the Line of control in retaliation to the Uri Attack by facilitated by the Pakistan army on 18th of the same month), where she felt that the two channels indulged in fanning extreme opinions. She further says that such news channels have become spin doctors for the government now and that this politicization of news channels sends dangerous signals. She feels this sort of politicization really came around in 2010. However, its seeds were sown when United Progressive Alliance II (UPA II was in power at the center from 2009 to 2014) came into power with a healthy coalition majority. For her, this paved the way for the beginning of the scams and the major opposition party BJP hell bent on not allowing the Parliament to function. To quote her,

News channels get into the business of plugging different political ideologies, points of view and much more. This strategy starts exploding on the face by 2014 when Narendra Modi was selected as the BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate. All the national news channels were covering his election rallies every day. Narendra Modi is a great user of media of all kinds. His campaign was planned in a way that every day he was speaking somewhere and every day BJP was giving a feed free of charge to the news channels. So while at one hand one was getting a free feed of Narendra Modi who was loud, opinionated and waiting for media spotlight on the other hand was this week-kneed, corrupt, effete UPA government. One could see the media positioning itself

¹²¹ This episode was aired on Times Now news channel on 11 February 2016. For more, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e569xmuPUjs>, accessed on 26 February, 2017

very cozy to Narendra Modi and at the same time hitting rightly so at the corrupt and non-functioning Congress led government. One also noticed a change in the tenure of television debates at that time. After Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister, things just escalated. Now there is a very strong political agenda in English news channel, anyone can see it.

Sevanti Ninan, cites the example of how Rajat Sharma, Editor-in-chief, *India TV* explained to her, his shift from one kind of news to the other which is laced with sensationalism. For him, news channels like *NDTV* had middle and upper middle income group as their viewers. The lower income group was completely untouched. Therefore, he started doing news to cater to this class. Here sensationalism and extreme opinions was the mantra to catch attention. This strategy worked and it fetched him high TRPs. Once this trend started, it spread in the news industry. So now viewers want to be told by the anchor how and what to think about a particular issue. Vinod Dua compares the debate programming with low cost reality television. He cites the example of Prince, a five year old boy who fell into a bore-well and died. While ‘Prince gaadhe main gir gaya’(The incident happened in July 2006, when a five-year old boy, named, Prince fell into an abandoned borewell in the Kurukshetra district of Haryana) is definitely news, sticking to that story for four hours means that news channels have shifted away from news and entered the territory of low cost reality television which is cheaper, sensational, noisy and a tabloid version of journalism. Such reasoning is in tune with Thussu’s (2007a) argument of infotainment based programming (discussed previously).

There is an underlying assumption especially amongst the English news channels that their opinion shows deal with serious issues, whereas their Hindi counterparts sensationalize their opinion format for higher ratings. Sumit Awasthi, strongly disagrees with such an assumption. He hosts a one hour show *Hum Toh Puchenge* on *News18 India* every weekday. For him, this English-Hindi divide is fast disappearing and increasingly the treatment of opinion shows across news channels in both the languages is appearing similar. He says that English news channels are now increasingly inviting Hindi speakers as panelists. For him, there is at least one Hindi speaker in each debate show. This is being done to gain entry into the Hindi market. He further says that there was period prior to 2011 when Hindi channels indulged in sensational news making to fetch ratings. However, this changed with the Anna Movement in 2011¹²², when

¹²²The Anna Movement was an anti-corruption movement spearheaded by the social activist Anna Hazare. The movement aimed at enacting a stringent anti-corruption law, the Jan Lok Pal Bill, for the formation of an Ombudsman to deal with corruption cases.

the Hindi channels have reinvented themselves. They provide more news than English channels and their opinion shows also highlight issues that impact the everyday life of their viewers. He also feels that such opinion based programming is participatory in nature. This participation is possible through social media where he invites questions or suggestions about the topic that will be debated in his prime-time show. He also runs a live poll on the issue being debated and shows the result of the poll at the end of the show. According to him, the channel viewers eagerly participate in such shows through tweets and voting. This aspect of television programming is in tune with McNair (2006) argument that with the coming of electronic media, however, new forms of granting citizens' participatory access to public debate have become available which give at least the appearance of greater representativeness and universality than readers' letters have ever achieved. These new forms include talk and debate shows (debates, that is, involving ordinary members of the public as opposed to panels of experts brought together in studios), phone-ins, and simulated 'people's parliaments' in which debate not only takes place, but the participants are invited to 'vote' on the issues (2006: 106). Center-staging the viewers, Livingstone and Lunt (1994) opine that media is playing a growing role in public discourse, including political participation and election campaign. According to them, such an exercise has led to the creation of three significant roles for media. Firstly, they can act as spokesmen on behalf of the people to both government and experts, conveying opinions, experiences, information and criticism upwards to the elites. Secondly, they can make government and experts accountable to public. Thirdly, they can provide a platform for communication among the lay audiences both in studio and at home, thus giving a new meaning to everyday experiences. There appears to be two divergent schools of thought on addressing the nature of the shift in news channels. Along with the cautioning of the emergence of polarizing views, there is also a celebration for the opening up a forum for all kinds of public discussions and deliberations. Next, I look at the impact of the views culture in news channels.

The Impact of Current Affairs Programming

Talking about the impact of discussion and debates on news channels, Nalin Mehta, certainly feels that news channels are increasingly setting the agendas for the society at large. He talks of the *Times Now* model as succeeding brilliantly model of journalism. For him,

Although the *Times Now* model of coverage would offend many sensibilities but as far as the channel goes it is achieving what is set out for. They treat their journalism as product which has found acceptability. Each media company has always tries to package itself in a certain manner. So The Times of India is packaged in a particular manner, The Hindu in a particular manner and The Indian Express in a particular manner. The same issue is packaged differently by different media houses to cater to diverse viewership and readership. This is in away saying that we take this stand and if you like you can follow us. For example *Times Now* has branded itself as the right-wing, ultra nationalist, shrill defender of India. Every story they pick up will be probed from this angle. Hence, the framework for the coverage of an issue depends on how a channel has defined itself.

Rajdeep Sardesai, also agrees with the view that news channels are developing identities to position themselves in a cluttered market. The idea of being unbiased has been conveniently relegated into the background. Now the emphasis is to take up a position that will touch cord with maximum number of viewers. Issues like gender, religion, caste and host of other issues are being debated form the ideological positioning of news channels. This definitely was the case with the India's Daughter¹²³ documentary based on the 16th December gang rape case in Delhi. He says,

What happened in case of India's Daughter documentary was if one went by the constitutional values then showing India's Daughter documentary would fiddle within Article 19 of freedom of speech and expression and the ability to reflect truthfully, so long as the identity and dignity of the victim was protected. People then flipped that around and say framed it as a national issue vs. a foreigner issue. Now this issue was turned into a nationalism debate and it was not longer about free speech. We journalists are supposed to be story tellers. We are not supposed to wear our tri-colour on our sleeves; we are not soldiers nor are we politicians. Our primary commitment is to the news.

Along with dumbing down of political dissent, Vinod Dua adds another element of dumbing down of the youth. For him, many times, youngsters frame instant opinions by blindly believing what is being shown. In such a scenario, the onus lies on the channels that they report correct and unbiased information. The positioning of news channels as following a particular line of thinking stands in strong contradiction to the idea of media as being source of providing information objectively. The one-sided representation of thoughts changes the landscape of public deliberation. However, on the other hand, Chandan Mitra, feels that people who think that

¹²³ India's Daughter documentary directed by Leslee Udwin is based on the Delhi Gang Rape case of December 2012. It was to be aired by television channels across the world on the occasion of the International Women's Day. However, its telecast in India was stopped by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Times Now news channel ran a relentless campaign against the Director of the documentary, calling for its ban as it portrayed India in a negative light.

the views culture on television can influence public opinion then they are seriously mistaken. For him,

In a democracy, people are mature and well-informed and they take stand on an issue in accordance with their thought process. Media discussions and debates do not influence public opinion. The latest example is the win of Donald Trump in the USA elections. All major news channels and newspapers campaigned against him and yet he won. The Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi was also subjected to this interrogation by a section of our media for years. Yet, he came into power. So, there are limits to media's power. Media has a right to express its views. Let news and views both be put out through newspapers and television. Ultimately people will be the real judge.

Jacobs and Townsley (2011) also believe that news media has helped in making deliberation possible. In their study based on the analysis of news commentary and opinion from both print and electronic media in the USA, they argue that the space of opinion programming has paved way for a presentation of plurality of voices in the media like professional columnist, elected politicians, civil society actors, academicians and so on. Although the debating format is tending largely towards rhetoric and emotional reasoning and predominance of a particular line of thinking, the presence of diverse voices on a public platform is making deliberation possible.

Over the years, such shows have got center staged and are now occupy the top spot in all news channels. They have also evolved in terms of offering different kinds of formats ranging from studio debates to audience shows to documentaries. While opening new vistas for debates and discussions, this format has also given rise to sharp and polarizing views. These polarizing views have also shaped identities for news channels that are competing in a cluttered market. In the next section, I look at how social media is increasingly setting agendas for news channels.

IV

The Influence of Social Media on News Channels

Any understanding on the role or the nature of media and communication in the 21st century has to factor in the aspect of social media. Social media has become an inexorable part of everyday life. The two way communication through various social media platforms like twitter, facebook, instagram, whatsapp has refashioned the communicative processes. Various studies have dealt with social media and its engagement with aspects like- formation of public sphere (Jenkins:

2006; Fuchs: 2012; Bennett and Segerberg: 2012), political campaigns (Drache et.al: 2015); surveillance (Fisk: 2014; Marwick: 2012; Westcott and Owens: 2013) and civil society and activism (Bonilla and Rosa: 2015; Kumar: 2017; Watson et.al : 2014).

India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing markets for US-based social media platforms like Facebook, Google, and Twitter. With entertainment and social media driving internet use in both rural and urban areas, internet penetration is growing rapidly in India. There will be an estimated 627 estimated million internet users by 2019 and internet access will grow by 16% and 7% year-on-year in urban and rural areas respectively. High penetration of smartphones and mobile internet as a result of reduced data tariffs and major telecommunication companies' aggressive roll-out of 4G plans has promoted consumption of digital content significantly pushing users towards an alternative screen for media consumption, which is historically and still dominated by television (KANTAR-IMRB, ICUBE 2018 Report).The extensive access to mobile internet services across India and the ever growing number of social media users has compelled news channels to invest in social media. Social media platforms, especially twitter seems to have much inroad into the programming of news channels. All news channels have social media teams that create, curate and promote the content of the channel across social media. Every news channel has facebook page, twitter handle, youtube channel where updates and tweets about their program schedules, topic of debate, trending issues, special broadcasts and interviews are posted. News channels also have exclusive shows on social media like *Viral Saach on ABP News*, *Social Media @ Aaj Tak on Aaj Tak*, *Trending@10 on NDTV 24x7*. The omnipresence of social media in broadcast media begs probe into some key issues like- What is the relevance of social media in the traditional/legacy media industry in India? How is social media impacting the media discourse in general and discourse on news channels in particular? How do journalists negotiate and engage with these new mediums of communication?

Nalin Mehta explains the relevance of social media in the legacy media industry. He, remarks,

The reach of social media is changing and any media house that does not take social media seriously is going to lag behind in the competition. All forms of mass media exist to make profit and this comes from their readership or viewership base. This readership or viewership base is heavily dependent on social media and hence social media is directly relevant to such forms of mass media. The 80% of the population that is outside the digital India does not consume much

media or consumes in lesser form. So social media for the segment mass media targets as part of its readership or viewership is very relevant to it. Digital access is increasing and when media companies formulate strategies they are targeting what is going to happen in the next five years. The percentage of people watching television is shifting to consuming news online. This has been observed among the younger section of the population. So it is vital for both television and print media to retune their business model keeping in mind the increasing usage of digital media.

The importance of social media arises from the increasing consumption of news, commentary, and information via digital platforms. Instant access of information at minimal cost is the underlying factor of that has spearheaded this growth. Adding to this reasoning, Zakka Jacob opines,

Social media is relevant because stories are being either discovered on social media or a lot of stories are getting amplified because of social media.

Mainstream media is increasingly looking toward developing news stories through videos, posts and tweets shared on social media platforms. Philipose (2019) cites the media coverage of the infamous December 2016 Delhi gang rape, to explain the changing dynamics of the convergence between mainstream media and the new media. She talks of how mainstream media through interviews, talk shows and articles and new media through videos, blogs, tweets, posts, synchronized to bring together the protesting voices throughout the country. However, Sandeep Bhushan, feels that this new form of *news sourcing* has weakened the traditional form of ground reporting. He says,

The whole media eco system post 2010/11 underwent a change and this was with the rise of the social media. So stories come from social media and it has altered the newsroom culture. In print the very robust way of debating, exchanging ideas or suggesting story ideas, it's gone. So fundamentally the democratic spirit of news creation is gone. So twitter and social media much as it is being sexed up, I am totally opposed to it. With the eclipsing of reporting, social media has become the new source. That is the first bottom line across news networks in English specially, social media is the main thing. Reporters have been replaced by social media and that is where the content comes from and then you have to track to who caters to that and who does not.

Along with changing the manner in which news is gathered, social media has also impacted the manner in which news is framed. It has given rise to a new format of news making, that is, hashtag journalism. Here, it is pertinent to point out an article on the fact checking website Alt News titled 'One month of Republic TV-How did they fare' dated 8th June 2017¹²⁴,

124 For more on this read Sam Jawed's article on altnews available at <https://www.altnews.in/one-month-republic-tv-fare/>, accessed 5 November, 2017

gives an overview of the hashtag strategy that has been assiduously promoted by the channel. Hashtags that reflect the editorial position of the channel on various kinds of issues are created and promoted on social media platforms. For instance one can see hashtags like #NationWithForces, #NationFirstNoCompromise, #ArmyAbovePolitics, for issues centering on the Indian Army, #RohingyaTerrorExposed, #IndiaForIndians on the Rohingya crisis, and so on being produced. Such hashtags frame the discourse around the issues being debated and help push agendas of media houses. Sailaja Bajpai remarks,

Twitter is now driving new content. Tweets are increasingly becoming news items. Therefore the functioning of social media and television is now getting intrinsically linked. The worry is the kind of messaging that has grown due to social media. The kind divisive, polarizing views circulating irrespective of political ideology was not prevalent five years back. It becomes crucial to understand where is all this hate and animosity coming from?

Rajdeep Sardesai concurs with the proposition that social media has become very divisive. For him,

The increasing negative tendencies creeping into everyday discourse due to social media and thus to television news media. In the last couple of years, social media has overtaken traditional media in dishing out instantaneous 24x7 news. Social media has become a space for instant opinion and that opinion gathers certain traction that a newsroom in a news channel cannot remain immune too. One is constantly hearing and looking at social media and it influences news judgment as those circulating opinions gain ground in the news cycle. So many times, journalists keep looking out for hashtags to make a news debate. For example, a hashtag like #kejriwalinsultsarmy which gets promoted by the media team of BJP to target Arvind Kejriwal. This gets picked up by newsrooms and a debate is created on the issue.

However, there are other voices that downplay the impact of social media. For Chandan Mitra,

Social media has limited impact. The comments on social media are flippant and lack depth. These days there is a tendency to collate various opinion and counter-opinions through tweets and play out a story. Often there is also a deliberate attempt to make leaders and political parties fight over non-issues. Such actions are meaningless. Due to this, social media cannot be taken seriously. But the positive offshoot of social media is in alerting the traditional media to what is making news around.

The impact of social media on news making cannot be discounted. The increasing reliance on social media for news gathering, circulating and consuming news, necessitates necessary checks to regulate the kind of information that flows in and out. Here, Siddharth Vardarajan, feels that the role of journalists as gatekeepers, assumes more significance. He says,

Should we care about what NDTV or Dainik Jagran does, when internet has put the power of dissemination entirely on the hands of the internet users? Social media has leveled the playing field somewhat. But to my mind this is illusionary because one of the problem of the internet is surfeit of impatience, it gives too much information, requires you to some way process that and I don't think social media by itself is able to play that role and that is why despite all its flaws people will always look towards a filter, they want somebody to play that gate keeping role and that gate keeping role that established traditional media plays is difficult to replicate, so I don't social media has leveled the playing field to that extent.

Zakka Jacob also highlights the aspect of journalists as gatekeepers. He opines,

The challenge for traditional media whether TV or print is there is a lot of fake stuff that keeps floating around on social media. Regular broadcasters can't put that on television. So I think that is where journalists and their role comes in because then you are expected to be a gatekeeper, you are expected to fact check, double source your information, and then put it on air. Because there are a lot of things floating around in social media and not all of it is necessarily true. The role of journalists as gatekeeper is all the more important now.

White's (1950) theorization of journalists as gatekeepers assumes more significance now. The role of journalists as gatekeepers becomes extremely crucial at a time, when social media is caught in the whirlpool of the fake news phenomenon. Spread of fake news or misinformation is rampant across social media platforms. Nielsen and Grave (2017) broaden the definition of fake news from just fabricated news produced either for economic or political gain to cover tendentious news coverage, partisan rhetoric, and false or outrageous statements by politicians, all spread via various social media platforms. In their opinion, two major reasons that have exacerbated the fake news phenomena are- the widespread crisis of confidence between the news media and politicians and public institutions and second, the lack of online regulations to check fake news amidst the overflow of news. (ibid: 2). Fake news syndrome is widely prevalent in both the Indian print and broadcast media format. An article, '2017's top fake news stories circulated by Indian media'¹²⁵, lists out 12 instances where fake news was circulated by all major national news channels and newspapers. It can be said that news media deliberately indulge in such practices to whip up ill-informed opinions that suit either their economic or political interests. In response to the rapid spread of fake news, many websites like *Alt News*, *Hoax Slayer*, *Fact Checker* have been created to counter the fake news malice. These websites fact check stories and debunk fake stories circulating on the internet.

125 For more on this read, <https://thewire.in/media/2017s-top-fake-news-stories-circulated-by-the-indian-media>, accessed 1 March, 2018.

The rise of social media has been accompanied by its own pros and cons. However, its impact on traditional media can be summed up in four points. First, social media has become a major source of news breaks. It is providing cues of events and incidents happenings across the world. News channels are often picking up stories from social media and then developing it further. Second, besides borrowing information, news channels are also circulating their content to the wider audience through social media platforms especially twitter and facebook. Third, the overflow of online information has necessitated that journalists act as gatekeepers. This is deemed important to check the onslaught of fake news and misinformation. Fourth, social media platforms are also widely used to target all dissenting voices, especially journalists. Journalists are subjected to abuses, sexist comment, hate speech and death threat¹²⁶. This appears to be the major challenge that journalists have to deal with.

V

Digital Journalism: An Emerging Model of News Making

Digital journalism is a new format of journalism that has recently made inroads into the media space in India. The need for alternate content armed with cheap technology has provided a fertile ground for the growth of digital journalism. In digital journalism, the medium of news making shifts from print and television to the internet. Abhinandan Sekri, lists of certain key factors that provide an edge to digital journalism vis-à-vis traditional journalism formats. He remarks,

So there are three aspects in the digital space, first it makes you braver. I don't think people like Prannoy Roy or ABP Group are less brave or anything, or have lower integrity or bad people, they are as good as you and me. But when you are on the hook for a 1000 crore then your decision making is going to be very different. Because if you shut me down, I can do something else and recover my costs, but if you shut down a channel then it will take two years to resolve all legal issues and make sure that 2000 employees are taken care off. Second, what is does it I am not under the kind of regulation like news channels are. Airwaves are owned by the government. The third aspect is allows a two way communication. And different people across the world are trying and coming up with interesting new features. Newslandry has lot of subscribers who are scientists, research scholars from USA, so we want to do content with them. So internet is two

¹²⁶The article demonstrates how internet trolling has become a new weapon to target journalists, social activists, academicians who challenge the majoritarian narrative. For more, refer to, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/power-social-media-emboldened-right-wing-trolls>, accessed 22 September, 2017.

way. Broadcast and print are one way. Since online is two way if you can leverage that I think you will see news change dramatically over the next few years.

Factors like cheaper technology, less reliance on advertising, citizen-centric content, two way communication process have propelled the growth of digital journalism in India. Commenting on how the editorial content of digital news website is filling the vacuum in today's journalism by offering alternate content , Shivraj Parshad, Former Employee, *NDTV 24x7*, remarks,

They do offer alternate content and if you notice they also have positions. Scroll is very outspoken. Don't discount Newslandry because what it has done is before any of these guys is it has done multi format. They do interviews, critiques, podcasts, articles. I think very much like television they too are right now in a very cluttered space and I am glad that they are out there because lot of people have started moving away from television and watching it on their devices or laptops. Interestingly some of them are also getting venture capitalist funding. Because I think they had a very interesting positioning for news, you pay for the news that you use, and they are saying that they are giving back to the public what journalism is all about. They can afford that content because they are not answerable to an ownership but to their own bottomline and they are answerable to their viewership/readership.

The Indian digital space has witnessed the launch of various news websites like *Scroll*, *TheWire*, *TheWire Hindi*, *TheWire Urdu*, *Newslandry*, *The News Minute*, *The Citizen*, *DailyO*, *Firstpost*, *People's Archive for Rural India (PARI)*, *India Spend* and many more in recent times. Like the segmentation in the traditional media, these websites also cater to diverse readership. While *Scroll*, *TheWire*, *Newslandry*, *The Citizen*, *Firstpost* have a national focus and cover and report from all parts of the country, *The News Minute* is more South-India centric. Similarly, *India Spend* is a data-centric news portal that utilizes data for analyzing government policies and programmes. *PARI* focuses on the rural hinterland of India, engaging with issues of rural areas which are largely absent in the mainstream media discourse. Highlighting on the need to start an online venture *TheWire*, Siddharth Vardarajan, says,

The choice of internet as a platform at one level is very obvious, as there is no entry barrier, one needs minimal revenue to start a website. Moreover, the idea of an online venture suited our interest to pursue independent journalism by being financially independent. We thought of a new business model that was not driven by family ownership or corporate control or being excessively dependent on advertising but instead as a new contract between a reader and a journalist, a joint venture of public sphere. *TheWire* was launched on the premise that the reader as a concerned citizen had to right to access the right kind of news. Ventures like *TheWire*, *PARI*, *Scroll* and *The Citizen* are all contributing to reemergence of vibrant journalism and in the fitness of time will pose a serious challenge to the lazy and unethical way the mainstream media is heading too.

The evolution of digital journalism in India is premised on the fact that it is an alternate to traditional media. The excessive focus on power and profits by the mainstream media now, has far removed it from the ideals of what journalism ought to be.

Like any other emerging medium, the digital space has its own set of challenges to deal with. Sen and Nielsen (2016) in their study of six digital news startups in India, list out the challenges the digital startups face. Like traditional media, digital startups do face the issue of funding to sustain themselves. They also feel the full power of political actors and other powerful groups when they are crossed. Professional malpractice like producing 'paid news' happens online as it does offline, and, as the case of FirstPost, which was acquired by Reliance Industries when it took control of Network18 in 2014, illustrates digital journalism ventures are not necessarily exempt from being acquired by politically powerful actors. For all their many qualities, the primarily English-language, urban-oriented, and digital media discussed here do little to address the economic inequalities, urban/rural divides, and differences.

Sanjay Bragta speaks of how digital journalism will find its space but not be overriding broadcast and print media. For him,

Digital is a different medium all together. They will not replace television news. When a big drama happens people will watch it on television only. They will not watch on social media. This is a different issue that they will watch it on iphone if not television. But they will watch either India TV or Aaj Tak or other channels. They will watch the streaming of these channels. Social media is challenging mainstream media that you have to come up with new strategies. Digital media is important for me because I can choose to read, watch, listen and interact with a story of my choice. In newspaper I can only read, in television I can only watch but in digital I can do all the four activity. But that does not stop me from watching television. Television news will sustain itself only if it becomes stronger, better and more of a viewing experience for viewers. Television media has to reinvent itself.

Mrinal Pande also raises the issue of sustainability of such a model. She finds such websites illuminating as they offer space to many professionals who often do not find space to unburden themselves. For her,

Sites like TheWire and Scroll offer many excellent articles. She states that 'of late there has been a lot of interest about India globally. The New York Times carries at least two editorials or opinion pieces about India on a weekly basis. Such stories are picked up by the online news websites and are reported in their websites. This helps in accessing views on India from a global platform. Such ventures have their pitfalls too. The issue of revenue generation is and lack of trained and professional staff are some issues that these websites have to deal with.

Echoing similar thoughts, Sevanthi Ninan says,

News websites are not into the breaking news model. They offer less reportage but cover areas that are relatively untouched by the mainstream media. They are more into an analytical model of journalism rather than ground reporting model of journalism.

Sandeep Bhushan, also adds to the sustainability aspect of digital news websites.

According to him,

Such websites are offering alternate content. They will not replace legend media in the near future. In India, for example if you look at The Print, Shekhar Gupta is running it from his own pocket, so he does not have a financial source. TheWire is not for profit venture, he gets money from Media Foundation set up by Nandan Nilekanni. The point is digital space cannot replace mainstream media, because they do not have bureaus, unless you have news bureaus how will you bring variety in news content.

Indian media scene is witnessing a new format of news making. Digital news websites are the new kids on the block who are competing with well established players in the media industry. Armed with cheaper technology, focus on in-depth and analytical style of journalism and two way mode of communication does make digital news websites an attractive and exciting platform for news consumers. However their non-reliance on corporate advertising and generation of revenue from subscription model will be the key factor in deciding their future course of action.

VI

Media Regulation: Self or Statutory?

The media has undergone significant changes since the time of its inception in the subcontinent. Far removed from the formative ideals of media as an agent of national building, large sections of Indian media are now profit seeking ventures. Along with amassing profits and higher revenues, the scourge of fake news and paid news have firmly entrenched themselves in the media sector. Amidst such worrying trends, the important issue of media regulation needs to be addressed.

The telecommunications sector in India comprising of telephone, internet and the television broadcast industry is regulated by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). TRAI was

established in 1997, by an Act of Parliament. 'TRAI's mission is to create and nurture conditions for the growth of telecommunications in the country in a manner and at a pace which will enable India to play a leading role in the emerging global information society'. Towards this endeavor, TRAI has released regular consultations, orders and directives to the telecommunication industry to ensure its equitable and just growth'¹²⁷. In February, 2013, TRAI released a report titled *Consultation Paper on Issues Relating to Media Ownership*. The paper raised an important question- Why regulate? and then went on to answer it as follows-'the products of media are not regular commodities as they constitute and shape cultural life of a society and serve as a strong tool to form public perception. Media products play a special role in democracies as media in modern societies provide the arena for public debates, a virtual public space where different issues of public interest can be represented and discussed. Media influences ideas and therefore can swing opinions. The size of the entertainment and media industry, its current growth trends, its future potential and its power to influence news and views within its reach are the factors that attract, amongst others, large corporate and political parties and organizations to the media business. The inherent conflict of interest which arises from uncontrolled ownership in the media sector, gives rise to manifestations such as- paid news; corporate and political lobbying by popular television channels; propagation of biased analysis and forecasts both in the political arena as well as in the corporate sector and irresponsible reporting to create sensationalism. These are even more lethal where the ownership/control rests with entities which have both business and political interests. The ills of uncontrolled media ownership have repeatedly been manifested, nationally as well as internationally, in controversial occurrences. The main casualty is the right of citizen to know the objective truth. Regulating ownership of media houses is thus essential in the public interest, as a guarantee of plurality and diversity of opinion. It is, therefore, topical to start, talking about the regulation of media ownership' (2013: 14-17). To understand the nature of regulation sought, especially in broadcast media, two specific reports by TRAI released in 2009 and 2013, respectively, need to be discussed. Thakurta (2013) analyses the content of both the reports. He says, 'In 2008, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, had sought the recommendations of TRAI to devise a policy for imposing restrictions in the pattern

127 Kindly refer to the report at <http://www.trai.gov.in/about-us/history>; accessed 5 March, 2018.

of ownership of media companies seeking licenses/permissions/registrations under various rules and guidelines. The authority was asked to look into all kinds of players that intended to enter into the broadcasting sector. In February 2009, TRAI, gave its recommendations to the Government covering the issues of horizontal integration¹²⁸, vertical integration¹²⁹, limit on the number of licenses held by a single entity, concentration of control/ ownership across media and control/ ownership across telecom and media companies. TRAI had recommended that the necessary safeguards should be put in place to ensure that plurality and diversity are maintained across the three media segments (Print, Television and Radio). The second report released in 2013, sought comments and counter-comments on media ownership from the various stakeholders'. The response from stakeholders, especially media houses was staunch refusal to accept restrictions over ownership and control. They argued that such measures would stifle growth, the multiplicity of media and the highly fragmented market prevents monopolization and that such regulation of the sector amounts to infringement on the right to freedom of expression as specified in Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution (ibid: 10-11). Government regulation of broadcast media has largely been seen through the prism of censorship of media (the print media is regulated by the Press Council of India, a statutory body). This is true, considering the monopolistic hold of the government on the public broadcaster, since the time of its inception. Tathagata Satpathy, says,

Government notifications are essentially an infringement on media freedom and that in the contemporary times, the government is increasingly resorting to such tricks to clamp down on media houses that are critical of them.

Deeply skeptical of government regulating broadcast media, private news broadcasters got together and set up a non-government regulatory body- News Broadcasting Standards Association (NBSA) in 2008, to deal with the regulatory, ethical, operational, legal issues affecting news and current affairs channels. The membership of NBSA comprises of senior

¹²⁸ Horizontal integration is a process by which one company buys different kinds of media, concentrating ownership across different kinds of media (Croteau and Hoynes 1997: 38). Within the Indian context, The Times Group is an apt example of how horizontal integration works. The Times Group operates across all media platforms, for example, in print- *The Times of India*, *Economic Times*, *Maharashtra Times*, *Navbharat Times*, *Mumbai Mirror*, *Kolkata Mirror*, *Vijay Karnataka* and many more, in broadcast- *Times Now*, *Mirror Now*, *ET Now*, in digital- timesofindia.com, economictimes.indiatimes.com, bombaytimes.com, cricbuzz.com, gaana.com, MensXP.com, Dineout.com, in entertainment channels- *Romedy Now*, *Movies Now*, *MNX*, *Zoom*.

¹²⁹ Vertical integration is a process by which one owner acquires all aspects of production and distribution of a single type of media product (Croteau and Hoynes 1997: 38).

editors and managers from the broadcast media in India. However, Sevanti Ninan is quite critical of the role of the NBSA. She remarks,

I recollect raising the matter of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) doctored tapes with the NBSA. However, the NBA claimed that they were waiting for a complaint to look into the matter of doctored tapes telecast by Zee News. This delay shows the lackadaisical attitude of the NBSA. Moreover the members of the NBSA are also owners of news channels. They cannot take action against themselves!

The ineffective functioning of the body is compromised as the members cannot take action against themselves in cases of transgression. The lack of proper probe into the doctored videos in the JNU case; the non compliance with NBSA orders by Zee News in the Gauhar Raza case¹³⁰, are few instances highlighting the inefficiency of the body. Similarly, questioning the efficacy of the NBSA, Rajdeep Sardesai, says,

The regulatory body News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA) is losing its relevance in the market place of news making. Although the NBSA from time to time has pulled up channels and tried to put some regulation in place, its efforts have been buried under the heat and dust of the newsrooms. Newsrooms decisions are being taken based on what is happening in the news market rather than on the guidelines formulated by the NBSA. Hence, NBSA is not playing the role it should play. It should be able to play the role of an ombudsman who can actually put pressure on newsrooms to change the way they do news. That is not happening as the NBSA is considered by newsrooms as a busybody which should be kept in the sidelines. No news channel has made the NBSA rule central to the core of their news judgment.

The issue of regulation is of utmost importance in the rapidly growing broadcast sector. However, what form of regulation is best suited to meet the standard of fair and objective journalism also needs to be discussed. State interference in the broadcasting sector in India has been a recurring feature. As previously discussed, successive governments, time and again, have sought to interfere in the functioning of the media. While the public broadcaster has been reduced to being a government mouthpiece, private media that is critical of the government in power has been subjected to undue harassment under the guise of statutory policies and regulations. Moreover, private regulatory bodies also fail to work as an effective mechanism for controlling the functioning of television news media. Amidst such a scenario, some voices are

¹³⁰ The article points out the open violation of an NBSA order by Zee News. The order was issued following a complaint by Gauhar Raza, a prominent scientist and social activist, who said that the *Zee News* coverage of him on an episode aired on 9th March, 2016 was defamatory and derogatory. For more read <https://www.newslaundry.com/2017/09/11/zee-news-nbsa-gauhar-raza-self-regulation>, accessed 11 March, 2018.

making a strong case for self-regulation by media houses. Arguing for self-regulation, Nalin Mehta remarks,

Self regulation by media is the need of the hour because the moment government steps in then there will be an immediate clampdown on news that is critical of the government. However, under the law of the land, the government has the right to issue notifications to news channels that do not follow the model code of reporting but lately it is being witnessed that these notifications are more politically intended.

Similarly, Rajdeep Sardesai remarks,

I believe self regulation is the need of the hour as advisories or notifications by regulatory bodies are completely ignored in the frenzied newsrooms. Whenever a terrorist attack or a bomb blast happens, the motive of news channels is to circulate any information as breaking news to garner eyeballs and be first in the race. At such moments, producing news within the guidelines laid takes a back stage. The mind space is occupied by what the other twenty channels are showing rather than what the guidelines say. So in such situations, self regulation is the key to circulate responsible news. The news channel owners and proprietors should hold the moral responsibility on what kind of news they produce and circulate.

The cut-throat competition in television news media has led to lowering the bar of media ethics. The sole purpose of out classing competitors with breaking news, ill researched exposes, fake news, dishing out majoritarian propaganda has come at the cost of manipulating the dos and don'ts of the profession to one's advantage. Sevanthi Ninan argues that the self-regulation model has also failed in the frenzied competition. She states,

The issue of self regulation also does not hold much ground as was evident in the 26/11 Mumbai attack case. All news channels went overboard in their reporting they were openly flouting government regulations.

Arguing against self- regulation, Chandan Mitra says,

Self regulation is like a cliché. Though it may be the best form of regulation, it is impossible to achieve. There should be an independent authority that should lay a broad set of guidelines for all forms of media to follow.

Sailaja Bajpai, also argues that the need of the hour is to have an independent regulatory body. Referring to the one day intended ban on *NDTV India*¹³¹, she remarks,

¹³¹ A case of government highhandedness was witnessed on account of the intended one day ban on *NDTV India* for its coverage of the Pathankot attack in January 2016. The government order said that the news channel has revealed crucial and strategic information regarding the terrorist attack in the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot. This order

The channel did not deserve the intended one day ban. The current government sees NDTV as a Congress news channel and is hence going after it. As governments change, they trouble those media houses that are not favourable to them. Therefore, the need of the hour is to have an independent regulatory body. An independent regulatory body would put firm guidelines in place which neither news channels nor government would trespass but then such a step would restrict the illegal means through which news channels as well as the governments pursue to settle professional and political motives.

Indian media is afflicted by several maladies. Questions are raised on the ownership patterns, the content policy, illegal revenue sources for funding of media enterprises. Putting a check on such vital issues is the need of the hour. Recent instances¹³² show that neither government nor self-regulation seems to be the most efficient mechanism to deal with broadcast regulation. Perhaps, the option of an independent regulatory body with statutory laws seems to be more appropriate to fix the anomalies in television news media.

VII

Government and Media in Contemporary Times

On 22nd December, 2017, an American film titled *The Post* was released. The film depicts the true story of the journalists at *The Washington Post* who published the Pentagon Papers—the classified documents regarding the US government’s involvement in the Vietnam War. One of the most talked about dialogue from the movie was— ‘the press was to serve the governed, not the governors’. This sentence succinctly sums up what ought to be the role of media in democratic societies. The role of media in all democratic societies should be to serve the citizens. It should provide them information about everyday events; provide them a platform for rational debates and help in the creation of a politically engaged citizenry. Further, it should make the government accountable to its citizens. Accountability involves questioning the government on various matters like governance, regulation, allocation, policy framing and implementation (Gans: 1979; Keane: 1991; Kellner: 1990; Thomson: 1995). This implies that the relationship

received strong condemnation from the Editors Guild of India which said that while other news channels also did similar reporting, *NDTV India* was singled out as it is critical of the current dispensation. However, the order was revoked due to condemnation from various quarters.

¹³² Like *NDTV India*, a similar was the case with witnessed in the case of *Kashmir Reader*, a daily from Srinagar. In this case, it was the PDP-BJP state government which imposed a ban on the paper for inciting acts of violence and disturbing peace and tranquility. The paper underwent a three month ban. For more on this, kindly see <https://www.firstpost.com/india/kashmir-reader-ban-india-new-zeal-to-tame-media-reflects-ruthlessness-of-british-era-3088700.html>, accessed 6 April, 2018.

between media and government ought to be critical and not amicable. Deviating from this practice, Sevanthi Ninan, describes the relationship between media and the government in India as a mix of both. For her,

Some media houses are hostile towards the government and some others are friendly. After a long gap in Indian politics, a government with has a thumping majority is in power and thus does not shy away from adopting repressive measures to clamp down media houses that question it. The present government is more intrusive than its predecessors. The tough signaling by government has lead many media houses to soften their stand vis-à-vis the government. On the other hand, there are channels like News18 who are cosyng up to the government as was evident by the repeated telecast of the Prime Minister's interview on 2nd September, 2016¹³³.

Rajdeep Sardesai brings in the national and anti-national narrative to explain the relationship between media and the government. According to him,

The current government wants complete control over the media. It is monitoring the 24x7 media day to day and by minute to minute. It expects the media to follow its own narrative on all issues that are out in the public domain. The national and anti-national divide that has been spread in the society has now crept into the media setup as well. This division has led to the government exercising complete control over some media houses and through them targeting other media houses that are critical of it. In the surgical strikes episode in September 2016, the government through its favoured media houses has been successful in bringing the national and anti-national debate to the center stage. Now the situation is such that any questioning of the government is seen through this prism of national and anti-national. This was never the case before. In consonance with the government, few media houses have framed this discourse and are now using it as a weapon to target those who oppose them.

Sailaja Bajpai feels that the issue of dissent, a vital ingredient for a healthy democracy, has suddenly lost its worth in this humdrum of national and anti-national sloganeering. She says,

In their quest to gain favour from the government, many media houses have lost objectivity in reporting. They just masquerade as journalists when they are actually propagandists. I can recall that on the day of the Uri attack on 18th September 2016, NewsX was attacking the opposition parties and painting them as unpatriotic due to their claims of involving all stakeholders for talks to settle the Kashmir stalemate. In the current scenario, dissent is equated with being an anti-national. This is not restricted to discussions on security issues but is pervading to all issues that impact everyday life. It is not only the electronic media but also print media and social media that is embroiled in creating this division. Such propaganda is going on at a deeper level and it is dangerous to see it touching a cord with a lot of Hindu population of this country. This is a worrying sign.

Mrinal Pande, while agreeing with the above arguments, signals a sign of optimism. She remarks,

133 For more see, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbApseW16mY>, accessed 20 March, 2018.

The current government has a clear marking of its own likes and dislikes in the media industry. While DD News is a government mouthpiece, Zee News, Times Now, NewsX, are clearly parroting the government's line. NDTV is seen as being close to the Congress and India Today and Aaj Tak play to both the galleries. The government feels it can use the media the way its likes but in reality it does not realize that it is spoiling the media and its own image. For example, everybody knows that Subhash Chandra's Zee News will always support the government. It openly showcases its bias and hence many viewers are suspicious of its reportage. However, at the end of the day no amount of media propaganda helps the government and ultimately in elections, people make use of their own mental faculties.

The divide in the Indian broadcast media at the national level is starkly visible. While news channels like *Times Now*, *Republic TV*, *Zee News*, *NewsX* explicitly function as government mouthpiece. The propaganda model, espoused by Herman and Chomsky (1988) finds resonance with the editorial policies of these channels. These channels frame their shrill discourse which is in sync with the ideology of the government-hyper-nationalist, majoritarian and divisive. Others like *India Today* and *Aaj Tak* appear to be treading the middle path. *NDTV* on the other hand, is singled out as being anti-government. This division is so apparent that in few instances, news channels have resorted to reporting on each other. An episode aired on 20th February, 2016, on *NDTV India* in the show *Primetime* anchored by Ravish Kumar¹³⁴, dealt with the issue of how news channels have become propagandists of political parties. Through the show, he talks of how news channels are openly taking sides and indulging in partisan journalism. He is particularly critical of the debate and discussions shows where hate mongering, propaganda, misinformation, have become the norm. Instead of seeking accountability, the focus is on targeting individuals who express dissent, instead of providing platform for diverse voices, the focus is on it promoting one dominant voice. In another instance, *India Today* aired a show on 20th September, 2017, on media ethics¹³⁵ where the discussion was on how while speaking in a public meeting, Arnab Goswami had lied about his experience during the coverage of Gujarat Riots in 2002. Similarly, Arnab Goswami did a debate show on *Times Now* on 26th July, 2016 on the occasion of Kargil Diwas¹³⁶, where he slammed a section of *pseudo-liberals* (emphasis mine) for denigrating the Indian Army and echoing the Pakistani line. While news channels have off and on indulged in such reporting, few digital news websites like *Newslaundry*, *TheWire Hindi*,

134 For more see, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLnF5YSOghg>, accessed 20 March, 2018.

135 For more see, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCCg9Pe6O70>, accessed 21 March, 2018.

136 For more see, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbSl06eCcBw>, accessed 21 March, 2018.

Scroll, do regular reporting on the happenings in Indian media in general and broadcast media in particular. While *Newslandry* has a weekly video feature *TV Newsance*, *TheWire Hindi* has a discussion show named *Media Bol* and *Scroll* regularly carries articles on framing on issues by varied media outlets.

Coming back to the media-government relations, some feel that the relationship between media and government is strained. The present government has far less tolerance for anti-government reportage unlike the previous ones. Siddharth Vardarajan says

In the current scenario, proprietors and editors of media houses have become fence sitters due to the unfriendly attitude of the government. The usage of words like ‘Prostitutes’, ‘Bazaru’, ‘news traders’ used by the government while referring to the media points out its hostile attitude. The risk averse of media proprietors and editors has led to uncritical coverage of what has been happening at the official level. Many significant areas are not being covered for example many decisions taken by the environment ministry diluting important norms safeguarding the country’s environment concerns due to mining or manufacturing projects are completely sidelined.

As opposed to the hostile relations theorization described by many in the above lines, Chandan Mitra feels that

Journalists who talk of a hostile government clamping down on media are the ones who have got undue favours from earlier governments. These media houses are complaining as the current government is not giving them the kind of access which they were used to. There is no substance in the claims that the government is selectively targeting media houses that oppose it.

Thus, it can be said that the relationship between government and media is tempered with both criticisms and bonhomie. History provides credence to the fact that every government in power has tried to utilize media to strengthen its political hold over the country. The onus between becoming a tool for propaganda or upholding accountability lies in the hands of media networks across all formats.

This chapter has mapped out some key emerging trends in the television news media space in contemporary India. These trends impinge on the way news media is structured and operates. The satellite revolution of the 1990s changed the nature of television news media. The availability of cheaper technology and relaxation in government regulations opened up the broadcast news space for private participation. With private participation, television news media became a tool for achieving political and monetary success. The content policy of news channels

was fine tuned to meet these requirements. Infotainment became the norm across all networks. Along with the changing content policy, the rise of social media also had an impact on the functioning of news channels. Social media has become a new source for news gathering. It has also become a platform that is shaping agendas and impacting the public discourse by amplifying events, incidents and ideas. The Indian media scene is also witnessing a new format of news making. Digital news websites are the new kids on the block who are competing with well established players in the media industry. Armed with cheaper technology, focus on in-depth and analytical style of journalism and two way mode of communication, does make digital news websites an attractive and exciting platform for news consumers. Factors like rapid growth, new technology, faulty business model, dubious ownership structure, bring in the question of media regulation. The current regulation policies are deeply inadequate to address these anomalies and a new regulation model is the need of the hour.

Chapter 5

Production of Current Affairs Programming: A Study of *NDTV 24x7*

The previous chapters mapped some of the key trends in the functioning of television news media in independent India and the transformative changes that India's new economic policies of the 1990s brought into media in general and television in particular. The tremendous growth in the broadcast news sector has led to significant changes on several fronts, such as, revenue generation, news content policy, regulation, technology, ownership patterns, organizational structures and so on.

This chapter focuses on one such widely prevalent trend, namely the current affairs format of news programming. Armed with different kinds of shows like studio debates, panel discussions, documentaries and interviews, this model of news broadcasting has got center-staged now and occupies the top spot in news programming across all channels. This apparently dialogical mode of communication has become a pervasive feature across news channels. News programming is no longer just restricted to disseminating information about events and occurrences. It has made a radical shift from the predominantly one way dissemination of information to an interactive format where the focus is to analyse, investigate and explore the *why*, *how* and *what* of such events. From merely reporting events journalists are now increasingly adorning the task of interpreting news stories for their viewers (McNair: 2006; Patrona: 2009; Zayani: 2006). The technological advance in the 24x7 mediums of communication has made information accessibility, faster and cheaper. There is no longer a reliance on the 9 o'clock bulletin or the morning newspaper for getting news. Mobile and internet services have ensured that there is a constant flow of information to people. So while accessibility to news has become easier, making sense of such news events by discussing, deliberating and debating it is the next step in news consumption. Thus, here the role of media as an institution that provides the platform for such deliberations, exchanges, conversations gains eminence. This chapter examines the role of the media network *NDTV* as a platform for framing public opinion.

A cursory look at the current format of news making in media in general and broadcast media in particular, showcases that journalists are now increasingly indulging in conversational format of news production. Their opinions, interpretations of news events and stories debated and deliberated in news bulletins and other programs are being circulated to the news consumers. Journalists have now taken over the charge of not only reporting about events and happenings but discussing the various nuances and finer points of such information on television screens. They select issues or themes that they deem fit for discussion. They also decide how such debates should be framed, keeping in mind their personal political leanings as well organizational editorial policies. Besides, in the age of social media, promoting and circulating these talking points on social media platforms, is also an integral aspect of such programming. This synergy of processes such as selection, representation, circulation together led to the production of such a format of news programming. This format of programming is a dominant feature across all mediums of media. But, here, the focus is restricted to its role in the television news media. The previous chapter discussed this trend of news programming in channels. It showcased how over the years, such shows have got center staged in news programming and now occupy the top spot in all news channels. Factors like cheap production costs, replication of international news format and competition for ratings have propelled the growth this genre of programming.

This chapter through an examination of the production process of the current affairs genre of news programming in the English news channels *NDTV 24x7* makes a case for generating a grounded understanding of the issue. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the *NDTV* model of journalism. It maps out the journey of network from an independent production house to a 24x7 news broadcaster. It looks at the key turning points of the network, like, *The World This Week* (TWTW) years on *Doordarshan*, its partnering with the *STAR* network, launch of its own 24x7 English news channel *NDTV 24x7* and Hindi news channel *NDTV India* and the subsequent news channel war in television news media space. With this anchoring, it then probes into the techniques and processes that undergo the production of debate and discussion based shows aired on the channel. Insights into issues like ownership, editorial policy, role of social media, its relationship with successive governments are also provided.

Finally, all these factors are woven together to provide an understanding of the *NDTV* brand of journalism.

The next section maps out the journey of the *New Delhi Television Limited (NDTV)* network and discusses the *NDTV* model of journalism.

Figure 4: Logo of NDTV 24x7: ‘Experience. Truth First’



(Source: https://www.indianetzone.com/3/NDTV_24x7.htm)

I

The Beginning

The beginnings of the news organization *New Delhi Television Network (NDTV)* can be traced back to 1988 when the Indian news television space was ruled by the official state broadcaster *Doordarshan*. Although the Indian press was free, television news because of its political leverage and geographical reach was under government control. It was under the Rajiv Gandhi government that efforts were made to reform *Doordarshan* from being a government mouthpiece to being a credible public service broadcaster. The Supreme Court ruling on airwaves in 1995¹³⁷

¹³⁷ This ruling stated that airwaves cannot be a state monopoly as they constituted public property. The court made it clear that it was the duty of the state to see that the airwaves were utilized to advance the fundamental right to free speech which could not be done in a monopoly. The broadcast media, the court said, ‘should be under the control of the public as distinct from Government. This is command implicit in Article 19 (I) (a). It should be operated by a public statutory corporation or corporations’ (Mehta, 2008: 118). The background for this ruling came in the wake

opened the broadcasting space for private participation. Kumar (2006) states that the archaic broadcasting laws formed during the colonial period could not withstand the changing political economy of the 1990s, a turbulent time for Indian television. In 1995, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the airwaves were public property that must be used in ways that ensure the expression of plurality of views and diversity of opinions in the national community' (ibid: 44). The court ruling paved the way for private players to enter the broadcasting sector. The then, Director General of *Doordarshan*, Bhaskar Ghose, commissioned Prannoy Roy¹³⁸ and Radhika Roy (promoters of *NDTV*) to infuse the public broadcaster with fresh talent and ideas.

During that time, *NDTV* was primarily functioning as an independent production house. Comprising of a handful of people, it functioned out of a small flat in the *Greater Kailash* locality of South Delhi. *NDTV* was commissioned by Bhaskar Ghose, Director General, *Doordarshan* to produce a half-an-hour weekly news magazine programme called *The World This Week* (*TWTW*). This arrangement hinged on the directive that *NDTV* would not air any news on India. *NDTV* was also paid two lakhs per episode of *TWTW* by *Doordarshan*. Prannoy Roy, Executive Co-Chairperson, *NDTV* Group, describes the *TWTW* venture as, 'the newsiest decade in television history: the Berlin Wall came down; the USSR disintegrated; the scenes of protest and revolution from Tiananmen Square had to be covered. With *TWTW*, the seed of private news television was sown (Roy, in Kagal 2016: 3)'. Smeeta Chakrabarti, President Revenue, *NDTV*, describes how the small team at the *NDTV* office would work on the programming of the *TWTW* series. She states, 'for *TWTW*, we would cull international stories from video tapes which were couriered to us from abroad, unlike today, where wire feeds come into our computers. Initially, we couldn't afford reporters to go out, so we took stories from an international news service called Roving Report. I would edit the stories, Prannoy would do the links and Radhika, who was the producer, would direct him. We would shoot the links with

of the tussle between Board of Cricket Control in India (BCCI) and *Doordarshan* in 1995 over the telecast rights of the India series with West Indies. When BCCI granted the telecast rights of the match to ESPN, *Doordarshan* objected to the deal on the ground that only *Doordarshan* had the exclusive right to telecast the match under the Telegraph Act of 1885. It accused the BCCI of being 'anti-national' as it was favouring a foreign broadcaster. Subsequently, BCCI took the matter to the Supreme Court and the court passed the landmark judgement. This challenged the government's monopoly over broadcast rights and paved the way for private and foreign participation in broadcast media.

¹³⁸ Few journalists like Vinod Dua and Ashok Lahiri were already working with *Doordarshan* since 1985-86. They used to produce talk shows like *Janvaani*, *Newsline* and election analysis shows.

Prannoy at Jain studios in Sarojini Nagar. The set was made up of a bank of TV sets in a wooden box divided by strips of carpet, our version of a video wall.....It was an amazing time for us to be in the whole international space. For *TWTW*, we hired people in West Asia. Very big things were happening in South Africa and China, and the erstwhile Soviet Union was being dismantled. In the US you had the elections where George Bush said the key words ‘No More Taxes’ and his ratings soared! Prannoy went to the US and China for *TWTW*, and to have our people reporting from the ground was unprecedented for Indian television (Chakrabarti, in Kagal 2016: 83-84). The programming of *TWTW* venture was in stark contrast to the insipid coverage of *Doordarshan*. With graphics and footage from onsite reporting, it outdid the news programming of *Doordarshan*. Mehta (2008) points out that until then viewers had only seen *Doordarshan*’s bulletin, which consisted solely of stiff news readers reading out the news in highly bureaucratised English or Hindi. When pictures were used, it was only for a few seconds, and often they were still pictures. For the first time, the Roys exposed Indian audiences to international news television practices, with Prannoy introducing each story in an easy conversational style, followed by a pre-packaged story using the best pictures with a voice-over to match the visuals (ibid:51).

The popularity of *TWTW* marked a shift in the Roys agreement with *Doordarshan*. Instead of the channel paying *NDTV* for each show it produced, the company became the producer in its own right, paying *Doordarshan* a fee and selling advertising directly. This boosted the Roys profile and from being hired talent, they became media entrepreneurs (Kaushik 2015:1)¹³⁹. This was also the phase, when *Doordarshan* relaxed its institutional policies and allowed private players to broadcast news bulletins. *NDTV* which until now was producing a 30 minutes current affairs show *TWTH* bagged the contract for the daily news bulletin. However, the costs for producing a bulletin had to be borne entirely by *NDTV*. Prannoy Roy recalls how he had to go around seeking financial help. He says, ‘We started our rounds with private companies with the plea: ‘please fund the first-ever private news programme in India....it’s beginning of a new era’. The response was terrific. Mr. Ratan Tata was the first to say yes and five others followed and we were ready to go with three years funding and editorial independence assured. On 5th February, 1995, we aired India’s first-ever private news broadcast

139 For more see, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/the-tempest-prannoy-radhika-roy-NDTV>, accessed 20 January, 2018.

(Roy, in Kagal 2016:4)'. Adding to the then existing censorship on live news and the *NDTV's* way of manoeuvring through it, he says, 'then came the blunder on the first night of our news broadcast of the *News Tonight*. I was anchoring and, like any other young anchor, decided to show off. As we went on air, I glanced at my watch and said, 'it's eight o'clock and this is *News Tonight* coming to you live'. Someone in the Prime Minister's office heard the word 'live' and immediately phoned the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and asked them to take us off air, or at least stop private news from being live. 'Live' was a four-letter word that, freely translated, meant 'danger'. But frankly, nightly news that was not live might as well be dead news. So we decided to race against time. There was Indian Standard Time and there was *NDTV* time. We brought a large-capacity hard drive, which could store ten minutes of video, and everywhere in the *NDTV* studios, we had two sets of clocks-the second one showing *NDTV* time that was ten minutes and over about a year reduced that ahead of the first that kept the Indian Standard Time (we began at ten minutes and over about a year reduced that to a minute). We would start our nightly news at eight o'clock sharp, *NDTV* time, the video would go into the hard drive and automatically regurgitate itself in ten minutes later at exactly eight o'clock, Indian Standard Time. So the Prime Minister's office could relax because, technically, we were not live but, in reality of course, nobody could preview or change anything while it was in the computer's hard disc for ten minutes (ibid:4)'. Describing the reticence surrounding live news in the early years of the broadcast media, Mrinal Pande remarks,

The threat of live television was felt in the higher echelons of power. The then Prime Minister Mr. P.V. Narsimha Rao had his own reservations against live television. He had the cunning politician's innate fear of anything in which he could be quoted against at a later date himself. So he was very apprehensive of live television and therefore live news. He didn't like being interviewed. Print media was fine for him because he knew that the Prime Ministers Office and Press Trust of India will scrutinize the script before it is approved for publication, but television was one of its kind.

There were apprehensions surrounding live television due to its spontaneity. Anything that was said went on air immediately. It did not allow any kind of government scrutiny or modification. The journey from no live news *then* to all news live *now* has indeed been transformational. The entry of private and independent media into the broadcast media landscape has been an important agent of this change.

II

Partnering with Satellite Television Asian Region (STAR) Network

NDTV's journey from a production house to an independent news channel was anchored in the entry of Rupert Murdoch's *Satellite Television Asian Region* (STAR) network into the Indian market. The entry of the media baron Rupert Murdoch, Chief Executive Office of News Corporation, whose pan-Asian network *STAR* has transformed television in India. Thussu (2007a) explains how Murdoch's extensive control of information software (content) and hardware (delivery systems) made him a popular player in all forms of media, ranging from print to electronic to digital. Murdoch invested heavily in the Asian media market with the launch of the English channels, namely, BBC World, Prime Sports, Channel V, from the STAR headquarters in Hong Kong in 1991. With the lifting of the restrictions on the airwaves in India, such programmes were readily available to the urban middle class here who eagerly lapped up to such never seen before content. Between the growing consumerism and cultural invasion argument, the Murdoch created entertainment-centric content gained foothold in the Indian market. He sensed the need to diversify into other forms of programming apart from entertainment and sports. He also envisioned an expansion of his media empire from only broadcasting to broadcasting and distribution. Murdoch eyed the television news arena as his next target. As the then existing Indian broadcasting regulations prohibits majority ownership of news channels by foreign companies, Murdoch scouted around for an Indian partner. Shivraj Parshad, former employee, *NDTV*, recounts how STAR network was exploring setting up a news hub out of India when it realized the potential of the unaddressed Indian broadcast news market. He says,

At that time the only two channels besides Doordarshan who were addressing the news viewers, primarily the English viewers, were BBC and CNN. STAR was eager to enter into this segment. Murdoch hired Ratikant Basu from Doordarshan to head this venture. Having a man on his side, who is used to the Indian bureaucratic labyrinths was Murdoch's way of doing business in India. Ratikant Basu in-turn reached out to Prannoy Roy, as Roy was considered the trendsetter in English news broadcasting.

Rupert Murdoch's success in the Indian broadcasting space was primarily due to his knack of establishing connections and networks within the power corridors of Delhi. He specifically hired people who had worked with the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* to take leverage of their experience and expertise. At that time, *NDTV* was also looking for partners to

expand its operations in television news media. Thus in 1996, Rupert Murdoch and Prannoy Roy worked on an agreement where initially *NDTV* would provide two bulletins- one at 7 o'clock in Hindi and the other at 9 o'clock in English to *STAR*'s entertainment channel *STAR Plus* and in return would get the *STAR* television platform to reach out to news audience in India and abroad. After a few years of the collaboration, *STAR* in partnership with *NDTV* launched a 24x7 news channel, *STAR News* on 18th February, 1998¹⁴⁰. Thus was born India's first bilingual news channel *STAR News*. This five year agreement hinged on the condition that *NDTV* would retain all editorial control in its news operation. *NDTV* was also a majority partner in the deal as the Indian regulations did not allow foreign companies to have majority stake in television news media. Dalal (2002) described the Roy's arrangement with *STAR* network as a 'sweetheart' deal in which *NDTV* was paid a whopping \$20 million a year and retain total control over editorial rights. *NDTV* used this money to buy better equipment and hire the best talent (discussed in detail in the next section). The *STAR-NDTV* partnership went on for five years till 2003, when both *NDTV* and *STAR News* parted ways over the issue of retaining editorial content and copyright over programming. Reflecting on the disagreement over the editorial rights, Prannoy Roy, remarks, 'as our five-year contract with Murdoch was coming to an end in 2003, James Murdoch came to see us to discuss an extension for another five years; but this time he said, quite understandably, 'let's make it a joint venture'. We agreed on one condition; editorial control must remain with *NDTV*. I still remember James Murdoch saying, 'Yes, of course. I want that too because if any politician complains, I can just say it's nothing to do with me, go talk to *NDTV*'. Three months later, James Murdoch asked me to meet him once more over lunch. He told me all financial and legal terms were agreed but he wanted one change. He must have editorial control. I asked him three times why he has changed his mind. He didn't answer. I still don't know why. So we parted in 2003, but as friends, and we still work together in some key areas (Roy, in Kagal 2016:11)'. *NDTV* ended its partnership with *STAR* and within a few months launched its own 24x7 English and Hindi news channels.

140 Krishn Kaushik writes that the channel was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral from his residence on 7 Race Course Road, New Delhi. For more, read <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/the-tempest-prannoy-radhika-roy-NDTV>, accessed 7 June, 2018.

III

The Launch of *NDTV 24x7* and *NDTV India*

The break with Murdoch transformed *NDTV* from being a production house into an independent broadcaster. Two news channels- *NDTV 24x7* in English and *NDTV India* in Hindi were launched in 2003 respectively. Smeeta Chakrabarti describes those years when efforts were put together for building the *NDTV* brand. *NDTV* had created a space for itself as being a pioneer in the news media. Its brand of journalism hinged on truth and credibility as was evident in its first tag line 'Experience. Truth First.' She further explains how the names of the two channels-*NDTV 24x7* and *NDTV India* were formalized. While the English channel targeted speed and transition of news and hence was named *NDTV 24x7*, the Hindi channel choose the idea of purity and hence was named *NDTV India* (Chakrabarti, in Kagal: 2016) The next vital step in the brand building exercise was the positioning of the channel. Sandeep Bhushan, former employee, *NDTV*, remarks,

NDTV wanted to position itself as a global network. Their benchmarks were BBC and CNN. They were tying up with various outsourcing outfits to learn how to generate world-class content. The grooming of the likes of Barkha Dutt, Rajdeep Sardesai, Arnab Goswami must be looked at in that context. Barkha Dutt was being groomed as somebody who would be a global star. *NDTV* was playing for high stakes.

This positioning was not only in terms of how and what kind of content was to be produced but also in terms of the designing, presentation and recruitment policy of the channel. International musicians like David Lowe and Los Angeles based Tag Creative Brand Solutions were hired to work on the look of the channel. As stated before, an important aspect of this brand building exercise was the recruitment of the right kind of people for the organization. There is an prevailing perception in the media industry that one gets a job in *NDTV* if one has the right connections. Shivraj Parshad narrates his personal experience of how he got a job at *NDTV*. He says,

Initially when *NDTV* started as a production house, the hiring took place on the basis of who knew who. The second consideration was to have connections, whether it was being a bureaucratic kid or people who had returned from abroad and had connections, a certain type or those who knew the Roy's. I fell into the latter category. I knew Prannoy's parents, growing up in Kolkata. So, I think they thought that working with young kids from familiar background, will help them in moulding them to their philosophy and way of working.

Adding to the *NDTV* recruitment policy, Sandeep Bhushan remarks,

The recruitment at *NDTV* was very personalized. The Roy's hired people who had worked (Indian Express and India Today) or studied (Doon School, Miranda House, Delhi School of Economics) with them. They hired people from the institutions they were associated. The great talent about Prannoy Roy was his ability to attract the best talent, talent that would have otherwise gone into academics or some multinational national corporation abroad. Prannoy could get such people to work with him. Hiring on the basis of personal connections was the mantra and it did not matter as long as they were a part of the privileged group of Prannoy's Boys. Very senior management people left their cushy government jobs to join *NDTV*. It was all possible due to Prannoy's networking and social connections. He had a way of getting people's faith in what he was doing. Another drawback of the organization was there was no compartmentalization of responsibilities, everything was organic. An anchor could also take editorial calls.

These statements point out to the pattern that formed the basis of the recruitment policy at *NDTV* network. The hiring was highly skewed towards recruiting people based on personal relations and networks who could be moulded easily into the *NDTV* model of journalism. The Roy's primarily banked on their social ties and networks to establish themselves in the media industry. This hiring policy was similar to Rupert Murdoch's style of operating. Kaushik (2015), talks about how the Roys did not have a human resource department and made all the hires themselves. He states, 'these early employees were collectively called the "Roys Boys"- even the women. Most belonged to families long familiar, if not enmeshed in, Delhi's circles of power'¹⁴¹ (Ibid: 2). Reacting to the skewed hiring policy of the channel, Sandeep Bhushan says,

It was a patently unequal system which is why a lot of us quit or were thrown out. We just couldn't adjust to a culture which was fundamentally so anti-democratic. It was perhaps an Indian way of running a news organization which was totally in contrast to say a BBC or a CNN that *NDTV* aspired to be.

In terms of editorial content *NDTV* modelled itself in the lines of the British broadcaster *BBC*. Their focus was on doing credible and hard hitting journalism rather than popular journalism of the other major player in the broadcast sector *Aaj Tak*. Commenting on the content

¹⁴¹ For instance, a few recruits, such as, Vikram Chandra was the son of Yogesh Chandra, a former director general of civil aviation, himself, the son-in-law of Govind Narain, a former home and defence secretary and governor of Karnataka. One of the *NDTV*'s top business heads, KVL Narayana Rao, was the son of KV Krishna Rao, a former army general who served as governor of Jammu and Kashmir and other states. Former employee, Rajdeep Sardesai, was the son of cricketer Dileep Sardesai, and the son-in-law of *Doordarshan*'s Bhaskar Ghose. Barkha Dutt's mother Prabha Dutt was a senior journalist. Another former employee, Arnab Goswami was the son of Manoranjan Goswami, an army officer and BJP member. Sreenivasan Jain was the son of economist Devaki Jain and L C Jain, a well known activist, who served as a member of the Planning Commission and as India's High Commissioner to

South Africa. Nidhi Razdan, was the daughter of M K Razdan, who has been editor-in-chief of the Press Trust of India. Vishnu Som, was the son of Himachal Som, a former senior diplomat'

policy of the channel, Shivraj Parshad, recalls discussions in the newsroom about the selection of news stories,

Aaj Tak had also launched by then. So there were two schools of thought on how should NDTV position itself- whether it should be spectacular like Aaj Tak or whether the focus should be on keeping to the core of verified news, replicating the BBC format. While the channel picked on the second option, a lot of strategizing went on in the newsroom for the switchover from a 30 minutes bulletin to a 24 hour news cycle. So software changed, infrastructure changed, training changed, personnel doubled and the newsroom became a huge professional newsroom. Input and output desks were set up. The international format of news-making started getting translated here¹⁴².

The launch years of the two *NDTV* news channels witnessed the stemming up of the competition in both the English and Hindi broadcast media. Within the Hindi segment, *NDTV India* was in competition with *Aaj Tak* and *Zee News*. Bhushan recalls his reporting days in Bhopal to explain the competition between *NDTV India* and *Aaj Tak* as it existed then. Bhushan says,

NDTV started as an English channel and in 2003 its Hindi channel started. At that time I was located in Bhopal, and there was a big song and dance about the fact that a big news channel was coming. Aaj Tak guys were masters at marketing and operations. They would always reach the location first and it gave them advantage over others. Aaj Tak was also much more professional.

Shivraj Parshad explains that the channel war in the Hindi sphere was essentially about who delivered the ‘masala’ (infotainment) news. He says.

Aaj Tak like us (NDTV India) began from the same level playing field. Zee News already had the advantage of being abroad and had a really huge network. So Zee News was actually one of the trend setters along with BiTV. And BiTV guys were way ahead of their time whereas Zee had entertainment as well. So that got them their revenue, news was something that was getting them out there. And their news was already going out to satellite networks abroad well before anyone else. So there was no competition. But Aaj Tak, was where the masala was, where the audiences went more than Zee News.

The foundational logic of Hindi television news genre was to provide infotainment model of news. Over the years, as the Hindi news channel wars peaked, the infotainment content underwent innovative changes. Channels came up with new genres of news programming to

¹⁴² Along with the up technological up-gradation of newsroom, the promoters of *NDTV* also spent money on their employees. Krishn Kaushik remarks that *NDTV* pampered its employees. He says that they were provided transport to and from office and fed well. The company offered health insurance and generous parental leave. They office had a crèche. The top employees were given a sedan and sent on foreign vacations. *NDTV* promoted its female employees who outperformed their male colleagues. For more read, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/the-tempest-prannoy-radhika-roy-NDTV>, accessed 7th June, 2018.

compete with each other (a detailed discussion follows in the next chapter). Besides content segmentation within news channels, specialized channels that targeted a specific constituency of viewership were also launched. For instance, in the *NDTV* network, while *NDTV* profit aimed for the business and economy segment, *NDTV Imagine*, *NDTV Lumiere* and *NDTV Good Times* catered to the entertainment segment. In the digital space, *NDTV Convergence* became a convergence point between the network's television, mobile and internet platform. The group also beamed live to foreign shores of United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, South Africa, Middle East, Australia, New Zealand and most of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries to reach the Indian Diaspora.

The next section 'Framing the Discourse: the *NDTV* approach', looks at how this brand of journalism functions. It describes the various processes, techniques and dynamics that are involved in the production of the various current affairs shows that showcase the *NDTV* brand of journalism.

IV

Framing the Discourse: The *NDTV* 24x7 Approach

This section maps the *NDTV* approach to producing current affairs shows. This is done by specifically looking into shows- *Left, Right and Centre*, *The Big Fight*, *Agenda*, *NDTV Dialogues*, *We The People*, *India Matters*, *Truth vs Hype*, *Reality Check* and *The Buck Stops Here* that are currently aired on the channel. It explains the various processes and techniques that are involved in executing the above mentioned shows. The interviews of the journalists who work on these shows have been used to map out the key aspects that go into producing a show. To begin with a short description of each of show is provided below.

4.1 The Shows on *NDTV 24x7*

NDTV Dialogues

NDTV Dialogues is a weekly one hour show that airs every Sunday at 9pm¹⁴³. Sonia Singh, Editorial Director, *NDTV 24x7* and Anchor, *NDTV Dialogues* describes the show as a conversation of ideas. She remarks,

NDTV Dialogues is about bringing back conversation to the centre stage rather than people shouting at each other. So we positioned *Dialogues* as something really about people having a dialogue over different ideas and the main focus is we try to bring people with different perspectives. There is no point in everyone agreeing around the table. So the focus is on getting different perspectives and we hope that the viewers managed to take back an opinion or gain greater knowledge of the issue at hand. I think we really looked at *NDTV Dialogues* as much more of an informative discussion than a talk show in that sense. As I said, talk sometimes can just go back and forth with no one any wiser at the end of it. We hope that in *Dialogues* we also illuminate a particular topic or issue.

Left, Right and Centre

Left, Right and Centre is a one hour debate show that airs from Monday to Thursday at 9pm. It has two segments where debate on two different topics or issues is conducted. Nidhi Razdan, Executive Editor, *NDTV 24x7* and Anchor, *Left, Right and Centre* describes the show as,

Basically a political debate show, a news program that happens every night Monday to Friday and the idea is to debate about politics. I believe that every story has three sides-left, right and centre. I am very interested in Indian politics, and I personally like to have at least one subject which is the big political story of the day. It doesn't always have to be like that but the whole idea is to take up issues that have made headlines on that day or maybe in the course of that week. And we debate on lot of things, from Presidential elections to the completion of three years of the Central government to air pollution to GDP numbers to administration of the BCCI (Board of Cricket Control in India), so we look at a whole wide range of subjects. We are basically dictated by the stories that are making headlines in the course of those days and week.

Agenda

Agenda is a half-an-hour audience based debate show that airs from Monday to Thursday at 7pm. Sunetra Choudhary, Political Editor, *NDTV 24x7* and Anchor, *Agenda* describes the show as,

¹⁴³Some of the shows and their timings have changed now. The names and timings of the shows mentioned here correspond to their broadcast timings, during the period of the field study.

A people based opinion or issue based show which affects large number of people. People's news consumption habits have changed. With the profusion of social media and digital new websites, people get their news at all hours. So in the evenings when they know their news, they just want to see informed opinion or they just want to hear whether their opinion have been vindicated or not. That is where a show like *Agenda* comes in.

We the People

We the People is a one hour audience based studio debate show which airs every Sunday at 8pm. The issues debated consist of a range of topics from health, gender, religion, culture, economy, politics, environment, to name a few. The focus is on opinion gathering of what people are doing, to give a sense of the diverse views prevalent. Along with audience, six to eight Panelists are also invited to participate in the debate. The panel usually consists of politicians, social activists, academicians, celebrities etc. The audience are also allowed to pose questions to the Panelists. Sometime a snap poll is also conducted amongst the audience to weigh in an argument.

India Matters

India Matters is a documentary show that airs every Thursday and Saturday at 10pm and 7.30 pm respectively. Radhika Bordia, Anchor, *India Matters* describes the show as,

A classical, in-depth look at an issue of the day. For example, the episode on '*Gorakhpur: The Peeth and the City*',¹⁴⁴ aired on 31st March, 2017, I had visited Gorakhpur when the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was returning to the city for the first time after being sworn-in as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. There is a lot of live television which is instant, but to really understand what that sense of the society is, what is happening, why is he popular in the place which has an abysmal development record? A longer format gives to the time to go and capture some of that.

Truth vs Hype

Truth vs Hype is an investigative show that airs every Saturday at 7pm. The anchor of the show Sreenivasan Jain describes the show as,

One that brings stories from the ground. From covering the aftermath of the revolution in Egypt to investigating the riots in Assam, from exposing the nexus between miners, real-estate players and politicians in Goa to a series on the coal scam, the show keeps its focus on hard news. From

¹⁴⁴ The episode is available at <https://www.NDTV.com/video/shows/india-matters/gorakhpur-the-peeth-and-the-city-453311>. It was aired on the show *India Matters* on NDTV 24x7, accessed on 31 May, 2017.

reporting from the grassroots, it evolved into an investigative show which had a combination of ground reports, investigation and political and socio-economic issues.¹⁴⁵

Reality Check

Reality Check is a 30 minutes debate show that airs Monday to Thursday at 8:30pm. The focus of the show is to do behind the scene research on issues that make headlines throughout the day. The guest invited for the debate consists of pro and anti voices on the issue being debated. Vikram Chandra and Sreenivasan Jain anchor the show alternately.

The Big Fight

The Big Fight is an audience based one hour interactive panel discussion which airs every Friday at 9pm. It consists of 30 to 40 audience and 3 to 5 Panelists. The topics debated are based on current affairs and issues of social relevance. It is anchored by Vikram Chandra.

The Buck Stops Here

The Buck Stops Here is a 30 minutes debate show which is broadcast every weekday at 10pm. It is anchored by Vishnu Som and Ankita Mukherjee respectively. It consists of two segments which debate two different topics.

¹⁴⁵ Refer to [//indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/ramnath-goenka-awards-the-storytellers/](http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/ramnath-goenka-awards-the-storytellers/), accessed on 31st May, 2017.

Figure 5: A Panel Discussion on *NDTV 24x7*



(Source: <https://www.NDTV.com/video/news/the-buck-stops-here/violence-at-iit-madras-is-beef-the-new-campus-flashpoint-458681>)

The current affairs programming of *NDTV 24x7* consists of different kinds of programs such as panel discussions, documentaries, investigative reports and audience shows. These shows focus on issues that have made headlines throughout that particular day or in the course of that week. The journalists feel that while internet and mobile technology provide viewers with news, debate and discussion based shows, that bring together diverse perspectives, help the viewers to build an opinion or gain knowledge on that piece of news. Further they say that some shows allow audience to participate by posing questions or airing views, thus providing a platform to the audiences and encouraging participatory conversations. In the next section, the focus is on how these programs are produced in the channel. Four specific aspects, namely, selection of topics, selection of guests, the kind of research involved and the challenges faced while producing such programs are probed into to understand the nuances of their production.

4.2 Selection of topics/issues/themes for the shows

Every night during prime time one witnesses a host of debate and discussion based shows across news channels. These shows engage with a diverse range of themes ranging from a host of

social, political, economic and cultural issues. Hence, in the current scenario, where the view/opinion has become the predominant format in news programming, it becomes pertinent to ask a simple question- how is a topic or issue selected for discussion and deliberation. Sonia Singh, remarks,

The topic for my show varies from 'Goods and Service Tax' (GST) to 'whether Secularism is still relevant' to 'Triple Talaq'. The theme varies depending on what we think are the key issues around us. I have done a lot of shows on poverty, malnutrition, education, health. So the issues that concern our nation, concern us. We try to stay away from politics because that is covered extensively. But I try to look at issues on which politics is done.

Adding to this, the member, Editorial and Research Team (*The Big Fight*), says,

It is generally the news of the week that sets the agenda for discussion in talk shows. Most of the debates focus on political, defence, foreign affairs, economic or domestic issues. If there is a complete lull on this front, then we focus on social issues. The various team that are involved in producing the show, come up with suggestions for the topic. But at the end of it, it is the editorial team that has a final say on the selection of topic.

Talking about how the process of selection of a theme or issue is a conscious effort to address a wide range of themes, Radhika Bordia, says,

I choose my topics in consultation with my colleagues who do *India Matters* part time. I think there is a very conscious effort made to reflect a diverse range of themes and issues that are all relevant but need a little more exploration. So let me identify some concrete points on how we pick up topics or at least how I pick topics. Caste absolutely is something that travelling across the country for 20 years, you see how caste manifests itself in everything, how a road will be build to how a mid-day meal will be consumed, to how a wedding will happen or not happen. It is our most defining reality and therefore understanding how caste works, understanding how development works, how sociology works, how pretty much everything works. So political reporting cannot be understood without caste. So caste is an area that I choose very actively because I think that without the understanding of caste, we will not be able to understand why things are the way they are? Gender is another commitment I feel that has issues because for the longest time, these were very invisible issues. Literally in my own career so far, I have seen how a story on reproductive health which would be completely dropped or buried is at least gaining some prominence. I am not claiming to have changed agendas in any way, but I am just saying that I can see that change and it makes me happy that a lot of this reporting is finally now getting much more main-stream visibility than it did even 20 years ago. I occasionally do some culture, because I think that is one of the most exciting aspects. Even when I do culture it is with the wider politics in it because India is a country where cultural identity politics defines everything. And it is both where our politics and richness lies and for an audio visual medium it is vibrant. So occasionally I do a project like 'Colours of India', where we do the story on colours in a very different way. Religion is again something part of our politics. And I think not understanding how much it is part of our politics, is why a lot of people are surprised where we are today. And look sometimes whatever it is, each reporter has certain personal issues that they immediately respond to. But overall, a lot of what we choose is also based on what is actually happening on the ground.

So because we are doing documentaries in a news organization, the constant referencing is back to the news of the day.

Bringing in the aspect of audience preference as being the key to a selection of a particular topic or theme, Sunetra Choudhary, remarks,

Since Agenda is an audience show, the selection of a topic for discussion is essentially about what is the issue that affects a lot of people. Then I also try and see can it be, suppose it doesn't have lot of people, but it is an issue about personal or individual rights and liberties, like the issue of transgender, then I will go among a group of transgender and try and make that relevant to everybody else. So it is an issue which concerns only a small group of people but then my whole thing is that is about personal liberty and so it is interesting to everybody else. So it could be an issue which affects lots of people or the affected party is very small but the ideas and values behind it, I think are kind of universal and so need to be highlighted. Sometimes it's just an interesting person to interview. So we sometimes just have like the junior Health Minister talking about surrogacy. So a young person like *Anupriya Patel* who is from *Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi*, how does she sit and defend the government not wanting single living in people to have a surrogate baby. So things like that really. So it could be an interview, it could be something which affects a lot of people, it could be something which is happening at a location around that time, and we do a special show also. So, all of this decides an issue.

Thus, it can be seen that different anchors have different takes on how they select a theme for discussion in their respective shows. While the weekday shows generally pick up the central news story of the day, the weekend shows focus on issues that have become the talking point of the week. There is a neat classification of events into categories such as politics, economy, foreign affairs, culture, entertainment, governance etc. Besides the primacy of the issues selected, journalists also rely on their own preference or style of working, on how they would like to frame such debates. While some frame their shows keeping in mind their *imagined* audience preference, others frame their shows that address the fault-lines in the society.

4.3 Selection of Experts/ Panelists/Guests

The next phase in producing such shows is the selection of guests/experts/Panelists for the discussion. This is a crucial aspect of a show where the primary focus is to showcase the diverse opinions on a particular issue, in one platform. As the team member of *The Big Fight*, remarked,

The main job of all debate shows is to get the opinion of the diverse stakeholders of an issue. For any issue, we try to get a pro-voice, an anti-voice and a neutral voice. This ensures that any issue is holistically debated. For example, if the Panama Papers issue is taken up for discussion this week, then we try to get a Pro-government (BJP) voice, an anti-government (Congress or other national party), a legal voice, a political journalist and an expert of finance and taxation. Similarly

for social issues like reservations, education, health we try to get sociologists, social activists who work on these issues. The channel has an editorial stance but it never tries to impose it on either its guests or the audience. Our aim is to get other viewpoints on board. Each panellist on the show gets a chance to put forth his or her views even if we consider them as wrong. The debates are controlled and the anchors ask direct, pithy questions without shouting others down. The attempt is to deliver an unbiased, informative show quoting credible facts and figures. Many times, it is easy to get a popular voice because maximum number of people think on those lines. The challenge then for us, is to get the other point of view which is at times daunting.

According to Sonia Singh,

The selection of guest is based on their background, their contribution to the issue at hand, their intellectual capacity perhaps to frame and idea to debate it. We usually do not get people who can argue any topic. We try to look for people who are experts on the subject at hand and have some domain knowledge on what they are talking about.

Adding to this line of thought, Sunetra Choudhry remarks,

I always look at people who would have had an interesting take in a wide variety of ways. Someone who would have written an editorial or a piece or a book on the issue at hand, sometimes when I read a book, I keep the author's name in mind thinking that when I do a discussion on this topic, I will call this person. I invite spokespersons from political parties as well. But, I generally look for people who bring in their field experience on to the discussion. They don't have to be proficient in English but speak the language of their experience.

For news channels, the primary aim of having debate shows is to bring in diverse opinions concerning an issue into one forum. These opinion makers are generally politicians, activists, academicians, government officials, celebrities, sportspersons and likewise, depending on the theme or issue under consideration. In case of political parties, official spokespersons are assigned the task of putting forth the party's point of view on the concerned issue to the media. Hence, news channels invite these spokespersons to get the point of view of their respective political party. In case of other guests mentioned above, domain knowledge becomes a criteria for selecting an expert. Such experts are expected to offer their views from their field of specializations and experience. While the anchors decide on the kind of guests they want for their shows, the actual task of getting these guests to participate in the show resides with the Guest coordination team. The team member of the Audience Research Cell at *NDTV*, speaks about the functioning of the Guest coordination cell in the channel. According to her,

The guest coordination team at *NDTV* is in-charge of arranging guests/experts for discussions. This selection is also done from the database where the experts are categorized on the basis of the issues in which they specialize like women's issues, education, health, foreign affairs, politics,

defence, industry, sports and so forth. This segregation is important as it gets convenient to get guests at short notice. Most of the guests on our shows are from Delhi. Since, we work with limited budget, we prefer local guests as we do not have to provide for their accommodation and travelling. We get out-station guests into studios only in rare cases. But if there is a strong requirement for an out-station guest, then we do a *simsat* (a pre-recorded interview) with them. Getting the desired guests at all times is difficult. There are times where we have last minute cancellations as the guests want to appear in other channels or their party does not give them the permission to speak on a particular issue. The decision to debate on issues is entirely the prerogative of the guests and we cannot force them. At times, when we do not get the top five guests, then we go to the next five guests and so on. The Guest coordination team also looks into the BARC viewership ratings of our shows.

Talking about how the debate shows are accused of showcasing only a few select speakers for every issue that is debated, Nidhi Razdan, explains challenge of getting credible guests for a show is a tedious job. She says,

My guests are invited on the basis of their take on a particular issue, either verbal or written. But often people do complain that they see the same faces on television and if you try to invite such people on to the show they don't agree. So I think it is really difficult for us also. There are some really good people in academics that one has tried to reach out to in the past many times, but they are reluctant to do television. I wish they would change their minds so that we could have a bigger pool of people to choose from.

Adding to the above sentiment, Sunetra Choudhary remarks,

Our focus is to get diverse voices on the show. You know that are some people who feel this and some who feel otherwise. So you try and get one person from each perspective which is very tough because sometimes you know people who are really intellectuals and you call them up and a lot of people say I don't do television or I don't want to come or I am busy. So then you have to tell them that if you don't come then we won't have anyone who says that point of view. But many times people don't care about that. So it is very tough convincing and that is where when people criticize television and say that oh you have the same people, that is also because of the fault of some people who are experts. I mean you can ask Tanika Sarkar but she will never come of television. And yet a lot of people will blame us saying that you never get the right people who are really the intellectuals. So a lot of people don't want to come on television. Ramchandra Guha will only come on television once in a month or once in two/three months. Like last year I got him on *NDTV* only once. So I am saying that you have to keep in mind that it is a lot of effort in putting a television show together. It is not like a newspaper story. So it takes a lot of time.

As stated earlier, the focus of panel discussions and studio debates is to bring out diverse voices on a particular issue to a common platform. A crucial point that needs to be discussed is how diverse are these voices? News channels are often criticized for being exclusionary. The Panelists/experts invited for debate shows belong to a cosy club of elitist and privileged opinion makers. This is amplified from the fact that news channels maintain database of experts from fields like defence, foreign affairs, economy, business, sports, culture, environment, rural affairs,

politics, gender etc. These experts are also ranked in terms of their domain knowledge, articulation, presentation on television, political affiliation, social networking, public visibility and so on¹⁴⁶. Such filters do narrow down the options of news channels to have the *preferred* guests/expert for a show. They end up having a small pool of experts to choose from. As a result one keeps coming across similar set of people who are hopping from one channel to another in the primetime slot. Further, the preference for news channels is always to get the top ranked experts. They feel that showcasing such guests on their platform adds to the credibility and popularity of the channel. These factors also determine the scale of payment of the guests. The ranking of the guests determines their scale of payment. While the preferred guests get the highest amount, the fill-in guests get the lowest amount. Thus, it can be seen that factors together determine the selection of experts for shows on news channels. The description of getting guests as a tedious job is best exemplified in an article titled ‘Guest Coordinators: Bouncers of the TV Industry’,¹⁴⁷ written by T.S.Sudhir (2017), Editor South India, *India Today*. Sudhir lucidly explains how the Guest Coordination team of news channels has become a new battleground in the competition for Television Ratings Points (TRP). The Guest Coordination team of a news channel is entrusted with the task of arranging guests/ speakers/ experts/ panellist for the different news shows in the channels. The team maintains a huge data bank of potential guests. The day begins with a conference call with all editorial heads where topics for the shows of the day are decided and then the countdown starts with the team contacting the required guests. He then explains how in this age when studio discussions have gained prominence over field reporting, the role of guest coordinators has assumed primacy. First, it is vital for the team to get more guests on a show to make the channel look more vibrant. Second, on the day of big breaking news, all guest coordinators are assigned with the task of getting the news maker of the day on their respective channel first. This often involves, assigning reporters to either the residence or the office of the newsmaker and wait endlessly for that one exclusive byte or set up an OB van or arrange for an interview on skype. The competition is so stiff that guest

¹⁴⁶ Citing the example of the present Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, Mehta (2008) argues that television played a key role in his political life. Jaitley was the perfect kind of television expert/guest who could give short, crisp, one-line, two-line answers, be courteous, be presentable and be articulate. His sense of television communication fitted well with the requirements of the 24x7 news industry.

¹⁴⁷ For more on this article read <https://www.newslandry.com/2017/09/14/guest-coordinators-republic-times-now>, accessed 4 November, 2017.

coordinators and junior reporters are instructed not to take a water or washroom break if another competitor is on the same location, lest they miss the sort after guest. The competition to get a guest does not exist only between channels but also in the same channel where the different anchors would want that preferred guest for their respective shows. Some tactics used by the anchors to undercut their competitors both within and across news networks is to linger the debate with the guest for more than the promised time so that the other channel does not get the same guest. They would also deliberately humiliate the guest, sometimes even asking them to leave the show. Although such gimmicks make an anchor look uncompromising and dynamic, it puts the guest coordination team in a tricky situation when they have to approach the same guest a few days later. At times there is also a display of negativity when the guests are convinced by saying that why should they go to a number 5 channel instead of a number 1 channel. Such instances showcase how cut throat the competition is among the various news networks. While the anchors decide on the kind of guests they want for their shows, it is the guest coordination team that acts as their foot soldier in meeting their requirements. This practice is not only limited to the national news channels but is also prevalent across regional news networks as well.

The rise of debates and discussions based shows has given rise to the spokesperson culture. A spokesperson is a person who is entrusted with the job of putting forward a political party's stand on an issue being debated on the television. I ask whether the rise of opinion based media has led to the evolution of the spokespersons culture. Sunetra Choudhary responds by stating:

Not all political parties have spokespersons. BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) doesn't have one. So it was very tough. But we wanted to find someone from BSP. Sudhindra Bhadauria appointed himself as the spokesperson. But Behenji doesn't object and he calls himself a BSP supporter. So people call him. Vivek Kumar from Jawaharlal Nehru University also has done his research and he is good. But he does not say he is BSP. He says he believes in the ideology and that he is a Dalit Scholar whereas Bhadauria claims to be part of the BSP. Similarly, Devashish Jararia is someone whom we found and he is called by other channels as well. So Devashish is a volunteer. So it is interesting. I know people say that Sambit Patra is a media creation but why is he a media creation when he is the National Spokesperson of BJP. That he gets briefed by Amit Shah, how is he a media creation? There was a whole conclave they had of spokespersons. If Shah is the head of the National Executive and if he has conferred Patra as spokesperson and if BJP under its mast head is sending out mails saying Patra is our top spokesperson then who are we to say that he is not right and scoff at him. So I don't think it is right to say that these people are media creations. GVL Narsimha Rao, Nalin Kohli are people who have been sanctioned by the party. Yes, Sanjay Jha that way was someone who was just a Congress supporter. He used to run a website for the

Congress. So he happened through the media. But again you must see that he got sanction from the Congress party and made him an official spokesperson.

The primacy of studio driven content has given rise to new forms of news making. A significant contribution of discussion based shows is the rise of the spokesperson culture. While the spokesperson culture can be attributed to political parties, seeking commentators or experts to give opinions on the social, cultural, economic, diplomatic, national security, regional, issues seems to be the emerging feature of operations across media networks in the country. The rise of the spokesperson culture also has its share of concern. First, is the emergence of the guest coordination desk as crucial department across news networks. These teams across news channels jostle with each other to get their preferred guests. Second, the experts are drawn from a small pool of people who meet the requirements of the channels. This makes the exercise exclusionary as only certain preferred experts/guests are invited to the shows. This makes the claims of news channels as providing diverse voices questionable.

4.4 The Research Team

A debate show involves posing questions and counter questions to the Panelists. Similarly a documentary involves unravelling the hidden or little known facets of an issue or theme or an incident. Hence, it becomes pertinent to know as to how anchors and editors prepare for their shows. What kind of research or investigation is involved in producing a discussion or a documentary based show? Radhika Bordia replies that the kind of research involved in producing documentaries is different from that for a studio based discussion. Many times the studio based shows have the luxury of banking on a selected set of guests who are already there in the Guest coordination team data bank. On the other hand, the documentary team has to look out for its experts or respondents by going directly to the field. On being asked as to how she identifies whom to interview in the field, Bordia cites the example of her episode ‘Gorakhpur: The Peeth and the City’ and says,

One of the things that happen when you do something for a long time is you get an understanding of places. I do travel back to Uttar Pradesh a lot, and I have been continuously travelling to UP now literally for 15 years now and I am aware of what some of the elements of society in Gorakhpur are. The Marwaris of Gorakhpur are a very prominent and important part of that city. They are both economically and politically very important. They are a support base for Adityanath to capture. This is also the heart of the *Gita Press*, and the *Gita Press* is a Marwari run institution. So to understand anything about the ethos, why is cow slaughter, why is

vegetarianism, why is Adityanath popular with the Marwaris, I realized that I would need to get a lot of the *Vyapar Mandals* together. I was very lucky because Adityanath was coming back for the first time and everyone was very keen to show their support. So a lot of the heads of the different *Vyapar Mandals*, came together to be interviewed so that they all could get a chance to say how much they loved Adityanath. That gave me a chance to get some of the most important members there.....We don't have documenting eye to do research in our organization. Some of it is a constant process of reading and learning that you do as an individual that gives you that intellectual quotient to know that look Gorakhpur is also the place where Firaq Gorakhpuri the poet was, you know demographically the Muslim community is numbered. So some amount of knowledge you always carry as a journalist. Some of it is on the field, some of it you arrive there and have conversation with one person and they tell you something else..... so it is a combination of one whatever research you can do before you get to a place, sometimes it means literally cramming on your way to the airport or in the flight reading or downloading whatever is easily accessible and related to the subject. Then some of it your own knowledge and how alert you are to making connections and sometimes it is what leads you from the one to the other on the field. So it is a combination of things. Ideally I feel that for half hours like India Matters, it would be lovely if we had a stronger research team, we don't really have a research team.

Stressing on how much of the research or reading up for the shows is done by the anchors themselves, Sunetra Choudhry remarks,

A lot of my research I do myself. But we have a small research team at *NDTV* who if we ask for send me the required research. Suppose the issue is *Triple Talaq* then I would read the affidavit. So I would try and read the primary source material. So yesterday I did the whole thing about the Supreme Court judgement. So I read the judgement which sometimes can be very long and take all day or whatever. I read the judgement and I would read the original petition, and of course a brief look at what reactions people are giving, read news reports.

Adding to this, Sonia Singh says,

Being in the news business is instant research because now over 20 years we do have some kind of perspective on how certain things have changed or evolved over the years, like the question of secularism, how politics is done around secularism, what is the new mantra of nationalism, has nationalism replaced secularism. So a lot of it is also actually based on what we do 24x7, which is maybe more than daily news, also of course reading, I mean nothing can replace reading and research and it is not just what research papers are being given to you but reading all the time whether current affairs newspapers or editorials or book. So, I think reading is essential.

Anchors do research by reading up literature, documents, official reports, online articles, newspapers, concerning the issue which they intend to debate. Such kind of self preparation helps in getting familiar with the larger debates surrounding the issue at hand. This facilitates them to frame questions and counter questions. Hence, research based on self preparation is one part of the story. Another significant aspect of research, as described by one of the anchors is the personal networks and connections of the reporters on the ground. Every journalist through years

of reporting in his/her beat cultivates sources in the field who facilitate accessing information, setting up interviews, providing leads and so on. Rao (2010) in her ethnographic study of press in Lucknow, describes how reporters, especially political reporters establish and nurture social relations with politicians, influential leaders, government officials to get access to information, privileges and other benefits. She argues that news-making is not only a process of selecting the most important and relevant information, but is also an enterprise in establishing, nurturing, strengthening and repairing relations. Reporters engagement with the political leaders and elites is driven by the desire to gain admission to the inner circles of political power and turn social closeness into a career advantage. They are singled out for special treatment by the political class¹⁴⁸ (ibid: 91).

Getting information from sources, accessing facts and figures is one part of the research that is put into these shows. The second aspect is verifying the authenticity of such information. Explaining how information accessed from these sources is subjected to cross check by the channel, Nidhi Razdan remarks,

It is generally not very difficult to pull up research on any topic or theme because of the access to the internet. But we are also very cautious regarding the source of the information. If the source is from a website which we have never heard of then we are not going to touch it. But if it is a credible piece by somebody who is credible enough then we can quote that person. Also if we find statistics in a newspaper we don't only take those statistics but we also try to find for ourselves. For instance, infiltration figures in Jammu & Kashmir. Let's say Indian Express gives some figures that these many terrorists infiltrated from Pakistan, we will not take that at face value. We will take those figures and ask our reporter to cross check it with Ministry of Home Affairs and verify it. So we have to do that ground work as well.

Stressing on the need to cross check facts and figures that go into the making of a show, a Member, Editorial and Research Team, *The Big Fight*, says,

After the selection of topic, my job starts. I start looking for the existing research on the topic. The research includes scanning newspapers, articles, reports, books, social media and google search for collection of facts and figures. All the facts are cross checked before they go on air. It is a very stringent process and this exercise gives credibility to the show. We also call up the

¹⁴⁸ Within the Indian context, one comes across several instances where senior journalists on account of their favorable reporting have been felicitated and granted important position either in the government or institutions or advisory committees by political parties. For instance, Chandan Mitra, Editor-in-chief, *The Pioneer*, was a two time Rajya Sabha MP; Kumar Ketkar, senior journalist was nominated to the Rajya Sabha on a Congress ticket; M.J. Akbar, a former journalist, was the Minister of State for External Affairs (2016-18); Rajiv Shukla was nominated to the Rajya Sabha on a Congress ticket; Arun Shourie, Former Editor, *Indian Express* and *The Times of India*, was a two term Rajya Sabha MP from BJP.

experts who work on those issues and take their suggestions. Then a brainstorming session is conducted with the anchor, where all the relevant facts and figures required for the debate are collated. This helps in streamlining the various points of debates that are taken up during the course of the discussion. There is a constant effort to have debates on wide range of topics that have a pan-Indian appeal.

Shivraj Parshad, describes the setting up of the research desk at *NDTV*. He recalls how in the initial years of the operation of the channel, the functioning of the research desk was ad-hoc. He remarks,

In the initial years, when the management could not decide where to slot the new recruiters or when wanted to retain the old hands, they set up a research desk. I don't know who that research desk catered too because we reporters were required to do everything ourselves. In a lot of instances, even anchors did the same. But after a point when the operations of the research desk were formalized, it became useful. The desk was assigned to put together a lot of trivia in terms of graphics and backend information. So every time there was a bulletin there would be someone who would add information so that people on the desk would start padding up the news a little bit more. Over a course of time, the research desk transitioned into copy desk (check transcripts). A lot of research that actually began was on the audience based shows where there was a completely different team that did audience research, outreach, inviting audiences etc.

Research for shows involves preparing oneself to ask questions, cross checking facts, moderating debates. However, in the absence of a full time research desk, much of the work rest on the shoulders of the journalists who work on such shows. In the course of the fieldwork, it was discovered that *NDTV* is the only news organization that has an Audience Research Cell. The cell was set up in 1997. It comprises of 10 to 12 people who are divided into teams. These teams simultaneously work on eight to ten shows per week. This cell works for both for the English channel *NDTV 24x7* and the Hindi channel *NDTV India*.

Sonia Singh, describes the working of the Audience Research cell as,

It is for the audiences who come to our shows, the cell brings in those audiences, they coordinate those audiences. So if we have a show with the head of the NITI Aayog, then they would look for business students, if there is a show on Marital Rape in *The Big Fight* then they would look for case studies who have gone through that ordeal, people relevant to the show. So that is the audience research cell.

The team member of the Audience Research Cell elucidates the functions of the cell as follows.

- Selection of audience-** The ARC works closely with the Editorial team for selection of audience. The basic aim is to provide for audience for talk shows both in terms of quantity and quality. For example, shows like *We the People* can seat about 80-100 audience and *The Big Fight* can seat around 50-60 audience. Therefore, for selecting 80-100 audience we initially talk to 350 odd people, out of which the required numbers show up. In terms of quality, the emphasis is to get an interactive and opinionated audience, who participate by posing questions to the debate. The selection of audience also depends on the topic of the debate. Many times, the Research team specifies the requirements of the type of audience needed for the show. For example, if there is an economy related debate, we try to get Economics students from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University or some management school. Similarly, if the topic is related to cricket, we get audience from sports academies, Fan club of cricketers and so on. At times, we also shoot in other cities, for example, one episode of *We The People* was shot against the backdrop of the Taj Hotel in Mumbai on the day after *Yakub Memon*¹⁴⁹ execution. Similarly, another episode was shot in *Amar Mahal* Museum¹⁵⁰ in *Jammu* on the day of the Government swearing-in in Kashmir last year. In such cases, two members of the ARC travel ahead of the shoot to arrange audience in coordination with the local bureau.
- Creating case studies** - Case studies refer to selecting individuals who are closely associated with the topic of the debate. For example- if the topic under discussion is about gay rights, they we try to select people who identify themselves as gay and want to speak about their identity on air. Similarly, when the topic is related to sexual violence we try to select rape survivors who are willing to share their experience of violence. It is very difficult to generate such case studies. But our Researchers generally approach such cases through NGOs, social activists, journalists, who work with such people.
- Creating database for future audience participation-** Once the audience confirms his/her participation, their data i.e name, phone number, email contact details residence address are punched onto an excel sheet and is kept ready for referral all the time. This

¹⁴⁹ The episode titled ‘Yakub Menon Hanging: Strong State or Incomplete Justice?’, aired on the show *We the People* on NDTV 24x7 on 2nd August, 2015. It is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4G6Ufk_Olc4 accessed on 31 March, 2017.

¹⁵⁰ The episode titled ‘Hyper-nationalism Weds Soft Separatism: Watershed Day in Jammu and Kashmir’, aired on the *We the People* on NDTV 24x7 on 1 March, 2015. It is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHRXJkE7CE8>, accessed on 2 April, 2017.

also helps collate data and build a data base. Then, a personal invite is sent to the confirmed audience and then a re-confirmation call is done a day or two before the actual recording of the show. Arrangements are also done to pick up and get the audience to the studio and then drop them off after the show.

- **Audience Briefing-** Prior to the show, audience briefing is undertaken by the ARC. The audience briefing starts from the first contact call itself. Earlier, we used to create excel sheets with audience name, which were compiled from MTNL phone directories. Now over the years, we have created a database and we select audience from that database. In the first call, we brief the audience about the topic of the week and ask them to prepare few questions and mail it across to us. These questions are then sent to the Anchors to get an idea of the questions that the audience want to pose. Next, we arrange logistics for our studio audience. Once they go through the entire security process, we take them to the studio and then brief them about the topic once more. It has been generally observed that a person might be quite vocal off camera but the moment they are on camera they freeze. To avoid such incidents, we brief the audience on how and when to ask a question. We practice with them for a while before a shoot starts. They are instructed not to speak out of turn and to wait for the anchor to come to them. They are asked to raise hands if they want to ask a question. They are also instructed to follow the debate and stick to questions that are suitable to a particular segment. As there are many segments within a show, the effort is to streamline the questions in accordance with the segment under discussion. For example, questions related to the first segment cannot be raised in the third segment as it disrupts the flow of the debate. So we try to tell the audience to stick to the angle under discussion and raise questions relevant to that angle. At times we conduct live polls during the debate and we ask the audience to raise their hands to vote in favour or against the issue. Celebrities are also invited to our talk shows. In such cases, we call in the administration department to help us. Interaction with celebrities prior to the show is discouraged. It happens only during the show. Post show, if a celebrity is interested to interact with the audience, we allow them.
- **Audience Feedback-** Audience feedback is collected through an audience form. There are two purposes of the form, one is feedback and second is to get references of people who would want to attend future shows. We take feedback on issues like topics for

future shows, guests, audience, type of debates etc. Audience feedback is very important not only in terms of the show but also what the studio audience wants us to discuss. Many times, some audience who would want to speak during the debate cannot do so. They think that coming to the studio was a waste of time. But for us, each audience is important and we ensure that people who want to speak, if they can't in the first chance then we again invite them for second, third time and give them a chance to speak. We don't want the audience to get a feeling that we are just getting them in to fill benches. We do not do that. We do not sit and read all the forms but then since we are doing these things day in and day out we can formulate a pattern of who speaks well and we mark them out for the future shows. Many people will not put their displeasure on paper but would come to us and tell us why did we call them and did not give a chance to speak. Then we try to pacify saying that we have restricted time and that we will make sure in future they get a chance. A show generally lasts for an hour and only 10-12 people are speaking. At times we have live polls, where audience is asked to raise hands for a poll, those kinds of audience is also important as everyone will not speak or will not get a chance to speak. We have to ensure that the audience feel they are an integral aspect of our shows. So we spend time with every individual, explaining the topic to them, getting their view points, because for us each one of them is important. Besides, participation issues we also face problems of last minute cancellations by audiences or show cancellations on account of bad weather or festivities etc. Occasionally, the feedback data is also sent to the anchors.

Thus, it can be said that the ARC as a conduit between the show producers and the audience. Along with arranging and organizing guests and studio audience, it also plays a key role in generating research data for the shows. With the preponderance of opinion shows on news channels across languages, teams like ARC and guest coordination in other channels have become an indispensable part of media networks.

4.5 The Production Team

The production team is responsible for the smooth execution of the show. It has to coordinate with the other teams like editorial for editing the show, audience research cell for audience,

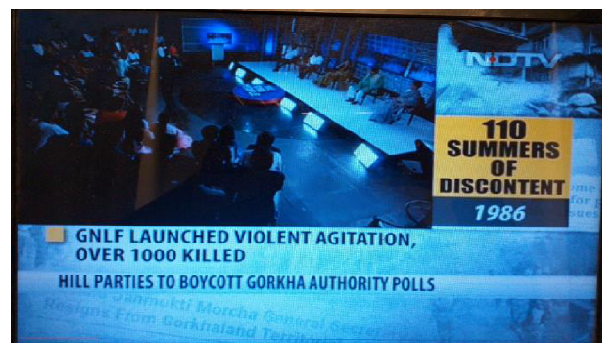
graphics for making tickers¹⁵¹ and slugs¹⁵², guest coordination for fixing guests, Production Control Room (PCR) for show recording, logistics for arranging logistics for crew and guests for outdoor shoots etc. to streamline all inputs. Any content that goes on air is approved by the production team in consultation with the anchor. A show is generally recorded for an hour after which it is packaged for 45 minutes air time. Due to the fast paced nature of breaking news, a show has to be completely shot on the allotted time so that the preparations for the next shot start. In short, the main aim of the production team to bind together the fine line of content with presentation so that the essence of the show remains.

The following figure shows the slugs used in the show '*We The People*'.

¹⁵¹ News in brief at the bottom of the television screen.

¹⁵² Slugs are brief story explainers.

Figure 6: Slugs used in the show *We The People* on NDTV24x7



(Source: <https://www.NDTV.com/video/news/we-the-people/we-the-people-gorkhaland-pipe-dream-or-can-it-be-a-reality-461172>)

This segment has dealt with giving a ringside view of how current affairs shows are conceptualized, produced and executed in *NDTV 24x7*. It should be kept in mind that the above described processes and techniques are directly under the control of the team that designs and executes such shows. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, certain external factors like social media are being seen as an important component of framing of the news discourse. The next segment looks into the role of social media in influencing, impacting and directing the discourse in the shows of *NDTV*.

V

Influence of Social Media

In recent times, social media is being conceived as a platform that increasingly influences the nature of discourse on social, political, economic and cultural issues existing in society. The new modes of inter personal communication through twitter, facebook, instagram, whatsapp are now an inextricable part of everyday life. Within the media sector, engagement with social media is proving to be a means, to make sense, of what matters to consumers of news. For instance, almost all newspaper and television journalists, and other media professionals have social media accounts. This makes it imperative to examine the relationship between traditional media and social media in general, and in my study, the relationship between the news organization *NDTV* and social media in particular.

Stating how social media is now framing the public opinion, Sunetra Choudhary remarks,

What frames a lot of public opinion now is social media and not television. Television was ten years ago and now its social media.

On the issue of social media and its influence on *NDTV*, Sandeep Bhushan says,

NDTV also caters to this strategy but they did still keep a little bit of reporting content, the channel has always been more balanced, now also as I speak, although I have been a huge critic of the Roys, it is still the best. I have written this piece in the Caravan magazine that Sonia Singh, the head honcho of *NDTV*, she tracks social media, she gives out stories.

Commenting on how social media has influenced the news making at *NDTV*, Sonia Singh remarks,

Well I think it has made us much more faster and alert. Earlier the only deadline was our own. Earlier newspapers had to beat television deadline and now television has to beat internet deadline. It has made us more faster, more energy, some ways it has changed the way we write or talk. But I think the mediums are essentially different, so I think some of our debate shows will really not have much attraction online, especially because they prefer shorter aspects. So I think, the mediums are very different and the content or news at the core of it is the same. How it is presented is still different.

Adding to this, Nidhi Razdan says,

I think social media is influencing content to an extent because channels and not necessarily us do pick up on a twitter trend and want to make either that the story, like the Sonu Nigam controversy that happened few days ago is a case in point. It actually became a news story because it became such a big thing on social media. Having said that, news organizations do have to take a call on where to draw the line because there are a lot of things that trend on twitter which are frankly, either defamatory or they are just wrong. There is no fact checking and so on. So therefore, it is very important for news organizations to know how to draw that line.

As previously discussed, social media has made a huge impact on traditional media. Apart from becoming a new source for breaking news, social media is also responsible for the spread of fake news and misinformation. Explaining how social media is setting the news agenda across news platforms, Sunetra Choudhary says,

I don't think social media is just influencing news content but is influencing policy makers a lot. That's how it affects the news agenda. Social media getting abusive is something that I don't care about. Journalists have never been popular under any government. So I don't understand why we are taking it so personally. I mean there is mute and block filter so that is not a problem as long as someone is not physically intimidated you in real life.

The media agenda setting thesis by McCombs and Shaw (1972) states that type of media coverage of political and social issues exerts a strong influence on the relative importance the public at large attaches to those issues. While McComb and Shaw spoke in an era much before advent of social media, their theorization stills hold ground in the contemporary time. Looking specifically at the case of *NDTV*, it can be said that the social media does provide the cues for stories that become the headline of the hour. But the channel is also restrained in its dependence on social media. Not every story trending on social media goes on air. The channel does ensure that stories are rigorously checked and verified before they go on air.

VI

Ownership and Editorial Policy

The ownership of a news organization plays a key role in framing its editorial position. With the ever increasing take-over of Indian media by corporate houses, this aspect does necessitate an enquiry¹⁵³. Batabyal (2012) explains how the various corporate divisions of news organizations like sales, marketing and human resources work in tandem with the editorial team of news channels to create news content. The constant pressure to generate news that sells for raking revenue and garnering ratings often comes at the cost of overriding editorial independence. In fact direct editorial inputs are now increasingly a part of corporate responsibility. Under such circumstances it becomes pertinent to look at how the issue of ownership and editorial control is addressed by *NDTV*. A *Newslaundry* (2014) article describes the ownership pattern of major media networks like *HT Media*, *NDTV*, *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *Jagran Group*, *Sun Group*, *Bennett and Coleman Limited* and so on. The ownership pattern of *NDTV* is as follows- Prannoy Roy- 15.94%, Radhika Roy-16.32%, Radhika Roy Prannoy Roy Holdings Pvt. Ltd (RRPR)- 29.18%, Abhey Oswal- 14.17%, Jupiter Capital- 2.43% and employees and individual investors -21.96%. This shows that the Roys are the majority stakeholders in the company¹⁵⁴. Throughout the history of the network, the Roys have always controlled the editorial content policy of the channel. Recalling how the *NDTV-STAR* alliance broke down primarily on the editorial control issue, Shivraj Parshad says,

I know that the talks with STAR broke down on basis of editorial control and I remember the discussion being that Rupert and James Murdoch wanted editorial control because they somehow wanted the DTH equipment to come into India and wanted to influence customs being a news channel. And I thought that was a bit fictitious because let's face it, *NDTV* is as culpable as anyone else in influencing content and direction on stories. Every news channel has its bias. *Aaj Tak* had its bias with Prabhu Chawla, *NDTV* has its bias with the Gandhi family and the Left. So the influence is very clear.

¹⁵³ To get a glimpse of the ownership pattern of the major media houses in India, refer to https://www.newslaundry.com/2014/02/05/who-owns-your-media-4?ref=art_sidebar_banner, accessed 7 September, 17.

¹⁵⁴ A recent SEBI order raises questions over the ownership rights of the channel. The order accuses the Roys of indulging in financial irregularities and of withholding information about the shareholding pattern of *NDTV*. For more on this, read <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/media/350-crore-rupee-mystery-open-offer-NDTV-vcpl-sebi>, accessed 30 June, 2018.

Reiterating the above position, Sandeep Bhushan says,

The bias is completely self-evident. But it essentially reinforces status quo. That is you don't attack the government of the day. That is the fundamental issue. Even in the 10 years that I worked in NDTV, it was totally pro-Congress. There is absolutely no doubt about it. And it was never told to us that we have it. Television is a very physical job and if you do a story and it doesn't get carried or gets relegated to some non prime time slot you feel bad and that would happen if you did a very anti-congress story, anti-Sonia Gandhi and anti-Rahul Gandhi story was unthinkable. There was no way you could do it. Those things only changed after Arvind Kejriwal. In this government also, nobody attacks the triumvirate of Narendra Modi, Amit Shah and Arun Jaitley. What happened at that time is happening now.

While the former employees openly talk about the channel's bias, the current employees are cautious in their approach to the issue. When asked on how the ownership of *NDTV* impacts its editorial position, Sonia Singh replies,

Well our owners are our editors. Prannoy Roy and Radhika Roy are editorial people as well. Although I am the editorial director of the channel, they have their inputs as well. So the influence is not in terms of coercion, but very much their journalistic vision which is part of the channel's DNA as well.

The channel's journalistic DNA is explained by Radhika Bordia as,

As far as the channel goes there is no editorial position that the channel has ever dictated. I mean there would be obviously clear things that your work has to be balanced, if you are taking a strong allegation against someone, you have to do due process, you have to diligently check what the allegation is, you have to get the other side, you have to get government bytes, and in that sense I think NDTV does emphasize. They are more conservative in terms of how they run news even as a channel. We will not give you the first pictures necessarily, if they have not been verified. Sometimes that can slow you down and sometimes you can look like you are a slow channel, sometimes it just protects you from just putting out rubbish.

Talking about how the journalists in the channel are given a free hand editorially, Nidhi Razdan remarks,

In our case, I have never come across a situation where we are told to play something more or play something down, no matter what social media would like you to believe about *NDTV*. So we have been pretty much given a free hand editorially on issues.

However, a few journalists also confounded that at the end of the day, journalists are also human beings who have their own ways of judging and interpreting a story. Many a times, framing of a news story is shaped by personal beliefs than by the editorial policy of the channel. As Radhika Bordia remarked,

Obviously given that it is often said and universally accepted that your personality and personal preferences end up reflecting themselves in different ways. When that happens it happens involuntarily. I am not looking to forward my point of view across. Do I have a very strong view that women should not be dying of a child birth, I do. So there are issues where it is quite apparent where the reporter's view or attitude they take and the ground reality will be evident. But do I as a journalist go out in the field saying that these are my views and now let me tell you, no, because then you will be a bad journalist. I think that politics done on caste, religion is awful. But if I am a journalist and I go into the field saying I am not therefore going to look at how caste and religion is being used, then that is pointless. I cannot invisiblize caste and religion. As a journalist it is incumbent on me to look at how caste and religion is being used. But will some of my views and my personality end up reflecting it probably will. I don't think anyone of us has complete control over that.

In case of *NDTV*, its owners are its editors. Both Prannoy Roy and Radhika Roy have been journalists. The influence of their journalistic sensibilities is amply visible in the editorial positioning of the channel. *NDTV* has always projected itself as a credible news organization which places primacy on getting the right news and not necessarily the first news.

VII

NDTV 24x7 and the Government

NDTV has always been perceived as a supposedly anti-BJP news channel. During the course of the interviews, some of the journalists associated with the channel also spoke about the kind of challenges that they face both at an organizational level as well at a personal level due to this perception. In the next section, I try to map out some of the issues that confront the professionals working in the channel.

The relationship between the *NDTV* network and the *Bharatiya Janta Party* (BJP) led central government has always been turbulent. *NDTV* is seen as a espousing a left liberal ideological stance in its programming. This editorial positioning is critical of the BJP led government at the centre. Prannoy Roy recalls this tumultuous relation by citing two instances- the Agra Summit in 2001 and the Gujarat riots in 2002 that occurred in the early years of the channel's launch. Roy says '*NDTV* was held responsible for the failure of the Agra Summit in 2001 due to the telecast of the editor's meeting with President Musharraf. We began receiving threats that we were about to lose our licence. As a first step, the government cut off all our cables and video feeds from parliament. At times like this the only thing to do is lie low and wait for the storm to pass. Which it eventually did and six months later our lines to parliament were

restored. A few months later in 2002, when the Gujarat riots and the mindless killing of Muslims took place, *NDTV* reporters were uncompromising and hard-hitting. I recall getting a phone call from a very senior minister in the PM's office to say, 'You know I am your friend and I always support you against many of my colleagues who want to shut *NDTV* down...but if you carry on reporting like this from Gujarat I will not be able to prevent them from shutting you down. So please tell all your reporters and anchors to cool down, or else....' Of course we did no such thing. No message went out to anyone and the reporters continued exactly as they were doing. A few hours later I got a call from the same minister, who said, 'Prannoy, I just wanted to thank you for sending a message to your team. Things are much better now!' I didn't say a word (Roy, Kagal 2016: 10 and 11)'.

The tumultuous relation continues till today. Many a times, the BJP media spokespersons who appear on panel discussions on the channel accuse the channel of running an agenda against the government. Recounting an incident that happened during a discussion on the cattle trade ban debate show *Left, Right and Center* on 1st June, 2017¹⁵⁵, a heated exchange of words took place between the Anchor Nidhi Razdan and the BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra, where Mr.Patra accused the anchor and the channel on live television of running an agenda against the government. This incident was followed by a boycott of the channel by the party in subsequent weeks. This was followed by another incident a few days later where an Income Tax raid was conducted in the residence of the channel owner Prannoy and Radhika Roy. This was seen as a deliberate attempt to silence the channel for its critical stance against the government. It led to a huge outcry for protecting and upholding media rights and freedom of speech. A protest led by the channel owners and supported by journalists across news organizations was organized at the Press Club of India, New Delhi¹⁵⁶. When asked about what kind the relationship exists between the channel and the government, Nidhi Razdan remarks,

Personally, I would like to dispel that we are a channel that is anti-government. We are actually just doing our job and not concerned about which government is in and it is some kind of lie that has been propagated that somehow *NDTV* in particular against this government. It is not. But

¹⁵⁵ The show available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/left-right-centre/meghalaya-bjp-leader-quits-will-beef-politics-hurt-party-politically-458869>, aired on 1st June, 2017 on the show *Left, Right and Centre* on *NDTV 24x7*, accessed on 1 November, 2017.

¹⁵⁶ The episode is available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/news/press-club-of-india-meets-on-raids-on-ndtv-459667>, accessed on 5 November, 2017.

look at the way the media in the USA (United States of America) takes on Donald Trump. I mean the media is not meant to be a PR (Public Relations) machine of the government. It is meant to ask difficult questions. You know we are not jingoistic, that does not mean we are any less nationalist. So we are not going to resort to jingoism and we will just do our job and ask questions. Putting labels like that on us is completely unfair. I would also say that any mature democracy, you can see that the ruling parties no matter what differences they may have with the media, they do have a relationship with media as well and they do understand by and large what the role of media is meant to be.

Dispelling the notion that *NDTV* is always critical of the government, Sunetra Choudhary says,

We are not always critical of government. Well, I always point it out to the supporters that some of my biggest guests have been people from the government. So I always counter that. The labelling of being an anti-national channel just came out because *NDTV* India was facing the prospect of a one day ban. But I think for us reporters, it doesn't matter. People will find their excuses to not talk to you. If someone really wants to talk to you, they will talk to you. So we don't take it personally. We just tell them it is not true, we talk it out, and if they don't want to give it then they don't. It's fine.

It is quite pertinent to point out the fact that this perception battle plays out differently in studio debates and on ground reporting. While studio is a controlled environment, on ground reporting throws its own kind of challenges. Radhika Bordia, who works primarily on documentaries and thus travels across the country, recounts her experience of being an *NDTV* journalist and reporting from the field in the prevailing scenario. I ask her about the challenges she faces while reporting from the field. She remarks,

I will tell you that since I am not one of the faces of *NDTV*, because I am not an Anchor that you see on a nightly news. I am probably one of the few television journalists who has worked for 20 years and have no facial recognition. So most people don't even realize that I am with *NDTV*. However, there are times like recently someone in Gorakhpur, came in with a mike and said *aapka desh drohi channel hai, desh droohi channel hai*, and I turned around and said, I am going to take your picture and I am going to ask your Chief Minister what that means. And he ran sacred. I have done stories on *Durga Vahini*, *RSS* (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak) *Shakhas*, and it is absolutely clear from my episode that as a person I have very little tolerance for religious bigotry, but a lot of it depends on how you conduct yourself in the field personally. So I am not going to be offensive to someone I am interviewing. I can ask them tough and sharp questions, but that is my role as a journalist.

Since May 2014, when the BJP led government came in the power, a new lexicon *anti-national* has entered into the public discourse. This term is used to label all kinds of voices that are critical of the government. Within the media sphere, *NDTV* has also been labelled as an anti-national news channel. Journalists associated with the channel have been branded as anti-

nationals by the government and its supporters and attacked viciously on social media platforms. Besides, being tagged as anti-national, there are also other kinds of concerns that journalists face on the field, the primary ones being, reporting on incidents where sentiments of the public are running high. Sunetra Choudhary recounts how the coverage on the aftermath of AIADMK Chief J.Jayalalitha's death. She says,

While in the field we have to be little careful about people's sentiments over there because sometimes the affected parties are right there as well. So while you are trying to say the right thing, my colleagues have often been heckled about the fact that they did not say Ms. Jayalalitha, whereas the standard format is to say Jayalalitha. So they are reporting on her in front of the supporters and they would get bashed up. So there are these concerns.

Summing up on how media and government relations should be in a democratic society, Sonia Singh, remarks,

See the media is as much an instrument of fair and good governance as our legislature or judiciary and I think the cornerstone of our work must be belief in the end that though it may seem that we are natural adversaries to the government or judiciary, we are also working together for a common goal. Journalists are not enemies of the state, we are not friends perhaps and we have to work in a relationship which is cooperative and pointing out what goes wrong as watchdog.

VIII

NDTV 24x7 Model of Journalism

The news organization *NDTV* has been in existence in the Indian broadcast media scene for a long time. From its inception to the present day, the organization claims to have experience, accuracy and fairness at the core of its brand of journalism. *NDTV* was launched at a time when the Indian broadcast media was in its infancy. While private ownership existed in the print media, broadcast media and radio were still under government control. The group witnessed the revolution in the Indian broadcast media from *no* live news scenario to *all* live now. The technological expansion on account of opening up of Indian economy successfully paved the way for private entry into the broadcast media. *NDTV* was a beneficiary of this technological and economic change and it did lap up the opportunity with both hands. Its promoter Prannoy Roy had worked in *Doordarshan* for some time and hence was aware of the nitty-gritty of the government institution. These insights worked in his favour when he successfully bagged the *Doodarshan* contract of a producing 30 minutes English news bulletin. Roy used the platform of

the *Doordarshan* in terms of its funding, logistics, technological apparatus, to build a *NDTV* brand of journalism. The success of *NDTV* produced shows like *TWTW* and *News Tonight* which were aired on *Doordarshan* added to credibility and popularity of *NDTV*. The channel's transition from an independent production house to an independent private news broadcaster was the first step in this direction. The launch of a 24x7 news channel was a brand building exercise. Deeply influenced by the *BBC* and *CNN* model of journalism, the channel made strategies in terms of channel designing and presentation, content framing and production layouts to provide an international look and feel to its image. A highly personalized recruitment pattern based on personal relations and network was also part of this process. The focus was to get in the right kind of people who could be trained and moulded into the channel's philosophy. Over the years, *NDTV* has successfully managed to create a name for itself in the overcrowded news bazaar. The news content of *NDTV* is in stark opposite to many of its competitors. The TRPs driven content that is on display in other channels is at its minimal level in *NDTV*. Along with news, the channel also produces a host of shows like audience debates, documentaries, investigative stories, panel discussions that enrich its current affairs genre. These shows are better researched and well moderated in comparison to other news channels. The producers of these shows believe that such shows help their audience to get a grounded understanding and form an opinion of contemporary issues debated in the larger context. The attempt is to give voice to all participants rather than harping on the channel's agenda, as has become the norm. The channel showcases various kinds of issues and themes that will definitely not fetch TRPs but should be addressed by the media fraternity at all levels. Sonia Singh adds to this by saying, 'we focus on relevance and importance on an issue rather than its saleability'. However, within the media industry, *NDTV*'s business model is seen as failure. One observation that would regularly crop up in the course of my interviews with journalists belonging to other organization is-how does *NDTV* survive without TRPs and in turn revenues? I pose this question to the journalists who work in the channel. Their answer is that not everybody likes the noise that is being generated on television these days. A section of viewers also look for credible, factual and non-sensational news and that is where *NDTV* comes in. A look at the BARC ratings does reinforce this argument. *NDTV* does make it to the list of top five news channels week after week. The minimal reliance on TRPs does provide the channel to experiment with documentaries like *India Matters* that attempt to bring in the invisible India into mainstream viewing. Over the years various issues like gender, religion,

caste, environment, health etc have been showcased on the programme. Shows like *Truth vs Hype* and *Reality Check* are also well researched and amply supported by ground reporting. Audience based shows like *We the People* and *The Big Fight* open the space for public deliberations on issues prevalent in the society. *NDTV* is the only news organization that has a dedicated Audience Research Cell that acts as a conduit between the show producers and the audience. Along with arranging and organizing guests and studio audience, it also plays a key role in generating research data for the shows. This shows that channel believes in providing a space to the voice of its viewers. The employees of the channel believe that it is important to seek opinion and get feedback from its viewers as it helps in identifying the gaps between the channel's vision and the preferences of its audience.

The previous chapters of the study highlight the changing dynamics of the relationship between Indian state and its media. Throughout the history of the Indian nation, the state has been seen as exercising its dominance over media. Successive governments have been seen as being intolerant of those sections of media who have been critical of them. The same is being witnessed in the case of *NDTV*. The editorial policy of *NDTV* has been liberal in its orientation. Due to this stance, the network has always been presumed as anti-rightwing. It's off and on tussle with the BJP central government adds credence to this fact. Few recent instances like the proposed one day ban on *NDTV* India on account of its Pathankot¹⁵⁷ attack coverage, the on air spat between one of its prominent anchors and a BJP spokesperson, followed by the Income tax raids on its owners in 2017 hint at the tumultuous relation that the network has with the government at the centre.

This chapter has mapped the journey of the *NDTV* network. It has showcased how factors like ownership, editorial control, channel philosophy, organizational structure, work ethics, together contribute towards building the *NDTV* model of journalism. The next chapter provides an insight into the journey of the popular Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak* and the making of its model of journalism.

¹⁵⁷The Pathankot attack in 2016 was a terrorist attack on the Pathankot Air Force Base of the Indian Air Force. The attack got in-depth coverage in the Indian media. The channel *NDTV India* was served a one day ban by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for violating the broadcasting regulations specifically in case of terror coverage. This order was challenged by the channel who stated that the channel did not violate any such regulation, and that it was targeted as it was critical of how the government handled the attack. The channel received support from other quarters and eventually the ban was lifted by the Ministry.

Chapter 6

Production of Current Affairs Programming: A Study of *Aaj Tak*

This chapter focuses on the current affairs genre of news programming in the Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak*. It maps out the various techniques and processes that undergo in the production of such programming. The prevailing production processes of the news channel find its roots in the organizational structure of the *TV Today network*. *Aaj Tak* is a part of the *India Today Group (ITG)* media network. The beginnings of the group can be traced back to 1975 when Vidya Vilas Purie¹⁵⁸, owner, Thompson Press started *India Today*, an Indian English weekly magazine. Presently *ITG* is a media conglomerate that has stake in a wide range of activities like magazines, books, radio, printing etc. *ITG* is a closely-held company, with several subsidiaries, and operations in television, financial services, music, education, publishing, online retail, and events. One of its major subsidiaries is *TV Today*, which controls its television business and several other businesses in a clutch of further subsidiaries: *TV Today Network*, *Mail Today Newspapers*, *Radio Today Broadcasting*, and *Thomson Press India*. In 2000, the group had no presence in radio or television. The *Aditya Birla Group (ABG)* bought a large stake in *ITG* in 2012 and the collaboration marks a unique convergence between the content-rich *ITG* and the communications industry owned by *ABG* (Bhattacharjee and Agarwal 2018:52).

The chapter first describes the journey of the Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak*. The beginnings of the channel are traced back to the days when *TV Today* operated as an independent production house which provided content, primarily to *Doordarshan*. Later, in 2000, the network launched its 24x7 Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak*. It then traces the Hindi news channel sector that witnessed massive growth and intense competition in the post 2000 phase. This historical overview helps getting acquainted with the foundational logic of the *Aaj Tak* brand of journalism. Anchoring itself on this historical trajectory, it then probes into the techniques and processes that underlie the production of the current affairs shows aired on *Aaj Tak*. This is weaved together with a discussion on issues like ownership, editorial policy, relationship with government, influence of social media that together influence the *Aaj Tak* brand of journalism. All these aspects together help in understanding how media networks are influenced by internal

¹⁵⁸ Vidya Vilas Purie is the father of Aron Purie, Chairman of the India Today Group.

(ownership of the institution, its editorial policies, the organizational structuring, work ethics, revenue model) and external factors (social media, market, state policies, media regulations) that frame their discourse (s).

Figure 7: Logo of Aaj Tak: ‘Sabse Tez’¹⁵⁹



(Source: <https://keenlms.com/flashcards/tv-channels-taglines/>)

I

The Beginning

The *Aaj Tak* story has to be seen in the context of the system of broadcasting in India in 1980s. *Aaj Tak* started its journey from a popular news magazine *Newstrack*. At that time, the government owned *Doordarshan*, was the solo player in the broadcast sector. Commenting on how *Doordarshan* facilitated the entry of private players into broadcast media, *Qamar Wahid Naqvi*, Former Employee, *Aaj Tak*, says,

Private participation in the Indian broadcast media started way back in 1985 when Vinod Dua produced a show *Newsline* anchored by M.J.Akbar which aired on *Doordarshan*. This show was produced by the *Ananda Bazaar Patrika* Group. The format of this audience based show was as follows- one minister from the central government would be invited to the studio. He would then be questioned about his work and the work undertaken by his ministry. The audience would also participate in the discussion. This show was hugely successful and it was followed by another

¹⁵⁹‘Sabse tez’ is the tagline of the Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak*. It means faster than the rest.

such show *Parakh*. Along with such shows, Prannoy Roy and Vinod Dua were also hired by *Doordarshan* to telecast election results. So, for the first time, for threedays of counting after voting, private producers seamlessly used all the infrastructure of *Doordarshan* to produce a show for them. The show attempted to put forth the view points of all political parties in a fair and objective manner. It showcased that political coverage was possible without any political bias. The credibility of private producers started from there. From then on, *Doordarshan* provided a platform to private producers and journalists’.

While *Doordarshan* was slowly opening up, an independent space in television for private producers and journalist was also emerging. The birth of *Newstrack* in 1989 and its subsequent transformation to a 24x7 Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak* has to be understood in this evolving media landscape. Recalling the launch years of *Newstrack*, Qamar Naqvi remarks,

Newstrack was a two hour show consisting of four to six stories political and human interest stories. It was available in the VHS cassette format and viewers would either buy or take these cassettes on rent and watch it on VCR. *Newstrack* was mostly watched by the intellectual middle class, by people who had money and could afford a VCR. There was a craze about *Newstrack* as people could watch live videos of events happening for the first time. They could see and hear the characters in those events, hear their views and counter-views. So *Newstrack* developed a craze.

However programmes like *Newstrack* were regulated by the Censor Board of India. The Board used to certify every story before it was made available for general viewing. Mrityunjay Jha, a former employee, *Aaj Tak*, remarks that the Censor Board at that time was very liberal and on three occasions (episodes on the ISRO case, Indian spies in Pakistan and Kashmiri Militants) had passed favourable judgement supporting the *Newstrack* team. Recalling one such experience with the Censor Board on the Ayodhya coverage, he says,

I joined *Newstrack* as a Researcher and after three months I became reporter. My first major story apart for the other stories that I did was the Babri Masjid demolition story. That was 6th December 1992. I had reached Ayodhya on 22nd of November. The demolition happened on 6th and every month *Newstrack* would air on the 7th. But this video got delayed because Censor Board did not give permission, it refused to pass the video. The reason for refusal was it was the first time that a video was shot covering a live incident. There was no live television then. The video showed the demolition, slogans. Immediately Madhu Trehan, the editor, went to the court and within 24 hours Justice Lentin of Mumbai High Court gave a great verdict. There were just three beep sounds in the video and rest of the story was untouched. The slogans that were beeped were totally RSS slogans, ‘katwe kate jayenge, ram nam chilayenge’. The story was totally untouched by the court. The Censor Board in those days allowed free thinking in contrast to today’s time when there is too much of focus on curbing free expression. As part of the *Newstrack* team I had interviewed Hafeez Sayeed and Syed Salauddin. Such a thing is unthinkable now.

Newstrack operated independently in the VHS cassette format till 1994, after which it switched over to the *Doordarshan*’s second Hindi entertainment channel *DD Metro* platform as a

thirty minutes weekly program. But the Living Media production team had a difficult time in *Doodarshan* due to excessive interference from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. There was unnecessary vetting of stories and orders were issued to leave out crucial political stories. The team could not handle the official pressure for long and their Head, Madhu Trehan withdrew the program from the channel. During that period, talks were on in *DD Metro* channel to start a news bulletin in Hindi. Prannoy Roy was already doing a bulletin in English, *News Tonight* and the channel wanted a Hindi news bulletin also. Aroon Purie, brother of Madhu Trehan along with some of the members of the *Newstrack* team made a pilot project and submitted the proposal to *DD Metro* for the Hindi news bulletin contract. Other producers like Vinod Dua also applied for the same contract. However, the Living Media team bagged the contract in March 1995 on account of having years of experience and infrastructure in the television production. The new team then started working on the Hindi news bulletin *Aaj Tak*. The first bulletin aired on 17th July 1995. By 1996, *Aaj Tak* started hosting special election programmes such as *Aap Ki Sarkar*. In 1997, *Business Aaj Tak* was launched and it live-relayed the 1997 Union Budget from Parliament.

II

Transition from *Aaj Tak* Bulletin to *Aaj Tak* 24x7 Hindi News Channel

The *Aaj Tak* Hindi bulletin was a twenty minutes news bulletin that aired from 9.30 to 9.50pm every week night. The news cycle comprised of the news of the day ranging from politics, human interest, business, entertainment and sports. Mrityunjay Jha states that *Aaj Tak* news was more fastpaced and visually appealing in comparison to the dull and staid news on *Doordarshan* channel. The audience took an instant liking to this format of news presentation. Over a period of time, the team worked on making the bulletin more viewer-friendly. The target audience for the *Aaj Tak* model of journalism was the vast section of the middle and lower class populace residing in cities, small towns and villages across the country. Hence, the emphasis was on designing and presenting bulletins that had a popular feel too it. Sanjay Bragta, Executive Editor-Input, talks about the kind of experimentation that was done to make the bulletin appear more attractive. He says,

When *Aaj Tak* used to come on *DD Metro* it was advertised in such a manner like DD metro pe ek serial jaldi aa raha hai jiske kirdar hain.....we had made caricatures of politicians like Karunanidhi, Jayalalitha, V.P.Singh, Rajiv Gandhi. The programme was advertised in such a manner so as to give shock value to the viewers that a new serial is starting with politicians as actors. But then it turned out to be news.

Aaj Tak focussed on providing news that would be light hearted, easy to comprehend and provide an entertainment quotient. This was to be achieved by using a particular form of language in its programmes and news bulletins. Qamar Naqvi argues that television is a medium where the focus is on the kind of language and the visual that appear on screen. He recalls the days when strategies were chalked out regarding the kind of language that should to be used in the bulletin. He remarks,

Television is a medium for speech and not for writing. And there is a difference in the language that is written and spoken. The language of news should be like water that takes the shape of the vessel in which it is put. So the emphasis was to have news in a language that could be understood by a professor, a student, roadside vendor, labourer and so on. Keeping these things in mind, we started working on the language. One model was *Doordarshan* and the other Zee bulletin which was too much Hinglish and appeared fake. We wanted to place the language of *Aaj Tak* in between these two extremes. I am saying all this because the evolution of language in *Aaj Tak* did not happen accidentally. There was thinking behind it. If we do not identify our audience then how will we develop our language? The audience for us in those days was someone from middle class with reasonable earning. From where does this audience come? Maximum come from small towns, villages and settle themselves in metros. The first generation of these migrants has a lot of attachment to his ancestral place, they would often go to their native place for all their personal work, the second generation has less attachment in comparison because their link weakens over a period of time, and then the third generation almost gets detached. So our audience was 25 to 44 years old, and is mostly the first and second generation audience who has migrated to the metros. These generations have more attachment to their native places in terms of language, food, culture, and hence migrants have more attachment to their native language. So our attempt was to make the language of news as similar as possible to that native language. So we started using those provincial proverbs in our news. One more thing was how did we define our relation with our audience? The tone of language between two people depends on the relationship between the two people. In print media, we do not have physical connect with our audience and hence our language is more formal whereas in television there is connect and hence the language is less formal. The anchor is present everyday in the house whether in bedroom, drawing room, etc through television. Since he/she meets us everyday our language cannot be either too formal or too friendly. It is somewhere in the middle. Another important aspect in communication is physical connect through eye and this happens in television. Moreover when you read a newspaper you read many articles but you do not know the writer, but you read the article and if it is soft then you make an image of the writer in your mind as a soft natured person and vice versa. Image formation is an important aspect of communication. This physical connect is weak in print. The physical connect is strong in radio than print. We listen to a radio jockey and form an image. The connect is most strong in television as I can see and hear. And that is why the language in television is the most informal among the three mediums. So when *Aaj Tak* came the emphasis was on formation of imagery and physical connect with audience. For example- *share bazaar main bhari girawat*, this is simple and factual statement, now if we say *share bazaar aundhe muh gira*, here you make an image that there

was a steep fall, now along with image if we add phonetic impact, then *share bazaar dhadham se gira*, here there is imagery as well as audio, dhadham, there is no fall physically but you feel so. So when you add imagery and sound then the power of that new item increases. So our emphasis was to bring in proverbs as well as phonetics, sound impact and imagery into our news. There was a headline like *haathi ghoda palki jai kanhaiya laal ki*, use of helicopters during election campaigns was like *helicoptaron ki goonj se aasman tharaya, dame ka daam barsaat main*, such headlines were lyrical, phonetics. When we use earlier proverbs we create nostalgia, and we create imagery with sound, then such a language has different kind of flavour. Therefore, the emphasis was that it should not be very but intimate with the audience.

Adding to this, Sanjay Bragta, Head Input says,

Our emphasis was to present news in popular language. We thought that people all over the country understand Bollywood style of Hindi better and tried to replicate that style of language in the bulletin as well.

The language policy of *Aaj Tak* was positioned between the serious tone of *Doordarshan* and the Hinglish tone (a mixture of Hindi and English) of *Zee* channel. It evolved by keeping in mind the target audience of the channel, namely, the middle and lower class population who often migrated to cities. The focus was to present news in a language that would be similar to the language spoken by such audience so that they could comprehend it. Thus the language policy of *Aaj Tak* comprised of phonetics, sound impact, imagery which framed its news content. It was similar to the language used in Bollywood, the Hindi film industry. This foundational strategy is well evident in the titles of the debate shows aired on the channel in the contemporary time. There have been instances where songs and dialogues from Bollywood movies have been used as titles of debate shows. A few instances like, '*Modi vs. All. Abhi toh party shuru hui hai!*' (aired on 13th march, 2018)¹⁶⁰, *Sena par Sadakchap siyasat!*, *Sena ki Keemat tum kya jaano sandeep babu!* (aired on 12th June, 2017). Similarly few other strategies were also put in when *Aaj Tak* transitioned from a bulletin to a 24x7 news channel. Recalling the experiments initiated during the Khumb Mela coverage of 2001 in Allahabad, Sanjay Bragta remarks,

Then we did another experiment with the Khumb Mela in 2001 in Allahabad. There are generally lot of colours and stories in such events for television consumption. So we sent a team of reporters and anchors to cover the event. They probed into every angle, how many akhadas were there, the stories of the gurus and pilgrims, such stories, the emphasis was on showing the event to people who could not physically participate in it. So this experiment also worked. Our channel garnered a lot of viewers, especially first timers who had never seen a Khumb Mela in their life. Then there was an earthquake in Bhuj in 2001. Earlier the television channels were offline. I remember due to some technical failure, our systems crashed. We could only play out live

¹⁶⁰The online link of these episodes has been cited in chapter 1.

images. Then we instructed all our reporters to have long walk through, explain the stories at length. At such an important news event, we could not have afforded to go blank or played a file footage, but we adopted the walk-through strategy and it worked. We garnered a lot of TRPs, almost 68%, there was no competitor for us. So we kept on doing these experimental things and a year or so passed by.

Aaj Tak experimented with novel ways of presenting news. Its experiment of live coverage of events such as *Khumb Mela*, *Bhuj earthquake*, brought in live news reporting to the homes of its audience. People would for the first time experience *instant* news.

The next phase in the journey of *Aaj Tak* was its launch as a 24x7 Hindi news channel. Nalin Mehta (2008) describes in depth the negotiations that *Aaj Tak* had with potential investors for funding the channel. The first talks were held with CNN, which like Rupert Murdoch's STAR, was eyeing an entry into the Indian market. The agreement hinged on the condition that CNN would provide American consultants to *Aaj Tak* to train its staff and in return *Aaj Tak* would facilitate CNN's entry into the Indian market. The partnership lasted for a short time and was ultimately called off as CNN wanted more control over the group. *Aaj Tak* refused to give in and decided to launch its own news channel. Mrityunjay Jha, recalls these year as,

By 1998, Aroon Purie was gradually planning the next big move. By that time, Prannoy Roy had also left the Doordarshan platform and had tied up with STAR Network. Sensing that the news channel market was slowly evolving and that there was more scope for a Hindi news channel, Aroon Purie made his next move. He hired Uday Shankar and formed a new team. Professionals were called from CNN to train us. At that time one would hardly find any PTC (piece to camera) in such stories. I used to end my story by saying M.K.Jha from *Aaj Tak*. We never thought of doing PTC. We were trained by CNN guys to own up the stories that we did. We were taught mannerism on how to present oneself on camera, how the set should be set up etc. Prannoy Roy had all these as he invested in people whereas TV Today invested in people as well as technology later on. Mobile Outside Broadcast (OB) vans were bought and preparations were on in full swing to launch a new channel.

The journalists of *Aaj Tak* underwent training in news designing and presentation under the professionals of *CNN*. One key difference between *NDTV* and *Aaj Tak* at this stage was, while both trained under foreign news broadcasters, their mode of utilizing this training in their news production was totally divergent. While *NDTV* model of journalism was niche and sophisticated, *Aaj Tak* model of journalism was popular and mass appealing. Also, technologically speaking, *Aaj Tak* was much ahead of its competitors at that point of time. Besides having a complete newsroom automation system, it had also invested in mobile outside broadcast vans that could produce live broadcasts outside the studio on short notice. This helped

in procuring live images from the site of an event (like Khumb Mela, Bhuj earthquake). The 24x7 Hindi news channel was officially launched on 31st December, 2000. During that period, Living Media's TV Today Division was transferred to TV Today Network, through a business transfer agreement¹⁶¹. *Aaj Tak* had made quite a name for itself in the DD metro platform. Its popularity had led to a significant expansion of its programming. Many news-based programmes like *Saptahik Aaj Tak*, *Business Aaj Tak*, *Subah Aaj Tak*, *Gaon Aaj Tak*, *Dilli Aaj Tak*, *Aaj Ki Narri* and *Aaj ka Agenda* were aired on *DD Metro*. When it became independent, its high viewership continued. The positioning of the channel as a common man's news channel worked in its favour. Commenting on how *Aaj Tak* was positioned in the Hindi news channel segment, Qamar Naqvi says,

Aaj Tak was positioned as a common man's news channel. A common man reacts differently to every news. The Indian public takes a deep interest in news viewing and more so in politics. So they react in their own way to every political story or development. Many times news organizations get intelligent comments from the public while reporting. The public in India, whether in public transport or roadside cafes do serious discussions on politics. So the effort was to replicate this ground level news discourse into a television news programming discourse. The ground level discourse was not in an intellectual language, but in their day-to-day life. Our attempt was to further the discourse that was happening in the ground, in the drawing rooms, over food.

Aaj Tak became a common man's news channel as it inculcated his/her day-to-day form of conversation into its programming. It also worked with the motto *Sab Se Tez* (Faster than everybody). The motto translated into practice during the Bhuj earthquake of 2001 in the Kutch district of Gujarat. Mrityunjay Jha recalls how the channel covered the disaster. He says,

The Bhuj earthquake happened in 2001. While covering the disaster we made extensive use of the live feed. There was no repetition in it. If someone was trapped for four hours, we were continuously showing it with reporters live. Our camera was following the rescue operation. We left all other news and focused completely on this tragedy. We used to summarize in headlines the other stories, but we also stated that we are going to stick with this. Uday Shankar, Aroon Purie, we all took the decision collectively.

Aaj Tak's technological innovations did give it an upstart in the competitive media market. As stated earlier, the channel did not have a smooth ride with the powers that be. As with the bulletin, the channel had to face its share of government interference. Qamar Naqvi recalls,

161 For more, refer to, <http://www.thehoot.org/media-watch/media-business/its-now-money-today-10489>, accessed 29 January, 2018.

When BJP came to power in 1998 in the centre, Pramod Mahajan became the Minister of Information and Broadcasting. He wanted to control media. Aaj Tak featured prominently in that list and he started putting a lot of pressure on Aaj Tak. Although Prasar Bharti was already there but it was toothless in front of him, and this issue was raised in the Parliament as well and many political leaders like Mamata Banerjee, Yerra Naidu of Telegu Desam Party and many parties from the Hindi belt supported Aaj Tak. Then the Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee got the hint of what was going on. He was a big fan of Aaj Tak and he said that *jab tak raat main Aaj Tak na dekh lun, toh khana hazam nahi hita hai*. With his intervention the pressure eased out.

Innovation in designing, production, presentation, newsroom automation, training of personnel and language policy were the essential ingredients which were judiciously worked on by *TV Today* network, to gain its foothold, in the broadcast media sector.

III

The Hindi News Channel War

The Hindi news media space has been blooming. Neyazi (2010) states that, ‘as many as 23 Hindi news channels have been launched since 2000. In the print media, circulation figures of, Hindi dailies lead with 84.9 million copies while English dailies stand at distant second with 31.5 million copies. Furthermore, the reach of the Hindi print media is not only confined to north India where Hindi is widely used, but has also penetrated other parts of India’ (ibid: 75). In the television space, the post 2000 phase witnessed the mushrooming of Hindi news channels. These news channels vied with each other to be ahead in the business. This race to be at the top largely rested on the content that was produced by such news channels. News content fetched ratings and in turn, higher ratings ensured the top slot and revenues. Before going in detail on how the on air content battle played out, a quick overview of how the Hindi news channel space evolved is warranted. Qamar Naqvi recalls the news media scene of the nineties. He says,

In 1995-96, Home TV and BBC co-produced a 30 minutes BBC-Home bulletin. In 1994, BiTV a full-fledged Hindi and English news channel was launched. That experiment was not successful because they had apparently hired a wrong satellite which could not be accessed by many cable operators and required another kind of dish. During this time, the general entertainment channels like Zee TV and STAR TV ran 30 minutes news bulletins. They did not own a separate 24x7 news channel as such. In 1996, during Haryana elections, Zee TV did a few stories covering it, like going around with politicians and party leaders and sending reports from ground. People appreciated it as they were watching something like this for the first time. Following the success of that experiment, Zee TV decided to launch a full-fledged news channel i.e. Zee News in 1999. Around that time, news started in STAR TV and this contract was given to NDTV to produce one bulletin in English and one in Hindi for STAR channel. Aaj Tak bulletin was launched in 1995 on DD Metro. The full channel went on air in 2000. Aaj Tak became quite popular. Then NDTV

parted ways with STAR, and launched its own news channels in English and Hindi in 2003. Zee also launched a few regional channels at that time around. STAR launched its own news channel i.e STAR News in 1998. Till 2003, four channels, Aaj Tak, NDTV, Zee and STAR were operating. Aaj Tak was popular for quite some time capturing 65 to 70% of the market.

Mrityunjay Jha also talks of how *Aaj Tak* had a pan-Indian appeal during that phase.

According to him,

Aaj Tak was already an established name around the late nineties and hence, when it was re-launched as a 24x7 Hindi news channel we never had any problem. We captured almost 65-70% of the market in the Hindi segment. We were very popular in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Goa barring some part of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. We had a soft launch, the channel was free to air, and it became an instant hit. The period of 2 to 3 years after launch was smooth was us. That was the phase when Zee News, STAR News and NDTV also started. Then Rajat Sharma left Zee News and started India TV in 2004.

The launch of other news channels led to two things-viewership fragmentation and content replication. Viewers now had access to a host of Hindi news channels. They had the option of switching on to the channel that catered to their palette. However, this does not mean that the news channels offered any new content. They essentially relied on copying each other's style of producing news. Qamar Naqvi claims that content replication happened because the journalists who started their new ventures had learnt the tricks of the trade in the *Aaj Tak* stable and carried forward the similar format of news making in their newly formed media networks. Describing how the rivalry between *Aaj Tak* and *STAR News* played out, Naqvi says

When STAR News was launched, it tried to position itself differently because at that time Aaj Tak was the leading channel and was a politics heavy channel. So STAR News knew that it could not compete with Aaj Tak by doing only political coverage and decided to make new type of content. So the top management of STAR News organized a lot of conference with viewers across India, took first hand notes from the field, and on the basis of that they reached the conclusion that viewers are not interested in only politics, and that they wanted to see different aspects of life in a news channel like good news, fashion, lifestyle, entertainment and likewise content. And this is how they positioned their channel and started doing that sort of coverage. They did it for quite a long period of time but they could never reach more than 20 % of the market share. They put in a lot of effort but it was not yielding results. They had launched shows with journalists like Vir Sanghvi which did not work. They struggled to break the hegemony of Aaj Tak.

STAR News took the lead in foraying into content segmentation in television news media. It attempted at delivering innovative programming to expand its viewership base. It initiated the influx of diverse kinds of programs relating to entertainment, sports, crime, mythology, lifestyle etc. which were later adopted by other news channels. The focus was on delivering infotainment

laced news. Such practices were soon replicated in other news channels. Describing the tendency of content replication among news channels, Qamar Naqvi cites the various instances which depict this replication in relation to the crime genre. He says,

Crime always catches eyeballs. Crime serials like *CID*, *Crime Patrol* had good viewership. So it was thought that if crime sells well in serials then it should be replicated in news channel as well. It is NDTV India that first started airing crime and sports stories in their show *Khel, Khabar aur Crime*. Their focus was to show more news on sports and crime in that show. So a crime bulletin was started by NDTV Hindi. Before that only Aaj Tak had a weekly show on crime titled *Jurm* aired on Sunday at 10.30 am. STAR News replicated this and started a similar show in the same time band named *Red Alert*. But then NDTV India started airing an everyday bulletin on crime and sports stories. This did not have any impact on Aaj Tak. Subsequently a show named *Kaal, Kapaal aur Mahakal* started on Zee News. This show was on tantrics and had episodes on *Aghori tantrics* who do tantrism with dead bodies, and eat dead bodies. Zee News heavily promoted this show and aired it at night 11pm. They got high ratings for this show. Other channels suffered loss in that time band. Their viewers crossed over to Zee to watch such esoteric shows at that slot. This went on for some time. Then came a phase when news on television serials was introduced. STAR News started with coverage of television serials at 2.30 pm. Initially no one took it seriously, but it went on for a few months, and started getting viewership. Others channels lost viewership in that time band. So others also felt that they should also give similar content on their channels, so that the viewership again gets divided. So, similar programs in the same time band started in other channels also. This is how deviation started with news.

While crime and serial based reporting became a norm, Mrityunjay Jha speaks of the growth of the trend of mythology based programming in Hindi news channels. He says,

Many mythological stories which you will not find in any puranas or epics were invented by news channels. Once I remember the Sri Lankan Tourism Ministry took 4 to 5 news channels on a junket to promote Sri Lankan tourism. And what they did was *ram yahan pe pahunche the, ravan yahan rehta tha*, stories like these played out. All those channels did the same story with different kind of takes. During that period all news channels were diluted. And that is why one could not see any serious or major news happening.

Videos picked up from the National Geographic channel also fuelled the rating war for a brief period of time. Naqvi remarks,

The rating war for wildlife videos from National Geographic channel was initiated by *STAR News*. It fetched good ratings for the channel. So then they started showing it daily. Then other channels started feeling the pressure. Aaj Tak had a show *Vishesh* which aired at 9.30pm. It still runs now. It was a well researched show and was normally based on news of the day or the previous day. The attempt was to give a wholesome coverage of a topic. It had a team of 8 to 9 people. But when national geographic videos were played on other channel, *Vishesh* viewership took a hit. So when it happened regularly, we thought of dropping *Vishesh* and show such videos. India TV had also launched by then. Initially it was an entirely different kind of news channel. It had tied up with Al-Jazeera, and their audience was Diaspora specifically in the Gulf. Tarun Tejpal, Rajat Sharma started this channel. They upped the ratings ante to another level. They

started picking up all kinds of videos from youtube and aired on their channel. Their stories were controversial but also fetched ratings. They would naag-nagin intercourse, and it got high ratings. Likewise that phase started and channels started picking up such videos from youtube and aired in their channel. India TV had also started a viewer video in which they asked viewers to send videos and the best video was aired in the channel and also got a TV set as a prize. They started getting a lot of videos. Likewise, a whole new kind of coverage started. Other channels also started imitating it.

Citing another incident which featured prominently in the ratings war among news channels, Naqvi refers to the Arif-Gudiya story in 2007. In this case, the news channels went a step further and acted as jury to settle the marital conflict. Naqvi says,

The second rating war was on the Arif –Gudiya story¹⁶². It was thought that Gudiya's husband had died in Kargil war but actually he was in prison in Pakistan and returned to India few years back. Meanwhile Gudiya had married another man and later when the first husband returned a debate started on who was Gudiya's real husband. The fatwa said first husband is real husband. That story was dramatized in Zee news studio, Arif, Gudiya and second husband were called in studio, a panchayat was held in studio, drama happened for 2 to 3 days, that who does gudiya belong to, the audience was also there and the resolution was that according to Islamic Shariat Gudiya is Arif's wife. The entire country saw the drama for a few days and Zee news became number one. Such stories started a rating war among channels.

He further says,

That was a phase of two years when channels produced such content. But then eventually everyone got tired at it did not help in improving ranking. Channels thought all this effort was waste and there was no improvement in ranking and questions on credibility were being raised and they decided to give it up. The channels also introspected that trivialization did not help ranking and it was better to go back to news.

The evolution of content segmentation was the result of the excessive competition among the news channel. Every channel in its effort to stay ahead in the competition, came up with innovative strategies to garner maximum viewership. One of the arguments in favour of content segmentation is that it offered the viewers a range of programmes to choose from. News channels justify this segmentation prioritized the viewers as they had the power to choose what they wanted to see. However, such claims find little resonance on ground. Content segmentation

¹⁶² Arif- Gudiya story refers to an incident that happened in 2004 in the Kalunda village near Delhi. Arif was a soldier in the Indian Army who was taken as a prisoner of war after the Kargil War in 1999. Ten days prior to the war he had married Gudiya. After receiving no news of her husband for quite some time, Gudiya married another man Taufiq in 2003 and was pregnant with his child. In 2003, Arif was released from Pakistan and he returned to India to find that his wife is now married to another man. This story became a big talking point in media and news channels enmeshed on this tragedy. For more on this read, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2004/09/25/stories/2004092502740100.htm>, accessed 10 July, 2017.

has led to content replication. All news channels openly copy each other's stories and formats of presentation. While minor difference in terms of the treatment of content prevails, the crux of all such programming essentially remains the same. Replication of such programming does raise the question of do viewers really have *choice*? Chaudhuri (2017) through her analysis of advertisements in the English print media argues that the concept of choice is highly problematic in a market-dominated media. For her, the language used by the market-dominated media is in variance with the ideals of freedom, liberty and choice as espoused in liberal democracies. The financial dependence of the market-centric media on corporate revenue forces the media to speak the language of the corporates. The corporate money defines the range and the nature of choices for its customers. In turn, the customers are forced to select from these imposed choices, thereby making the idea of their individual, autonomy, freedom to choose, redundant.

The intense competition in the media business has also led to compromises on the ethics and fair practises of journalism by news channels. Sanjay Bragta talks of how news channels have to make compromises to sustain themselves in a competitive market. He says,

At times, you have to make compromises. Because you can have your own standards of journalism but in a tough competitive market, wherein you are the market leader but your competitor is lowering his standards to achieve TRPs that impacts your market share, viewership share. So to counter him you also start following the trend set by him. That was a phase for such type of news, you had to strengthen your number one position, as well as lead ahead in the competition.

He further says that the above scenario was short-lived and the Hindi news channel changed their character post 2010. For him, the Anna Hazare anti-corruption movement was a turning point in news media. That event shifted the news frame in Hindi news channels from being observers of news to becoming participants of news. News channels became participants by providing a platform for the generation and dispersal of 'opinion'. He says,

An important event, in the history of the country was the 'Anna Movement'. Everything changed after that from news making point of view. News media became an activist at that point of time, especially news channels. From morning till night, all channels covered it. That event had drama, emotions, all issues which impact everyday life of a common man were present in that event. But till that event, there was no common platform to vent out feelings for issues confronting common man. After that event, news standards improved a little. From that event onwards, opinion became important. Now opinion shows start from 6pm. Opinion has become an integral part of news making. This trend is not just limited to India but is happening globally. Lot of emphasis is being given to opinion in news channels. It is difficult to give news 24 hours. An average viewer

watches news in English for 10-15 minutes and in Hindi for maximum 30 minutes. So in such a scenario, what more can a news channel do?

This aspect of news channels as participants in news making finds resonance in the work of Rodrigues and Ranganathan (2015). In their work, the authors argue that there is a decisive shift in the role of Indian news media. By providing an account of the reportage and presentation of some significant events like the Mumbai terror attacks, Anna movement, Nirbhaya Rape, they opine that Indian media has shifted from being an observer (reporting on events and issues in the field of politics, economy and culture) to that of a partaker (reporting events and issues as a participant rather than an onlooker of the events and issues).

An integral aspect of the functioning of Hindi news channels is the fight for television ratings points. Ratings have always determined the kind of content that goes on air. It is the mad race for higher ratings that led to the trivialization of news content. Instead of putting in efforts for providing well researched and well analysed news content, news channels succumbed to the easier path of sensationalizing content to fetch higher ratings. Stories on myths, astrology, crime, Bollywood became an intrinsic part of the news programming. However, journalists working in these organizations say that such a period was short-lived and that post 2010, Hindi news channels did rethink on such frivolous strategies and took steps to restore sanity in their news production.

The journey of *Aaj Tak* from being a production house to a media network has coincided with the changing broadcast sector in India since the nineties. Like *NDTV*, *Aaj Tak* also the *Doordarshan* platform for its brand building exercise. The launch of its 24x7 Hindi news channels was the first step towards building up the network. The foundation for the network was built up in close collaboration with *CNN*. *CNN* helped the network in terms of training its journalists, automating the newsrooms, streamlining news production. While international expertise helped in building up the organizational system, the decision on positioning on the channel was entirely the call of the owners. *Aaj Tak* was positioned as a common man's news channel targeting the middle and lower classes in metros, towns and villages across the country. Its content policy comprising of language, programmes, presentation, designing, editorial positioning was framed keeping in mind this target audience. Later, the emergence of other players in the Hindi broadcast space, set in pace the ratings war which was responsible for the

sensationalization and trivialization of news in this sphere. While historically, these factors have together been the building blocks of the network, it would be interesting to see the role they play in the making of the *Aaj Tak* brand of journalism in the current context.

IV

Framing the Discourse: The *Aaj Tak* Approach

This section attempts to make sense of the *Aaj Tak* approach to discourse framing. This is done by specifically looking into the shows- *Dustak*, *Halla Bol*, *Ishwar Ek Khoj*, *Vandemataram*, *Khabardaar*, *Seedhi Baat* and *Adhbhut Awishwasneyan Akalpaniye* that are currently aired on the channel. It explains the various processes and techniques that are involved in producing and executing the above mentioned shows. The interviews of journalists and other media professionals who work on these shows have been used to map out the key aspects that go into producing a show. A short description of each of these shows is provided.

4.1 The Shows on *Aaj Tak*

Dustak

Dustak is 30 minutes news show which airs every week night at 10pm. Punya Prasun Bajpai, Executive Editor and Anchor of *Dustak* describes his show as an opinion based one. For him,

Jab hum *Dustak* ka programme karte hai toh uske liye mind main ek chal raha hota hai ke log raat main dekhna kya chahate hain. Ek cheez yeh hota hai ki log kal ka akhbar dekhna chahte hain raat ko sone se phele, ek mind main yeh aaya. Doosara, mind main yeh aaya ki, din bhar jisne kuch khabar nahin dekha hai, usko saare khabar lake dedein. Doosri sthithi yeh hoti hai. Teesri sthithi yeh hoti hai ki, khabarein toh aa rahi hai continuously alag alag madhyam se, lekin un khabaron ke saath vichaar nahi aa rahen hai. Vichaar ka matlab hain ki aap usk khabar ki multiple dimensions ko dekhayen. Kisi ek khabar ke kayee dimensions hote hai aur un dimensions ko leke agar hum discussion karte hai, humare koshish hoti hai ki hum tesere point pe zyaad zor dete hai, ki hum vecharik taur par logon ko jode ya vecharik taur pe logon ke dimag ko sakriya kar de, ki who sirf dekhe nai balki sochna bhi shuru kar de. Isike aadhar pe pura programme tayar karte hai, usme research ki madat lete hai aur hamari mushkil yeh bhi hai ki khud hi cheezon ko itni bariki se jaante hai ki, research ka upyog bahut kaam sthar pe hota hai.

(I keep three things in mind while preparing the show *Dustak*. First, do people want to know about what is going to happen tomorrow before going to bed? Second, do they want to see what happened today? Third, people do access news from various sources. Do they want to hear opinions around the issues of the day? By opinion I mean showcasing the multiple dimensions of an issue. Each issue has several dimensions and my attempt is to highlight these dimensions to

our viewers so that they not only watch the show but also start thinking about the issue showcased. This is how I prepare my show and I do take help of research. But since I am already aware about a lot of these things, I rarely rely on research).

Halla Bol

Halla Bol is a one hour debate show that airs on every evening at 6pm and is anchored by Anjana Om Kashyap. The theme of the debate ranges from the top story of the day to a comment by a famous personality on social media (for instance, the episode aired on 12th June 2017 was titled *Sena Par Sadakchap Siyasat*, where the debate was on a comment made by a Congress party leader Sandeep Dikshit on the Indian Army Chief Bipin Rawat¹⁶³). Experts of diverse view points are invited to the show to put forth their point of view on the theme being debated. Sometimes, an audience is also invited to the show and allowed to ask questions to the Panelists.

Vandemataram

Vandemataram is a current affairs show about the Indian Defence forces. Sweta Singh, Executive Editor and Anchor of the show describes it as follows.

Vandemataram is more of a story telling, tales of valor. I have had three seasons, hoping to get a fourth one. The first season was about the wars India fought after Independence. There is no literature in Hindi about such wars. So there were just two authentic books which were completely in English. So the Hindi audience never got to know what happened in those wars. The second season was about the freedom fighters, the revolutionaries basically and not the moderates. The third season was individual stories of valor not the war, not Kargil but Captain Vikram Batra, not 65 Indo-Pak but Adbul Hamid.

Ishwar Ek Khoj

Ishwar ek Khoj is a one hour faith based show that airs on weekends. Sweta Singh, describes the show as,

Ishwar ek khoj is about a group of 9 scientists coming together to determine whether the Gods and in this case the name can be little misleading because ishwar can mean different things to us. You can say that you cannot see ishwar, ishwar does not have a form. I would say because in Hinduism, ishwar is all about avtar, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh are the originals RGB but there are colours which mix and come. So we say that Ram was avtar of Vishnu but Ram existed on planet earth, so if he did exist then there must be proof. So it was a group of scientists led by Dr. A P J Kalam. Kalam himself said that Ramayan and Mahabharat are documented, it is history and not

163 This episode <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEAj7azSvo4>, was aired on the show *Halla Bol* on *Aaj Tak* on 12 June, 2017.

mythology. So it is a show which tries to say that it is not mythology, and this is the proof. Where I don't have proof, I talk about that. How was Sita born, where was she born, who was she born to, nobody knows, so we just put it that way. We have just telecast four episodes, we didn't get a chance to go up-to Hanuman, but if I talk of Hanuman, I will say that there is a tribe which had a cloth tail attached, which was very strong and perhaps some 5000 to 6000 years ago were present but then after that there is no trace of it, so we talk about options, could he be this, could he be that. So it is just exploring whether the ishwariya avatars (God's incarnations) did really walk on the earth.

Seedhi Baat

Seedhi Baat is a 30 minutes interview based show. Rahul Kanwal, News Director, *Aaj Tak* and Anchor describes the show as,

A hard-nosed interview show where we pick one guest every week who is one of the big newsmakers and we ask him very well researched questions, about what he has been doing, areas of interest, his statement in the news, etc. we try and grill our guests, inquisition, hard talk kind of thing.

Adhbhut Awishwasneyan Akalapniye

Adhbhut Awishwasneyan Akalapniye translates into amazing, unbelievable, unimaginable. It is a one hour show centering on issues, events and places that have generated curiosity either due to faith, belief, superstition, amongst a large section of the population. Some of the themes that featured during the course of the fieldwork were- the mystery of the Bhangarh Qilla in Ajmer, Rajasthan, the reverence for Kailash Mansarovar Peak, the display of fevour and mania in cricket matches between India and Pakistan and likewise.

Khabardaar

Khabardaar is a one hour show that airs every night at 9pm. Along with providing the top headlines of the day, it has a segment where a short analysis accompanies the top news items. The analysis states the channel's editorial stand on the issue concerned.

Figure 8: A Panel Discussion on *Aaj Tak*



(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r34iOQKS3Ok>)

Thus, the above description on the various kinds of current affairs programs on *Aaj Tak*. The channel does different kinds of programming ranging from studio discussions to interviews to special programmes as part of its current affairs genre. Studio discussions are aimed at showcasing multiple dimensions of the issue being debated. The journalists working on such shows believe that these discussions help viewers to form an opinion. Interviews are generally about interrogating a particular person who was in news that week. Documentaries and special shows focus on bringing into the fore events, incidents that are evoke a sense of patriotism (*Vande Mataram*), invoke curiosity (*Adhbhut Awishwasneyan Akalapniye*). The next section focuses on how these programs are produced in the channel. It specifically look into four aspects, namely, selection of topics, selection of guests, the kind of research involved and the challenges faced while producing such programs.

4.2 Selection of topics/issues/themes for the shows

How is a topic or issue chosen for the debate in *Aaj Tak*? Sanjay Bragta, Executive Editor, Input, replies,

Topic must be debatable. The topic emerges from the stories that come to our reporters every morning. Every editor pitches for a topic from their point of view. One issue might interest me, another issue might interest you. Here an editor has to take a call that which topic may have a wider appeal. Three days back, there was a news story about a private member bill that called for regulated spending in marriages proposed by a Member of Parliament. It was a brilliant idea. But then another story concerning elections also came up. It was the Kashmir issue (Army Chief's comments). So we thought people may like it more. So we chose the second topic. We pick up debatable topics.

Debatable topics are those that can sell more. Saleability of content refers to producing content that attract eyeballs and ratings. According to a team member, Outreach and Guest Management,

We mainly focus on politics and cricket. These issues sell and we produce what sells. Discussions on social issues like education, women empowerment are also done. Our debates are not just restricted to the studio. Our anchors like Rahul Kanwal, Punya Prasun Bajpai, Anjana Om Kashyap go to the field and organize shows.

An important point to be noted is that the choice of topic for discussion or for a feature story in *Aaj Tak* is saleability. As stated earlier, saleability refers to producing content that attract eyeballs and ratings. Topics that provide scope for heated arguments and discussions are more likely to be selected for debates. Sailaja Bajpai, talks about why news debates have become more shrill and noisy. She remarks,

Topics that generate conflict sell. Conflict in any format sells whether a movie or a novel. There has to be some inner conflict that is driving it, some inner suspense so that the reader is anxious to get to the end of the book. It might be also just the suspense and conflict in a love relationship, not necessarily a war but some tension that must drive the plot. Because you have a number of players and you have to create a situation when there is some tension, so that it creates a plot or a narrative, and from that emerges either a solution or an ending. Even in a sitcom, there will be many people, a conflict and then resolution. This is what satisfies a viewer. So you go through that whole arch and that is why we say now that television news is entertainment.

Besides, debate shows, some religion and faith based shows like *Adhbhut*, *Awishwasneyan*, *Akalpaniya* and *Ishwar Ek Khoj* are also part of the programming on the channel. It becomes pertinent to probe into the need of such kind of programs in a news channel. Rahul Kanwal, Managing Editor, *Aaj Tak* justifies the need for such content. According to him,

India is a very religious country and there is lot of interest in different things to do with religion, and these are very clearly targeted and presented as a special show so that is not mixed or confused with news. India is a religious country and different religious practices are covered and those are aired as a part of these special programmes.

On being asked whether such programming promotes superstition, he says,

Newspapers carry astrology, tarots cards. I think there is a debate there for sure, there can be no contest about that but then it's part of providing a viewer with a wholesome meal. Obviously when he is seeing Dharam or astrology show, he knows what he is watching, this is not news, no viewer is so stupid to assume so. He goes to pundits himself so he takes this show as seriously as the pundit he consults. So as long as one is not confusing this for news, I feel it has a certain space for itself as do different dishes on a thali.

Sweta Singh, Anchor, *Ishwar Ek Khoj*, adds to this by saying,

Ishwar Ek Khoj does not promote superstition. I think television suddenly feels empowered enough to talk about issues which were just rejected as superstition or stupidity. In today's date and age we get a lot of reaction, the believers will say *ishwar ko koi nahi khoj sakta*, the non believers will say *dekho murkh*. So that is the challenge, the risk that comes with it but if I believe that a certain research has brought out that this is our history, you have no reason to deny it. Then get me the other point of view that it is not history. You can just not say that this is not history, this is stupidity. No, give me proof. I am giving you proof this is history. So when I choose my news, it is basically this, I give you my point of view, I give you my evidence, give me your evidence if you think it does not exist.

Religion based programming is a significant aspect of the *Aaj Tak* content policy. The employees of the channel justify it by saying that just like other genres like cinema, sports, entertainment, lifestyle etc, religion also has its share of viewers. And as a national news channel *Aaj Tak* attempts to meet the expectations of its viewers. They also claim that such shows are thoroughly researched, facts are cross checked. The channel does not promote random beliefs and superstition but rather puts across hard facts. They also claim that feature stories on topics relating to faith, belief are more likely to attract viewers. The trend of religious programming on television is intricately linked to the emergence of religion and faith as a profitable business venture all over the world. Nanda (2009) argues that, 'globalization is making the whole world more religious-and all religions more political. Even as they are drawing closer economically, people all over the world are becoming more self-conscious of their religious and civilizational heritage. India is no exception to this global trend (ibid: 2). A host of religion and faith based channels like *Aastha TV*, *Sadhana TV*, *Angel TV*, *Peace TV*, *Sanskar* and a few others are aired on television. The programming content of these 24x7 religious channels centers on sermons,

prayers, yoga camps, astrology, religious celebrations etc. Many godmen and god women own such channels which becomes a platform for proselytizing¹⁶⁴. Within the television news scenario, shows like *Ishwar ek Khoj* and *Adhbhut Awishwasneyan Akalpaniye* attempt to meet this growing appetite for religiosity. From the channels point of view a mix of soft news along with hard news fills up the palette of their viewers. *Aaj Tak* has been positioned as a family news channel that offers news to all the members according to their tastes. It also caters to a large section of the Hindi speaking population that resides in smaller towns and villages belonging to middle and lower middle class. The kind of programming in the channel is intended to cater to this section of the population. Two criticisms that can be levied against the channel are first it promotes superstition and second it promotes the majoritarian religion as the primary religion of the country, overlooking the vast religious diversity that is present in the country. These issues are dealt in detail in the next chapter.

4.3 Selection of Experts/ Panelists/Guests

The next phase in producing such shows is the selection of guests or experts or Panelists for the discussion. The team member of Outreach and Guest Management describes the earlier phase of how guests or Panelists were invited to the channel. He recalls,

Aaj Tak was officially launched in December 2000. From the beginning itself, we did programming on talk shows. Initially it was the assignment desk that looked after into arranging guests for shows. Later the guest coordination team was set up which took over the job from the assignment desk.

Describing the process of selection of guests, he remarks,

The Guest coordination team of 15 members looks at four aspects- the day-to-day arrangement of guests, signing of contracts with guests, organizing events like the India Today Conclave and Agenda and giving editorial inputs for shows. We do not have any audience cell and it is the guest coordination team that handles both guests and at times audience for shows. We select guests from our database that has been created over the years. For example we call *G. Parthasarthy* when there is a discussion on Pakistan. Similarly we call *K.C.Singh* for discussion on international affairs. We select audience on the basis of requirement of the topic. Like, if there is a discussion on cricket, then we contact schools, colleges, sports academies to get audience. Our aim is to get young voice on the shows as they are free thinkers, unbiased and bring exuberance and energy to the show.

¹⁶⁴ A few studies on religious broadcasting are R. Abelman and K. Neuendorf (1985), J.Ellens (1974), J.K.Hadden (1987) and J.Sholes (1979).

As stated earlier, the growth of debate and discussion based shows has given rise of the phenomena of guests/experts/Panelists for shows. Every news channel in the country has a guest coordination cell which is entrusted with the task of getting guests for the shows. Domain knowledge becomes the key criteria for selecting guests. Emphasizing on how it is important to get diverse voices on the debate shows, Sanjay Bragta says,

Frankly speaking there are not many experts available. In debates, there is an emphasis to have a right party opinion, a left opinion, opinion of the people related to the topic, minority opinion, get all opinions on board and try to conclude. We try to get people who are related to the topic. If it is a business related topic then we try to get someone who is an expert in business affairs, science main science affairs. There are a lot of news channels now both in national and regional media. Almost all channels run debate shows. So at point of time, there is a need to have 6 to 7 people who are articulate, can't be stumped, who know the topic, can steer the topic. For example, Sambit Patra is a media creation. What extreme position he can take! General G. D. Bakshi, on hearing him many viewers must be experiencing high blood pressure. But such people bring drama on television which caters to the medium.

Retreating about the spokesperson culture as discussed previously, Mrityunjay Jha describes how debate and discussion based shows in news channels have given rise to this culture. For him,

Such shows are a regular part of programming now. It starts in the 7 pm in evening and it is easy arm chair journalism. Earlier political heavy weights used to go to news channels for discussions, now it's left to official spokespersons.....so because of television news, party spokespersons have emerged otherwise who knew about Sambit Patra. A department which every channel has is the guest coordination department, consisting of 5 to 6 people. Their job is to snatch guests from other channels. Subha 6 baje sabko phone karke bol dete hain ki, sir aaj aap mera yahan ho, aur topic hum aapko baad main bata denge.

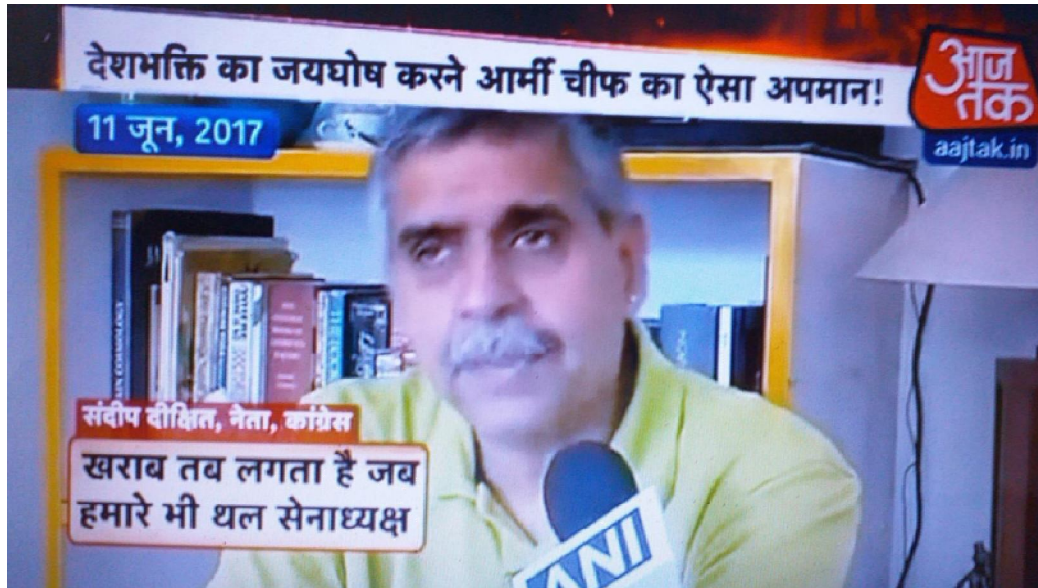
An examination of the twitter handles of these party spokespersons does allude to the observation made above. Every morning, the twitter savvy spokesperson tweet the schedule of their appearances in the various debate shows on news channels. For instance, the tweet would be like, 'Today 5pm@ *Aaj Tak*, 6pm @*India TV*, 7pm @ *Zee News*, 8pm @ *News18*' and so on. Along with debate shows, guests are also invited to the studio for interview based shows. Hence, it is important to probe into what sort of off air preparations are done before the show. Rahul Kanwal, Anchor, *Seedhi Baat* remarks,

Guests are not informed about what questions they would be asked. But I think everybody has a broad sense of why they are being targeted. For example in the Babri Masjid issue, we will try and pick somebody who has something to do with that topic. If you are speaking to Kanhaiya

Kumar then he knows that you will ask him specifically about what has been happening in week when he was in jail, he being beaten up by the lawyers. I think that kind of heads-up which the guest also knows, and this is what he is prepared for. So he has a sense of what we will talk about, the specific questions and all he has no idea about but the topics that will be covered is something which is very clear by the fact that you are picking that guest. For example if you are picking a guest when India is doing very badly in cricket, he knows that you are going to ask him about India's bad performance, what specific questions he does not know, but the broad theme of course he knows.

While the topics selected for discussion are solely from the point of saleability, the selection of guests or Panelists for such shows also rests on how much on screen drama can be created. There is also a candid acceptance that one of the primary motives of such discussions is to create on air drama. A majority of the guests invited to the channel are plain high on rhetoric. Their theatrics adds noise to the debate and becomes its selling point. The anchors of the debate shows also encourage shrill discussions to create conflict that turns debates into mudslinging matches. Besides the tone of moderation by anchors, the selection of themes, many a times, also raises question on the kind of discourse that the channel promotes. During the course of my fieldwork, one came across a few topics that were aired on the channel, *Salman ko vivid pasand hai* (*Salman likes controversy*), *Sena par sadakchhap siyasat* (*roadside politics over army*) and *Patharbazon se pyar, army chief par var!* (*love for stone-pelters and hate for army chief*) Such debates are essentially framed from sound bytes that the channel gathers on a particular day. There is no research that is undertaken by the team and the debate is presented as a combat match between the speakers. The anchors deliberately make the speakers fight and many a times name calling is also allowed on air. In *Aaj Tak*, sound bytes become theme or subject for debates and deliberations. Similarly, tweets by politicians, activists, leaders, sportspersons, actors, etc. also become talking points on the channel. This shows the lackadaisical attitude of the channel to have meaningful and critical discussions that enrich the discourse in the society at large.

Figure 9: A sound bite as a topic for debate on *Aaj Tak*.



(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEAj7azSvo4>)

Figure 10: A tweet as a topic for debate on *Aaj Tak*.



(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEl7YjB3nxU>)

4.4 The Research Team

As stated previously a debate show involves posing questions and counter questions to the Panelists. Similarly a documentary involves unravelling the hidden or little known facets of an issue or theme. Hence, it becomes pertinent to know as to how anchors and editors prepare for their shows. What kind of research or investigation is involved in producing a discussion or a documentary based show? Sanjay Bragta describes the research process at *Aaj Tak* as follows. He says,

We have a dedicated research team who do research on topics selected for discussions. We also have a data team who do data analysis. Then we also have file footage. The work of the research team is to prepare explainers (explaining the key facts and figures of a story) for any story that comes in. If there is upcoming judgement, then they prepare a brief history, what charges, which parties involved, the team also flag off important data from the history. Our Group has lot of file footage created over the years. For any story, we first go through our footage archives. You ask for research on any topic, they must be a brief made on it. We just add two to three recent points in it. Additions to those briefs are also done through latest articles in India Today magazine. If the relevant data is not found in the magazine then we pick from other sources and state the sources.

Adding to how the research generated is actually put into practice during the shows, Rahul Kanwal remarks,

We have a very strong research desk and then once we pick on a particular guest, we very quickly start looking at everything he has been saying, everything he has been doing, over the last several weeks and months. Those issues provide us with fodder around which we then start researching his position, facts, law and then according to that we come together with a list of questions, which we believe are questions that we should ask him. We also think of what his response maybe to each of those questions and we try and stay one step ahead, by thinking that if he says this in response then what will be a follow up question. So we think of a question, we think of a follow up, we break it down into different topics and issues and that is how we do the show.

Talking about how researching for content differs from one show to the other, Sweta Singh, cites her experience to highlight the kind of background preparations that is carried on for producing shows like *Vandemataram*. Like the *NDTV* anchors, she claims that anchors of *Aaj Tak* also have to read a lot of books while working on feature stories. According to her,

We read a lot of books. For example if I talk of *Vandemataram*, I will tell you about an episode on Vijayant Thapar, where Vijayant starts with singing, 'Chalte Chalte' (a bollywood song) which is just audio because we got that audio from his father who on his death got a walkman with a cassette which had recording of songs. So these are things people will never know about. So I spoke to his father, mother. We spoke to people of his unit who survived the battle. And then again very limited literature that is available. So you read that, you talk to the journalists who

cover that war. So this is the kind of research that we can go about if we are doing shows on something where shows have never been made on. We started from the scratch by surfing the internet and found about all Param Vir Chakra and Maha Vir Chakra awardees. So we went through that list. There are certain familiar names which you pick. There are certain battles you talk about and then you see that one story looks interesting. What is this story all about? Then you will have to go and do a basic reporter's job.

However, journalists like Punya Prasun Bajpai equate the research in a newsroom to that of google search. He says, rather dejectedly,

Research bhi hamare yahan jo hai, woh system google wala hi hai, kamovesh sare office main yehi hai. Toh google ka research kitni madaat karta hai, yeh toh apne aap pe ek sawal hai. Baki research ka matlab yeh hota hai ki jaise bahut kam log jante hai ki, jaise aap mauka mile toh jaror padhiye, jisne Indira Gandhi ki Biography likhi hai, Pupul Jayakar. Kyunki Pupul, Indira Gandhi ke saath kaam karti thi, unhone Indira Gandhi ki kuch cheezon ko quote kiya hai, maslan, quote kiya hai usne 1971 main Indira Gandhi ne rupaiye ki value kam ki thi, toh uss samay unhone rashtra ke naam sandesh diya tha. Aab app us sandesh ko padheye aur Modi ne jis din demonetization kiya us din ke sandesh ko padhiye. Toh aapko lagega copy paste hain. Toh Modi apne aap ko national way main rakhne ke liye, is Hindustan ke un logon ka adhyan zaroor kar rahen hai jisko pehchan mili is desh main. Unke positive cheezon ko bhi lete honge. Toh hamare dimag main sawal yeh aata hai ki, Modi ka jab bhi hum koi bhi rachna karte hain screen par, toh us adhyan main chale jaate hai, jo google main nahi hai, uske liye aapko study chahiye. Toh hamare yahan jo Researchers aate hai, who computer chala jaante hai aur google dekhna jaante hai, aur usko kaam shabdon main laake aapko de saakte hain. Woh sirf yehi kar sakte hain. Kyunki Researcher ke liye kuch aur bi cheeze chahiye'.

(The research is on our office is google based. So, to talk of how fruitful that kind of research is, is to get into another discussion. To give you one example, Pupul Jayakar is the author of Indira Gandhi's biography. She used to work with Mrs. Gandhi and hence had a deep insight of her life. So when Mrs. Gandhi devalued our national currency in 1971 and the speech which she delivered on that occasion was similar to what Narendra Modi said during demonitization in 2016. Modi speech's was a copy and paste of Mrs. Gandhi's speech. So it can be inferred that Modi wants to place himself in the list of famous personalities of India. So whenever I listen to Modi, I go back to the history to find his connection with the past. Such insights will not be available on google. It will only come through reading literature. So, the kind of Researchers that we have, only know how to operate a computer and google data that is asked for. They can just do this much. Proper research demands much more).

Journalists across news channels claim that reading up literature is an essential part of their profession. This helps them in getting a proper understanding of issues being debated. It also helps in contextualizing the issue at hand within the large discourse in society. While self preparation definitely creates an edge, the organizational back up in terms of accessing data, figures, file footage, interview tapes, archives, analysis, presentation, also add on to the discussions. Talking specifically about *Aaj Tak*, it is a part of the TV Today group. The TV Today group also has ventures in the print and digital media. The first product from the TV

Today group was the news magazine *India Today* which was launched in 1975. Having been in the business for over 50 years, *India Today* magazine does serve as an archival treasure for the group. This is useful for both its English and Hindi news channel when the focus is on generating data on vital historical issues like *Babri Masjid*, Sikh Riots of 1984, Mandal agitation, Emergency of 1975 and a host of other issues that narrate the story of our nation. On the other hand, one can also see the lack of proper research on issues that are debated on prime time every night. When sound bytes on social media become the topic of discussion, it rules out the need to invest time and energy on framing debate points. The mad rush for breaking news first without background check and investigation and for framing ill baked views does put the research team under questioning.

4.5 The Production Team

Like in all news channels, the production team in *Aaj Tak* coordinates with the other teams like editorial for editing the show, audience research cell for audience, graphics for making tickers and slugs, guest coordination for fixing guests, Production Control Room (PCR) for show recording, logistics for arranging logistics for crew and guests for outdoor shoots etc. to streamline all inputs. Any content that goes on air is approved by the production team in consultation with the anchor. In short, the main aim of the production team to bind together the fine line of content with presentation so that the essence of the show remains.

V

Influence of Social Media

Talking about the larger issue of how social media is influencing news media, Rahul Kanwal remarks,

I think, the world always evolves. Social media is a reality now, everybody tracks social media very closely, and trends and stories on social media are often reflected on television as is the case the other way round. Lot of what social media is talking about that is going viral on social media is stuff that we have done in television. I think it is a relationship which works both ways, and social media has made the debate shriller, more polarized than before, and that is a reality which one cannot ignore, everybody has a very strong opinion now because they have a chance to voice it. Earlier people may have had opinions but didn't really have a platform to voice it on. So there is that echo chamber that which comes into play. But that apart, I think television and social

media will both continue to exist. Both feeding off each other, both exerting pulls and pressure on each other, which will be a part of the way things are.

There are two facets of the social media and traditional news media relationship. First, social media does dictate the manner in which television debates are framed. Second, it also impacts the media professionals at a personal level. Sanjay Bragta, explains how due to the advent of social media, the profiling (branding) of journalists takes place on a day to day basis. He remarks,

Today the biggest need of the hour is the credibility of media houses. Every journalist's social profiling is open to the public. Your shows, reporting, everything can be downloaded from youtube. Your tweets are also open to the public. So profiling keeps happening and one has to maintain credibility. In the long run, credibility pays but then there are some elements who blow with the wind. So if there is rightist approach then they will turn that way and if left then that way. Such type of journalism is very harmful for democracy as well as for them. As long as journalists have credibility they have value. Once you lose credibility then you become a prostitute only. People get an opportunity to label us as prostitute, but there are prostitutes in our fraternity.

Sweta Singh talks of her experience of how labelling/ profiling/branding of journalists happen on social media, especially twitter. She says,

I am very inactive on social media. I am a hardcore nationalist. I come from a family of Army men. The moment I say India, the moment I say patriotism, the moment I say Ram, I am branded a right-wing. So you are yourself forcing people to be right-wing. And what is wrong with right-wing, when there is a thriving left-wing in the country for so many years? Everybody is entitled to a point of view. My only point is if the so called right-wing are opposing my show *Ishwar ek Khoj* because they think I am maligning *Ishwar* by saying that we need proof, and I am being targeted by left as well, that means I am being neutral.

Within the Hindi news segment, shows on social media are prominent. For instance, *ABP News* airs a show *Viral Sach* that does a fact checking of the videos that go viral on social media. Similarly, in *Aaj Tak* there is a show *Social Media @Aaj Tak* which showcases news and videos that trend on twitter and other social media applications. Responding to how information and videos circulating on social media has become news content for channels, *Punya Prasun Bajpai* says,

Aaj kal social media pe programme bhi aane lage hai. Hamne dekha *ABP News* ne shuru kiya hai, *Aaj Tak* main bhi shuru kiya hai, social media se juda 30 minutes ka programme. *Aaj Tak* main weekly hota hai, *ABP* roz karta hai, jo video viral ho gayee hai uska saach kya hai. Toh uska matlab yeh hai ki use jude darshak to hain hi, lekin doosri sthiti yeh bhi hai ki, jab social media main koi cheez aati hai, uski jaach parak toh hoti hogi, karte honge na? soochanao ki awajahi toh aap nahi rok sakte. Information technology ke daur main, aap yeh toh nahi rok sakte

hai ki yeh khabar aayegi aur yeh nahi. Social media jo hai woh koi editorially run nahi hai..uska koi editor toh nahi hai na. usme information freely aa rahi hai, toh agar cheeze freely aa rahi hai toh woh apke editors pe depend karta hai ki woh use kaise dekhten hai.

(These days we have television programmes on social media. I have seen one such programme on ABP News. *Aaj Tak* also has a similar programme. They check the veracity of the videos that have gone viral on social media. This means that there is a section of audience that watches such shows. Such videos should also be verified. In today's time, one cannot stop the flow of information. You cannot say this news is allowed and that news is not allowed. Social media is not run editorially. It does not have any editor. Information comes freely on social media and it is upto the editors how they use this information).

Bajpai also talks of how the government is actively colluding with non state actors and using social media to create false narratives on issues. He says,

Mushkil yeh hai ki jab, State hi aise madhyamon ko hathyar bana le toh tab aap kya karenge. Toh yeh mushkil hai ki abhi tak, jinko shaabad nahi mile the, state ne unke hisse ki baat kehke unko legalized kar diya hai. Aur who jab legalized ho gaye, to unme aur takat aa gaye, waise baat karneke liye. Toh yeh mushkil hai, journalism hamari isiliye zyaada mushkil main hai kyunki agar is desh ka Pradhan Mantri bhi twitter aur social media ko aadhar bana raha hai, tab aap kya karenge. Iske upar koi restriction nahi hai, yah koi editorial control nahi hai. Toh yeh kaam, agar aap aur bade background main chale jao, toh Indira Gandhi ne jab Congress ko Congress (I) banaya, toh unhone Kamraj ko bhi bahar kar diya aur unhone party ke bahar se samarthan liya. Yehi kam Modi ne kiya, BJP ke logon se nahi, Delhi manin aake ke unhone, BJP ke bahar khade logon ko manyata dete hue, us class ko khada kar diya, jisko zubaan nahi mili thi. Who chahe nationalism ke naam pe ho ya kisi bhi naam pe ho. Even media main phi un logon ko khada kar diya, jinko space nahi tha. Toh aab State agar woh kar raha hai toh aap State ko counter kaise karoge? Who toh chunni hui sarkar hai. Aab yahan par ladai shuru hoti hai. Aap keh sakte ho ki kuch logon unke khilaf hai aur kuch logon unke samarthan main hai. Hamara kehna hai ki khilaf main koi nahi hai, critique hai, critically cheezon ko analysis karte hain journalists, toh humlog wohi kaam kar sakta hain. Hamme ka matlab ki X PM bane ya Y PM bane, hamare liye yeh matter nahi karta, hamare liye toh PM matter karta hai. PM ko is paad main rehke kya karna chahiye aur kya nahi. Usme aaj Modi baitha hai, parson Manmohan Singh, use hame kya matlab hai.

(The state is using social media for its own means. It has given voice to people who never had any voice and using them to build false narratives of issues like nationalism and other such issues. Since the state is so powerful, how does one counter such tactics? The government is democratically elected. Some people support it and some people oppose. I think we journalists do not oppose it but try to question it. We try to understand it critically. It does not matter which person occupies the highest chair. What matters is how does that person who holds that post fulfil the duties assigned to him/her?)

The discussion on the relationship between *Aaj Tak* and social media highlights some interesting aspects. First, like all news channels in Hindi segment, *Aaj Tak* also has its own show on social media featuring news and videos trending through the day. There is also an open acceptance that news circulating on social media does creep into the news programming of the

channel. Second, social media has put professional and personal life of journalists open for public scrutiny. Profiling of journalists takes place on an everyday basis and they are subjected to vile threats and abuses online. Third, the government actively supports such vilification. It has also propped up non state actors who smoothly carry on the task of circulating fake and doctored news and videos to build up false narratives on vital issues. Such acts have fuelled the growth of reactionary and divisive nationalism that has seeped into all forms of communication in the society at large.

VI

Ownership and Editorial Policy

Aaj Tak news channel is owned by the TV Today Network Limited which is a subsidiary of Living Media India Ltd. Reportres Without Borders (2019) released a report which showcases the ownership structure of the TV Today Network. According to its report, 'Living Media India holds 56.92% stake in TV Today Network Ltd, Aroon Purie holds 0.49% stake, the remaining 42.58% shares are owned by public. The shareholders of Living Media India Limited are the World Media private Limited (48.15%), IGH holding Private Limited (41.50%) and Aroon Purie and family (10.35%). Purie family through Living Media India Limited holds 5.94% share of TV Today Network Ltd. 100% share of World Media Private Limited is owned by Purie Family: Aroon Purie (52.97%) his wife Rekha Purie (24.17%), Kalli Purie, daughter of Aroon Purie (7.62%), Koel Purie the daughter of Aroon Purie (7.62%) and Ankoor Purie the son of Aroon Purie (7.63%) and through this company Purie family owns 27.4% of TV Today Network Ltd of which Aroon Purie (14.32%), Rekha Purie (6.53%), Kalli Purie (2.04%), Koel Purie (2.04%) and Ankoor Purie, the son of Aroon Purie (2.06%). So, the total the stake of Aroon Purie and family in TV Today Network Ltd is 33.83%. 100% share of IGH holding Private Limited is owned by Essel Mining and Industries Limited. Shares of Essel Mining and Industries Limited is split between 12 companies: Manav Investment and Trading Co. Ltd (10.19%), Gwalior Finance Corporation Ltd. (2.03%), Central India Industries Ltd (2.03%), Rameshwara Jute Mills Ltd (0.77%), Bharat Arogya and Gyan Mandir (1.46%), Birla Holdings Pvt Ltd (3.75%), Umang Commercial Company Pvt. Ltd (12.00%), Meenakshi Steel Industries (2.89%), Mansoon Trading Co. Ltd (3.08%), Jatayu Textiles and Industries Ltd (2.89%), TGS Investments and Trade Pvt Ltd

(12.65%), Surya Abha Investments Pvt Ltd (Singapore) 44.30% and 3 Individuals Kumar Mangalam Birla (0.96%), Rajshree Birla (0.45%), Neerja Birla (0.50%). Shareholding of all the above-mentioned companies are very complex and majority of the share of those companies are owned by other companies. However, a pattern has been noticed where members of Kumar Mangalam Birla family own some percentage of stake in all those companies. Moreover, we have been able to calculate 8% share of Birla family in TV Today Network Ltd but it can be inferred that the family owns indirectly all of the shares of IGH Holding Private Limited. Hence, it can be concluded that the shares of TV Today Network Ltd is owned by Aroon Purie and family (33.79%) through multiple companies, the Public (42.58%) and Kumar Mangalam Birla family (8%). As mentioned above 15.62% shares are possibly owned by the Birla Family,¹⁶⁵. The network has wide range of activities in the print, television and digital platform. In the print media business, the group offers reputed publications like *India Today* news magazine, *Readers Digest*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Men's Health*, *Business Today*, *Mail Today*. In the television sector, it broadcasts news channels like *India Today*, *Aaj Tak Tez* and *Dilli Aaj Tak*. It also owns digital news websites like *DailyO*, *Lallantop*, *OddNaari*. The radio channel Oye 104.8 FM is also part of the TV Today network.

Commenting on the editorial policy of *Aaj Tak*, Sanjay Bragta says,

Whatever story comes to us, we first check facts. We check what proof we have. We try to give the version of the two sides. And that is how we proceed with a story.

Rahul Kanwal links the editorial stance of the channel to its ownership. He says that the Chairman of India Today Group, Aroon Purie has been a journalist himself and hence has an eye for news. Talking about how the owners influence editorial policy of the channel, he remarks,

Our ownership is very transparent and very open. Both Aroon Purie and his daughter Kalli Purie are very actively involved in news. I have been here for about 15 years. There has never been an occasion where any story has been taken off because of pressure from any politician or businessmen. All kind of content is carried here. India Today is one of the very few media sorganization, which is very transparent, very open and we carry all kinds of stories. At different points in time, the BJP is upset with us, sometimes AAP is upset, sometimes Congress is upset with us, so that keeps varying and I think it reflects the fact that we are genuinely non-partisan in the way that we do our news.

¹⁶⁵For more on the shareholding pattern of TV Today Network, see <https://rsf.org/en/news/media-ownership-monitor-who-owns-media-india>, accessed 4 June, 2019.

Kanwal also mentions how the overall editorial policy of the channel translates into practice by its employees. Referring specifically to how the faces of the channel position themselves on air, he says,

Firstly, there has to be a certain amount of freedom, every anchor lends his own personality to the broadcast, and that is something we encourage. But it is not as if all our anchors, have the same opinion, they all look at stories differently, there is no one opinion which can be imposed, that is just impossible, there is of course a broad box of what is appropriate and what is not, what is the behavior that behooves India Today group and what is not. In that larger spectrum, there is a lot of freedom to do what one wants. I mean everybody has the space to do things that he would like to and that is not something which is boxed in or curtailed, of course, there is behavior which is unacceptable, so nobody can cross that line, but in that larger domain, people are free to do what they want.

By citing her personal experience, Sweta Singh remarks on how the channel's editorial policy gives a free hand to its employees. She says,

I can tell you about myself. Since, the ownership always had a journalistic background, so we never had a problem. We have run news stories about his best of friends an example being Salman Khurshid, who was a very good friend of Aroon Purie. Mr.Poorie had such strong journalistic ethics that he never ever interfered in editorial content. I have spent almost 15 years in journalism with *Aaj Tak* and never have I taken his permission to run a particular story. It is always the editorial team which takes a call.

While journalists at their personal level claim that there have freedom to work as they want, such claims necessarily don't turn out to be true. Organizational policies are strictly to be followed by its employees. This means that what they say on air or what they tweet has to be within the prescribed limits set by the organization. This becomes crucial especially in the age of social media where personal opinion of journalists on public platform leads to conflict in newsrooms. Stating the social media policy of the TV Today group, Kallie Purie, Vice Chairperson, TV Today, said,

The policy is whatever we can't publish or broadcast should not be put up in the personal handles of the journalist or the anchors. That is the social media policy widely circulated but very often that we say is not followed to the T. And if I send an email everyday then it is freedom of press. So I am walking a very thin line. And there is a problem of private and public blurring on social

media. It is a very new space for all of us which we are working towards it. What is public or private is up for debate. That is our social media policy¹⁶⁶.

This statement showcases how journalists in the network have to adhere to guidelines that monitor their social media behaviour. Punya Prasun Bajpai offers a rather candid assessment of how TRPs are the sole criteria that determine the editorial position of the channel. On being asked about who decides the editorial take of his show *Dustak*, he remarks,

Channel ka sirf ek hi dabav hota hai, app jo programme kar rahe hai uski TRP aa rahi hai ki nahi. Kyunki wahi dhanda hai, wohi unka business hai. Aur hamara ulta mana hai ki jab aap content wise bahut rich honge toh aap TRP ki taraf kyun dekhenge. Toh hum TRP dekhte bhi nahi hai. Hamari koi ruchi usme rehti nahi hai. Lekin kamovesh hamari programme ki TRP ho ya na ho, us time slot main number 1 hi rehti hai. Kabhi kabhi beech main ek adh baar number two ho gaya, jis samay Modi ka bhasaan kahin chal raha hai, ya jo bhi ho raha hai, toh kuch agar lokpriya cheez ho rahi hai. Iska matlab yeh hai ki, channel ka nahi hota hai, who aapke khud ka initiative hota hai, aur yeh initiative hamne haar jagah liya hai.

(Channel has just one pressure and that is TRPs. TRPs is business. I am not too keen for TRPs. I aim to provide good content. I believe that if the content is good then it will automatically fetch good TRPs. Incidentally, the TRPs of my show have always been high except on some occasions where PM's speech is live or something more popular is on air.)

Further, talking of how he is in charge of what goes on air during his show, he says,

Dustak shuru kiya tha 2004/05 main. Us samay badi bhari bharkam team hoti thi, lekin dheere dheere hamne cheezen collect karni shuru ki aur khus ko kendrit kar diya. Kendrit karne ka matlab hota hai ki, voice over bhi khud kijiye aap, toh woh ek kahaani lagti hai. Aur hamare programme main dekhenge doosre ka voice over bhi nahi hota. Doosra aapke mind main design rehna chahiye, kyunki hamari badi ruche editing main bhi hai, kaise edit hona chahiye, screen pe kya hona chahiye, viewer ko kya pasand hai, yeh sab hum sochte rehte hai. Yeh soch hamesha hona chahiye. Television main aapko woh samajh aani chahiye. Toh humko lagta hai ki yeh sthiti, kahin na kahin woh individual level pe provoke karti hai, ke aap acha karo jab aapko space mili hai. Isme koi rok tok nahi hai. Rok tok tabhi hoti hai jab TRP neeche aa jati hai. Humne kabhi aisa laga nahi ki koi editorial policy hai. Editorial policy toh badi clear hoti hai ki aap journalism hi karoge. Aur humko lagta hai ki chunki Aroon Purie iske Editor-in-chief hain, woh khud journalist rahen hai. India Today unhone emergency ke daur main shuru kiya, toh unko itni samaj hai.

¹⁶⁶Kallie Purie was speaking at the India Today Conclave in 2018. For more, refer to, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-conclave-2018/story/when-a-politician-grilled-journalists-at-india-today-conclave-2018-1186193-2018-03-10>, accessed 11 March, 2018

(Dustak started in 2004/05. That time it had a big team. Over time I started putting in more effort. I do my own voice overs. I also look after my editing. I try to keep experimenting different styles. I feel that if one gets his own space independent space for showcasing his or her work then the effort shows. I do not have any editorial restrictions. Questions are asked when TRPs are low. Our editorial policy is very clear, we have to do journalism. And since our Editor-in-chief Aroon Poorie has been a journalist himself, he understands the requirements of the profession. He has started his career during the Emergency years and so he knows what is required in journalism).

Like *NDTV*, the owner of TV Today group Mr. Aroon Poorie is a former journalist. The journalists working in the channel give him the the credit for upholding the journalistic spirit in the overall functioning of the group. While the group does not align itself closely with any political ideology per se, it is tightly controlled in the grips of the ratings war. There is an open acceptance of this by the journalists working in the channel. They clearly state that their news organization is a business entity that works for garnering higher ratings which translate into monetary profits. The *TV Today* brand of journalism is designed much like the American media system where journalism has turned into a business venture. This has resulted in an erosion of media being a fourth pillar of democracy.

VII

***Aaj Tak* and the Government**

Sanjay Bragta describes the prevailing relationship between media and government as,

The relationship is not very good. This government is very secretive. Most of the stories do not come through the sources. The stories come either from official government handles on twitter or comes as a shock like a late night speech of the Prime Minister. Ministers are fighting with journalists, calling them names, prostitutes. So it is not a healthy relationship.

Rahul Kanwal talks of how successive governments have had a different kind of relationship with the TV Today network. He remarks,

Every government that has been in power had a different relation with our network. For example Kejriwal thinks we are very pro BJP, BJP thinks we are very pro-Kejriwal, Congress thinks we are very pro everyone except them, so if everybody is upset, I think that it is something great, problem would be if only one is upset and the other is very happy. But if everybody is equally upset then that is fine. So we have got different talent, different positions, different anchors, different roles, different kind of content which caters to the entire gamut. And that is something that we are very proud of, there is no one view which prevails, everybody has his voice and view, and everybody's view goes on air. So I think that shows the plurality which is India, it reflects the diversity of India, and that is what we reflect on air.

Adding to this Sweta Singh says,

We have learnt to live with the labelling which takes place. There was a time when we were called AAP Tak instead of Aaj Tak when there was a lot of Arvind Kejriwal news running. Then when BJP started winning, they used to bring out morphed pictures of anchors saying see this journalist supports BJP or Congress or AAP. Everybody has become thick skinned, if you know you are doing the right thing, as an individual or the channel knows they are doing the right thing it doesn't matter really.

Talking about how the labelling of channel does not impact its functioning, Punya Prasun Bajpai says,

Yeh labeling agar hoti hai toh uski ek umar hogi na? Hum log label the ki Manmohan Singh ke khilaf hai. Hum log BJP ke log the. 2010-2014 ke daur main. Aur aab 2014-17 tak hum log anti-Modi hain. Toh iska koi upaya nahi hai. Mera yeh kahana hai ki long term vision hota hai journalism ka jo chalte rehta hai. Usme agar aap isko leke ladai ladne lage ki aap kahan khaadhe hai, toh humko lagta hai ki, app journalism nahi kar payeega, sivay iske ki safai dete rahiyega. Iska koi matlab nahi hai. Apna kaam karte raheye, jisko samajhna hai woh samjhega aur nahi samajme main aa raha hai toh hum man lenge ki journalism dead ho gaye hai. Humlog koi doosra dhanda khoj lenge. Isme aur kya kar sakte hai. Toh phir bhi mera mana hai ki, State ko bhi ek vibrancy chahiye toh, usko bhi apne critics chahiye. Agar koi criticize karega hi nahi Modi ko toh, toh Modi toh agle hi din maar jayega.

(Labeling of channels is short lived. We were once labelled as anti-manmohan Singh and pro-BJP during 2010-14. Now in 2017 we have been labelled anti-Modi. There is no way out from this labelling. Journalism has a long term vision and if we keep justifying where we stand then we can never do journalism. One should keep doing one's work. I do think that the state needs its share of criticism. If there is no criticism then Modi may die the next day).

He further talks of the media-business-politics nexus and remarks,

Yeh lag sakta hai aur ho sakta hai ki channelon main bias hai. Lekin aapko yeh samajhna hoga ki, alag alag news channels ke alag alag businesses bhi hote hai, aur business ke talukat government se bhi ho sakte hai, toh us jagah pe ho sakta hai ki woh manage bhi karte hon. Lekin pir bhi hamen lagta hai ki woh kitna bhi manage karte honge, lekin agar unke yahaan bhi koi shaks aisa ho jaye joh behetar TRP de raha hai, jisko manyata mil rahi hai, aur aapke sansthan ki saak ban rahi hai, toh kyun rokega. Kul mila ke media toh chalana hi hai na. Toh bharat main abhi aisa aaya nahi hai, kisike kehne par government pareshan ho jaye aur bole use nikalo. Yeh hua tha Indira Gandhi ke samay, jab Kuldip Nayar ko hataya gaya tha, yeh hua tha. Lekin woh period aisa bhi tha jahan Indian Express ne ladai bhi ladi thi. Toh alag alag daur ki alag alag sthithiyen hoti hai. Maujudah waqt main, kyunki corporatization itna ho gaya hai, ki woh ek, koi policy nahi hoti hai. Corporatization ka matlab yeh hota hai ki jahan, profit based economy work karne lagti hai, wohi editorial policy ho jati hai. Toh yeh sthithi hoti hai, lekin mere khayal se waise sansthanon main hoti hai, beech main aapne dekha hoga, builders ke channel aa gayen hai, jaise Ambanis ne channel le liya, woh chala rahen hai. Toh ek lakir toh unki apni hoti hogi, ya nahi bhi hoti hogi, toh editor jo hoga, uska one-to-one jab hua hoga, usko bola loga ki ek lakir maintain karna, toh woh karta hoga. Lekin phir bhi hamara yeh mana hai, ki who kitni bhi badi lakir kheech le, lekin Ambanis bhi jaante hai ki, Prime Minister 5 saal ke baad badal sakta hai, uska dhaanda toh nahi

badlega na. Toh usiliye who sahej kar rakhta hai journalists ko bhi. Toh hamen lagat hai yeh check and balance ka khel hai.

(One has to understand that different news channels have different business interest too and these interests might be linked to the government too. But I do believe that whatever be the level of government interference, if a channel gets good TRPs then they will not toe the government line. However, corporatization is an issue that needs to be looked into. Corporatization means that profits determine your editorial policy. Now Ambanis also run a channel. There cannot forever be pro the current government because ultimately after five years a new government may be in power. So it is all about maintaining the checks and balances).

The relationship between *Aaj Tak* and the government is one of bonhomie. The channel whips up a majoritarian narrative that gels with the right-wing government narrative. Many news channels like *TimesNow*, *Republic TV*, *India TV*, *Zee News* are seen parroting the government narrative on every issue. They have become government mouthpiece. An interesting aspect is that while government is controlling the narrative on many news channels, it is also blocking the flow of information from its side. As one journalist said, ‘the government runs on twitter, our Prime Minister communicates to the public via twitter’. The majoritarian government supports spread of majoritarian narrative and a majority of news channels have grabbed this opportunity with both hands. The audience survey on news viewership ranks four factors in descending order responsible for this media bias towards the government- to gain power and influence, to popularize their political agenda, to be ahead in the media competition and to garner higher ratings. The bias ensures that news channels meet the above listed requirements for making their newsmaking ventures profitable.

VIII

***Aaj Tak* Model of Journalism**

Like *NDTV*, *Aaj Tak* has also been present in the Indian television news mediascape for a longtime. *Aaj Tak* started its journey from being a 20 minutes bulletin on *DDMetro*. Right from the beginning *Aaj Tak* positioned itself as a fast paced and visually appealing news bulletin. This instantly appealed to the viewers who had only access to the dull and staid news of *Doordarshan*. Over a period of time, the team at *Aaj Tak* worked on making the bulletin more viewer-friendly. Much emphasis was laid on designing and presentation of the bulletin in order to connect with the audience. The language of the bulletin was also crucial for its positioning as a

common man's news channel. *Aaj Tak* was more focussed on doing news that is popular and catered to a large segment of viewership in small cities and towns and middle and lower middle class strata. Technologically also, *Aaj Tak* was ahead of its competitors. Besides having a complete newsroom automation system, it had also invested in mobile outside broadcast vans that could produce live broadcasts outside the studio on short notice. This helped in procuring live images from the site of an event. Post 2001, the Hindi news channel sphere witnessed intense competition with the operation of channels like *STAR News*, *Zee News*, *India TV*. The launch of other news channels led to two things-viewership fragmentation and content replication. Viewers now had access to a host of Hindi news channels. They had the option of switching on to the channel that catered to their palette. However, this did not translate into news channels offering any new content. They essentially relied on copying each other's style of generating news content. Trivialization of news content became the norm. This phase led to the growth of the infotainment model of news. The three Cs- Cinema, Cricket and Crime became the central topics for content production. *Aaj Tak* also positioned itself as a family news channel. It attempted to cater to all age group and gender. Thus, besides hard news of politics, economy, foreign affairs the channel offered soft news on religion, soap operas, astrology, gadgets, health, autoshow and movies. Within the debate genre, shows like *Halla Bol* and *Dangal* are aired. Feature stories on faith and religion like *Ishwar ek Khoj*, *Adhbhut Awishwasneyan Akalapniye*, *Dharm*, valour and sacrifice like *Vande Mataram*, news analysis and commentary like *Dustak* and *Khabardaar*, news on television serials like *Saas*, *Bahu aur Betiyan* and so on are part of the *Aaj Tak* programming. The editorial policy of the channel rests on TRPs. The journalists employed by the network openly accept that the primary goal of the channel is TRPs. The debate shows aired on the channel are dramatic, noisy and shrill. The anchors encourage confrontation among the Panelists to create on-air drama. The channel promotes majoritarian views in all its deliberations and discussions. This positioning is aimed at fetching maximum TRPs. *Aaj Tak* does meet its mark as evident in the high ratings it receives week after week. Besides, news and current affairs shows aired on the channel, TV Today group also organizes a host of conclaves like *Agenda Aaj Tak*, *India Today Conclave*, *Ideaplex*, *India Today Woman's Summit*, *India Today Youth Summit*, *India Today Education Summit* and *State of the States Conclave* annually. Talking on the need for organizing such conclaves, Sanjay Bragta, says,

Television has a limitation. You can make shows only of 30 mins duration or you can do a round table. But if you want to do a special supplement on Uttar Pradesh election it is easy to do in a newspaper as you have dedicated 10 pages for it. But in television that space is lacking. So by organizing a conclave, you get the key leaders of political parties at a central location. In one place one can listen to all minds, hence conclaves are organized. These events were first started by India Today only. So slowly conclaves were started keeping in mind the election and budget. It's just like if you want to bring out a special segment for television then conclaves fit in. If budget is coming and you want to hear all voices on budget then in one place you can hear them.

Organizing conclaves is emerging as an important source of revenues for news channels. Talks and discussions by politicians, eminent citizens, civil society activists, bureaucrats, writers, and intellectuals are organized in conclaves. Such conclaves are sponsored by host of companies working in the areas of automobiles, communications, food, manufacturing and consumer goods, heavy industries, pharmaceuticals, services, entertainment. The sponsorship acts as a promotion and advertising for these companies and also showcases their efforts towards performing corporate social responsibilities. For the media houses, it provides revenue for their brand building. While media houses might claim that they are providing platform for showcasing of views and opinions, in practice, conclaves are used to generate revenue. Commenting on how such events are a win-win proposition for both media houses and their advertisers, Hartosh Bal (2017) states, 'over the past decade, many prominent Indian media houses have staked their prestige on mega-events where advertisers sponsor speakers ranging from Indian politicians to out-of-office US statemen. In recent years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has easily been a marquee draw at such events. Though questions have been raised about the dangers of breaching the wall between editorial and business, for much of the industry, these events are a win-win proposition. They attract prominent speakers who create sound bites for big media brands, in return for a platform and wider publicity; with sponsors more than willing to go along¹⁶⁷.

This chapter mapped out the *Aaj Tak* model of journalism. It showcased the various aspects that go into the production of the current affairs programming. It can be said that while the techniques involved in producing such kind of content is more or less similar across news channels, it is the representation of that content that stands out as a definitive marker of how media networks frame their respective discourses. The next chapter enters this terrain. Through

¹⁶⁷Hartosh Bal cites the examples of two media houses *BCCL* and *Hindustan Times* to illustrate how media conclaves are mutually beneficial events in contemporary times. For more, refer to <https://caravanmagazine.in/perspectives/high-profile-events-news-organisations-damage-journalistic-independence>, accessed 15 January, 2018.

a thematic analysis of issues, events, news items aired in the current affairs genre by both the sample news channels *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*, it makes a case for understanding the issue of framing of media discourses.

Chapter 7

Framing of Narrative(s): A Thematic Analysis of *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*

Production and representation of media texts together shape the nature of discourse on news channels. The previous chapters have already delineated the processes and techniques involved in the production of media texts. They showcased how a synergy of internal organizational factors along with external factors, impinged on production of media texts in news organizations. In this chapter, one shifts from production to representation of media texts and I use the term framing of narratives to put my analysis across.

Drawing from Stuart Hall's 'politics of signification' (chapter 2), it can be said that along with reporting events and occurrences, media plays an active part in framing narratives/discourses around such events. Talking specifically about the process of framing in television news media, I argue that factors like- selection of topic, selection of experts on panel, the role of the anchor, the research, if any, on the topic, the production elements like slugs, tickers, digital video graphics, twitter handles, youtube channel, blogs etc. all play a significant role in creating the meanings that get conveyed. Further, factors like organizational structures, editorial positioning, content policy, which differ from one news channel to the other, lead to the emergence of varied narratives on the same issue or topic. These narratives may either be similar or dissimilar. This depends on how each media institution defines its form of journalism. For instance, this chapter showcases how the framing of the discourse on the thematic issue of cultural politics in India¹⁶⁸ by *NDTV24x7* is markedly different to that of *Aaj Tak*. *NDTV 24x7* which has a liberal editorial positioning, framed the discussion on the theme in terms of the questioning the growing majoritarian Hindutva agenda which intends to override the constitutional and normative values. On the other hand, the editorial positioning of *Aaj Tak*, as a popular and mass based channel, got reflected in the manner in which the channel framed its discourse on the theme. It called for upholding the cultural belief and values of the majoritarian population as the law of the land. This approach was in complete sync with the hyper nationalistic politics of the right-wing groups which have got center-staged in contemporary

¹⁶⁸The term cultural politics in India is a thematic reference to grouping of the discussion on issues like cattle trade, cinema, sports and nation on both the *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*. A detailed analysis of this theme is provided in section I of this chapter.

times. The agenda of cultural nationalism does crop in many other thematic discussions aired on both the news channels.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to understand the nature of programming by doing a textual analysis of the current affairs programmes aired on the two news channels *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*. The current affairs genre consists of panel discussions, documentaries, investigative stories, audience shows which report and debate on contemporary issues. Thus, the sample for the study consists of programmes/episodes which fall under the category of current affairs. For instance, in the English news channels shows like *Agenda*, *We the People*, *Left, Right and Centre*, *The Big Fight*, *India Matters*, *Truth vs Hype* and *Reality Check* were analyzed. Similarly, in the Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak* shows like *Dustak*, *Khabardaar*, *Halla Bol* and *Adhbhut Avishwasneyan* and *Akalpaniye* were looked into. The programmes analyzed were aired on both the news channels from 27th May 2017 to 26th June 2017. This led to 31 days of viewing data. The channels were viewed on alternative days resulting in 16 days of viewing *NDTV 24x7* and 15 days of *Aaj Tak*.

While the original idea was to analyse all the shows that featured under the current affairs genre, later this approach was reworked. After preliminary study one felt that a comparative perspective on a select set of themes may be more productive. The new focus was to first look at issues which were reported and debated extensively on both the channels so that it could provide for a comparative analysis of the emerging thematic narratives. Thus issues like farmer protest, cattle trade regulation, Indian Army, statehood agitation, Presidential elections and Ayodhya dispute, Bihar education scam occupied more airtime on both the channels. Discussions on other issues like censoring cinema, cricket battle, violence against women, jobless growth took place in either channels only. However, as many topics were similar based on the theme of the discussion, they were categorized into thematic groups for better understanding and an in-depth analysis. However, it should be noted that the categorization was largely done for developing thematic narratives. This does not mean that it is a water tight compartmentalization of the issues that were aired. The issues analyzed do cross the thematic boundaries. Based on the issues that were aired on both the channels, the following thematic narratives emerged.

1. Cultural Politics in India

2. Debating Gender
3. India in World Affairs
4. Politicization of Institutions: Indian Army and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)
5. Regional Politics: *Kashmir* and *Gorkhaland*
6. Religion and Politics: The *Ayodhya* Dispute
7. State, Policies and Governance
8. The Politics of Caste Identity

These thematic narratives have been divided into eight sections. Each section provides a description of how a particular issue was framed and represented on both the English news channel *NDTV 24x7* and the Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak*. The concluding section makes a comparative assessment of the emerging similarities and dissimilarities in the discourses framed by both the channels.

I

Cultural Politics in India

In this section the focus is on cultural politics and its representation on the two news channels. The four themes that I discuss here are- the new state notification on cattle trade; cinema and censorship; sports and the Indo-Pak cricket battle and the state sponsored hyper-nationalism. Significantly, while the themes aired on both the news channels were similar, their manner of treatment or ‘framing’ was distinctly different. That culture has become a primary site for contestation in contemporary India is self evident. What is less obvious is how the same event can communicate very different meanings on different platforms.

The Notification for Cattle Trade

The first set of issues aired under this theme relate to the issue of a government order which called for regulating cattle trade for slaughter across the country. According to the notification, dated 23rd May, 2017, the Ministry of Environment, Forest had framed new rules for prevention of cattle slaughter. The notification titled the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017, banned the sale and purchase of any bovine animal (bulls,

cows, buffaloes, camel, steers and heifers) for slaughter at livestock markets across the country. However, it allowed the procurement of cattle and buffaloes for slaughter directly from farmers and not from livestock markets. It further prohibited the establishment of any animal market in a place which is situated within 25 kilometers from any state border and within 50 kilometers from any international border. The four aspects of the notification that framed the discussion on the news channels were- legal tenability, impact on agrarian economy, impact on beef export industry and its subsidiaries, and impact on dietary practices of a large section of the population.

The following are the episodes aired under the theme of cattle politics on *NDTV 24x7*.

- ‘Cattle Ban: Bending the Rules?’¹⁶⁹ - Aired on *Reality Check* on 30 May, 2017
- ‘Violence at IIT Madras: Is Beef the new campus flashpoint?’ - Aired on *The Buck Stops Here* on 30 May, 2017
- ‘Will Beef Politics hurt BJP politically?’ - Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 1 June, 2017.
- ‘Holy Cow, Unholy Politics?’ - Aired on *The Big Fight* on 3 June, 2017
- ‘Cattle Ban: Behind the Numbers’ - Aired on *Truth vs Hype* on 3 June, 2017
- ‘Beef and Bone of Contention’ - Aired on *We The People* on 4 June, 2017.

NDTV 24x7 stated that the government had failed to explain the rationale behind such notification. The channel through its investigative reporting aired in the episode titled ‘Cattle Ban: Behind the Numbers’ explained the illegality of the notification. It cited two documents-the Supreme Court order of 2015 and a Parliamentary Committee Report of April, 2017 to explain the discrepancies in the notification. The channel stated that the Supreme Court order of 2015 held legal the sale of cattle between buyer and seller as slaughter was permitted legally. It only ordered the central government to frame guidelines which ensured the legal sale of cattle in livestock markets. The channel further said that the Parliamentary Committee Report of Home Ministry April, 2017, talked of better policing along India’s border and of strengthening borders with Bangladesh and Nepal to check infiltration. This was with reference to West Bengal’s government’s purported bad handling of illegal cattle smuggling to Bangladesh. The committee only asked for a crackdown on illegal cattle hats/markets, along the India- Bangladesh border,

¹⁶⁹The online links of all episodes mentioned here, are provided in chapter 1.

and shifting them to areas within 15 kilometers of India's interiors. It did not mention of any national ban or cattle sale in the country. The anchor, Sreenivasan Jain, contested how the central government extrapolated the idea of a national ban on cattle trade based on these documents. He sounded caution by saying,

Hysteria being whipped up is not based on facts and figures. What is dangerous is the shaping of policies that is dividing the society!

Along with highlighting the illegality of the notification, the channel also showcased how the government was using the state machinery to further its divisive agenda. One of the major fallout of the notification was a series of protests in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Meghalaya and Nagaland against regulation of beef consumption. In an episode 'Violence at IIT Madras: Is Beef the new campus flashpoint?', the channel debated the issue of how beef politics had become a bone of contention in educational campuses across the country. It reported an incident, where a few organizers of a beef festival were roughed up by goons belonging to the right-wing outfits in the campus of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras. Questions like - whether such acts indicated the mainstreaming of beef vigilantism in campuses? Why is eating beef scandalous? Is such violence justified?, were posed to the panelists *Abhijeet Diwedi*, Leader, *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)*, *Sudhansu Mittal*, Spokesperson, *Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)* who represented the right-wing view point on the topic being debated. The panelists defended the violence by stating that consuming beef in private spaces was permissible. But beef consumption should not be allowed in public spaces as it hurt the sensibilities of majority of other people. They further rebuked the channel by saying,

Violence is in your mindset. You only attempt to mock the majority community which is shameful.

The right-wing attack on the channel amplified again, when the issue was debated on the show *Left, Right and Centre*. The anchor of the show *Nidhi Razdan* and the BJP Spokesperson *Sambit Patra* were locked in a heated exchange, where the BJP threatened to boycott the channel as it was running an anti-BJP agenda.

The economic repercussions of the notification were also debated on the channel. The channel stated that the government was creating problems for beef exporters as well as the tanning industry in the form of job losses. The eventuality of job loss was a blow to the Prime

Minister's promise of job creation. *NDTV 24x7* made three claims in its framing of the debate on cattle trade regulation. First, the notification on was a political decision masked in legal terms. Second, it was just a diversionary tactic by the government to deflect attention from issues like decline in jobs, dip in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and economic growth. Third, the politics on cow was being done for electoral purpose. The government was misusing the state machinery to promote its intolerant and divisive ideology.

The episodes aired on *Aaj Tak* on cattle politics are the following.

- 'Virod ke naam pe Gauvadh!' - Aired on *Halla Bol* on 29 May, 2017.
- 'Siyasi pashu ya rashtriya pashu?' - Aired on *Halla Bol* on 31 May, 2017.
- 'Gaukashi, Beef Karobar aur Siyasat' - Aired on *Halla Bol* on 2 June, 2017.

Aaj Tak claimed that cow had become *Siyasi Mata* (political mother). The notification issued by the government had led to a new political row in the country. The channel debated the row from two aspects- its cultural underpinnings and its political ramifications. Discussing the cultural underpinnings of the notification, the channel pitted the controversy over beef consumption as a geographical north-south divide in the country. It stated that while in North India the cow was worshipped, in South India it was being slaughtered and consumed in beef festivals. In the episode 'Virod ke naam pe Gauvadh!', it reported an incident in Kannur district of Kerala, where some youth Congress workers had slaughtered a cow in public. The channel ran a headline,

Sirf virodh ke naam par, kannur main bech sadak par gau vadh.

(In the name of protest, cow slaughtered in the middle of road in Kannur).

It also raised a few questions like- '*khane ki azadi ke naam par shakaharion ki samvednao par kutharaghaat kyun?*' (Why hurt the sentiments of vegetarian people in the name of freedom to eat?), '*virod karne wale kya samajik sauhard ki chinta bhul gayee?*' (why forget societal civility in the name of protest?), '*kya aise virod se samajik sadbhav nahi bigdega?*' (won't such protests lead to unrest in society?). Throughout the show, the anchor used words like '*neech harkat*' (lowly action), '*barbarta*' (cruelty) to describe cow slaughter. Her tone suggested that slaughter of cow and consumption of its meat was a barbaric and heinous act. Further,

consumption of beef was undesirable as it hurt the religious sentiments of large section of population.

From the political aspect, the channel raised the issue of why the BJP government has different cow slaughter laws in different states? And further, by invoking such notification is the government heading towards a national cow slaughter ban? The channel also credited itself for its investigative reporting which highlighted the pathetic condition of cows in a government owned cow shelter in Hingonia, Rajasthan. It stated that the Rajasthan High Court had taken cognizance of its report and passed a judgement declaring cow a national animal to prevent its slaughter.

Cinema and Censorship

The issue of curbing freedom of expression due to the non clearance of three documentaries by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for screening in the Kerala Film Festival 2017 was debated on *NDTV 24x7*. The three documentaries in question were: *The Unbearable Being of Lightness* by P.N. Ramachandran (the film was based on a series of workshops organized in the University of Hyderabad in the aftermath of Rohith Vemula suicide), *March, March, March* by Kathu Lukose (the film was about protests in Jawaharlal Nehru University in the wake of the February 2016 incident) and *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar* by Faizal NC (the film showcased the production music and visual arts by students of Kashmir University as they came to terms with life in a conflict zone).

The following episode was aired under the theme cinema and censorship on *NDTV24x7*.

- ‘Selective outrage over films on JNU and Kashmir?’ - Aired on *The Buck Stops Here* on 13 June, 2017.

NDTV 24x7 stated that the Ministry has denied permission for the screening of the three documentaries on the ground that they ‘they affected the sensitivity and integrity of the country’. It informed that under the existing rules, provocative works which do not pass censor regulations can be screened in film festivals. However, the government appears to have superseded this rule by stating that these documentaries were ‘too sensitive even to merit a private showing in a film

festival'. The channel questioned the government's motive behind such a move. It asked whether the government trying to suppress the voices that are critical of the government? Who decides what is 'sensitive'? And whether it was trying to deflect attention from more pressing issues by issuing such orders? It claimed that there appeared to be a certain commonality in the reasons being given for the non clearance of these films by the Ministry. All the films are responses to the political events that happened in the country in the past few weeks. It appeared that the government was suppressing voices which questioned its reaction to the events highlighted in the three documentaries. Besides the framing of the debate on the issue, the conduct of the debate was extremely shrill. The student activists in the panel belonged to both the left wing (Shehla Rashid, All India Student Association) and right wing (Saket Bahuguna, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad) affiliations. The debate ended up in mudslinging with each side accusing the other of trampling freedom of speech. The channel concluded the debate by stating that the hyper-nationalism appears to have permeated into every kind discourse. It has led to extreme polarization, thereby blocking any kind of meaningful or civilized discussion.

Sports and the Indo-Pak Cricket Battle

The prevalent hyperbole in television news media with regard to discussion concerning Pakistan was witnessed in *Aaj Tak*. The channel promoted a shrill, jingoistic and divisive nationalist narrative through its discussion the issue of cricket politics. It aired a debate show on the celebration of Pakistan's win over India in the final match of Champions Trophy by Kashmiri separatists. The channel disparaged the separatists over their celebrations and questioned their loyalty towards Pakistan.

The following episode was aired under the section Sports and Indo-Pak Cricket Battle on *Aaj Tak*.

- Pakistan ki jeet, deshdrohi ki 'Eid'! –Aired on *Halla Bol* on 19 June, 2017.

Aaj Tak aired a debate show on how Kashmiri separatists and their supporters were celebrating Pakistan's win in the final of Champions Trophy. The opening statements of the show by Anchor, *Anjana Om Kashyap*, set up the tone of the debate. The anchor said,

Yeh khabar cricket se judi hui, lekin judi hui un gaddaro ke saath bhi, jo Hindustan ka khana khate hai, lekin Pakistan ka gana gate hai. Pakistani team ke Champions trophy ke final main pahuchne par, na ki Kashmir main sirf jashn hua, balki Hurriyat ke neta Mirwaz Farooq ne tweet kar khushi jatayee.

(The debate is on cricket but it is also related to those backstabbers who live in India but are well wishers of Pakistan. Today when the Pakistani cricket team entered the final of the Champions Trophy, celebrations erupted in Kashmir. Not only were fire crackers busted but the separatist leader Mirwaiz Farooq took to twitter to congratulate the Pakistani cricket team).

Visuals of celebrations were flashed on the screen. Next, a tweet by the separatist leader where he was congratulating the Pakistani cricket team was put up. The channel stated that the separatists who are prematurely celebrating the festival of Eid in Downtown locality of Srinagar are supporters of the Pakistani state. It claimed,

Hurriyat ki is jashn par, pura desh gusse main hai.

(Hurriyat's celebrations have angered the entire nation).

It then went on to state this is not the first time that such celebrations by the separatists are being witnessed in the Kashmir Valley. The channel claimed that its earlier investigation had revealed how the separatists took money from Pakistan to create unrest in Kashmir. It reiterated that, time and again, the separatists have pledged their loyalty for Pakistan by disrupting peace in the Kashmir valley. It asked,

Dushman se yaari, desh se gadaari, kab tak sahega bharat.

(How long will such treachery be tolerated by India?)

The conduct of the debate was extremely shrill and noisy. One of the panelist, *Ashok Pandit*, filmmaker, gave his opening comments by saying that the cricket match between the two nations was not sports but war. The panelists from Kashmir, *Emanul Nabi*, Spokesperson, *Awami Ethihad* and *Gowhar Gilani*, Writer, were repeatedly rebuked by the anchor for saying that Kashmir is a disputed territory. Twice, the volume of their mike was lowered to silence their voice. The anchor defended this action by stating that the guests were making anti-India remarks. Besides the confrontational form of conversation, the channel also pitted the debate as for-India and anti-India discourse. In one instance, the channel maximized the windows of the two panelists, *Ashoke Pandit* and *Gowhar Gilani* and imposed a *Pandit vs Gowhar* screen shot. The

debate ended up as shouting match, thereby preventing any meaningful dialogue. The entire show was littered with statements like,

Pakistan ki jeet par, Kashmir main phoote phatake

(Kashmir erupts in celebration as Pakistan wins)

Jis haar se desh sadme main aa gaya, us par Pakistan ke pithoo aatish bazi kar rahen hai

(The loss which has plunged the entire nation into gloom has become a moment of celebration for the well wishers of Pakistan).

The channel used the plank of Indo-Pak cricket match to target first the separatists and later the Kashmiris, who it claimed harbored anti-India feelings. It used the pretext of cricket to frame Kashmiris as anti-nationals and called for strict against them as they were not loyal to their motherland¹⁷⁰.

Hyper-Nationalism

NDTV 24x7 also aired show debate on the current state of hyper nationalism prevalent in the country. The channel discussed the significance of a letter written by a group of 65 former bureaucrats to the Prime Minister *Narendra Modi*, asking him to take corrective measures to tackle growing ‘hyper-nationalism’. The bureaucrats cited series of instances like – cow vigilantism, online trolling and intimidation, religious intolerance that attempted to destroy the social fabric of the country. They further wrote that the disquiet on the part of government to take firm steps against such vicious attacks had propelled them to convey their sentiments to the Prime Minister.

The following episode was aired under the section Hyper-nationalism on *Aaj Tak*.

¹⁷⁰The negative portrayal of Kashmiri guests on most television debates is a serious issue that ought to be taken note off. I have observed that in many news channels, a discussion on an issue connected with the region of Kashmir gets quite contentious. In many news channels Kashmiris are always framed as the others: anti-nationals, trouble makers who are always plotting to against India. The Kashmiris guests on such new channels are always subjected to heckling and name calling. For more on this, read Usman Khurshid (2017) in an article ‘TV Debates and Kashmiri Panelists’, available at <http://www.risingkashmir.com/article/tv-debates-and-kashmiri-panelists> accessed on 9 October, 2018.

- ‘Hyper-nationalism growing: 65 former officers write open letter’ - Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 14 June, 2017

NDTV 24x7 debated the contents of the letter. It said that the letter was couched in strong terms. The signatories of letter were former bureaucrats who had handled issues of law and order in their careers and that these people are had written the letter with a sense of responsibility. The channel referred to contents of the letter to explain how the ascendancy of the right-wing political forces has led to the center-staging of their majoritarian and divisive agenda. It stated that the growing hyper-nationalistic tendencies like dictating dietary practices, religious intolerance, cow vigilantism, censorship of freedom of expression, online intimidation were threatening the social fabric of the nation. It furthered mentioned how the government has abdicated its responsibility of being accountable. It questioned the government’s clamping down of critical voices. It cited the instance of how Bollywood actor *Salman Khan* was viciously trolled on social media for advocating peace between India and Pakistan. The channel concluded the discussion by stating that these hyper-nationalist times, a letter written by apolitical people was becoming a political slugfest.

The debate by both the news channels on the theme of cultural politics in India resulted in the emergence of two distinct narratives. *NDTV 24x7* spoke about the rise of a right-wing nationalist cultural agenda. It stated that the ascendancy of this form of a militant and nationalist Hindutva agenda was the result of the capturing of political power by the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Through its discussions on issues like cattle trade notification, beef consumption, censorship of cinema, the channel highlighted how the current government was misusing the state machinery to promote its divisive agenda. Its investigative reporting on the cattle trade regulation exposed the illegality of the order. The channel claimed that the government was whipping up hysteria to polarize the society. Similarly, on the issue of the ban censoring the documentaries, the channel stated that the government was targeting voices which were critical of it.

On the other hand, *Aaj Tak* had an entirely different take on the theme of cultural politics. The framing of its narrative on the issue of beef consumption and cricket politics, showcased its right-wing majoritarian agenda. The framing of its discussion on the issue of beef politics

highlighted how section of media is playing a major role in transmitting the values and ideals of the dominant right-wing groups. Similarly, on the issue of cricket politics, it's demonizing of the Kashmiris as anti-nationals, gels well with the right-wing branding of all critical voices as anti-nationals. Along with making provocative statements in the debate, the channel through its use of graphics, sound bites, tweets, and videos added much to the shrill and noise on the show. Many of the debates on this theme were pre-concluded. The channel's sole attempt to frame a jingoistic narrative on cultural politics defeated the purpose of having a meaningful dialogue.

II

Debating Gender

The episodes aired under this theme focused on three aspects of the discourse on gender - violence against women, women's reproductive health and women entrepreneurship. All the debates on gender were specific to *NDTV24x7*. *Aaj Tak* did not have any discussion on the theme during the period of the fieldwork.

Violence against Women

The issue of violence against women figured was taken up thrice on *NDTV 24x7*. As mentioned earlier, the discussions on the channel centered on two kinds of violence against women- societal and state sponsored. The first debate on societal violence was in reference to a case of sexual assault on the night of 29th May, 2017 in Khanda village, near *Gurugram* in Haryana. It focused on the growing number of crimes against women and called for the need to introspect the kind of mindset which provokes such violence. The second debate was on discrimination against women. It was debated in response to a series of hunger strikes undertaken by school girls in the two districts of Rewari and Faridabad in the state of Haryana. The girls protested against lack of proper secondary level school facilities in their villages and highlighted the inefficiency of the district administration in addressing the issue. The third episode was a documentary titled *Weapon of War: The Women of Bastar* that focused on state sponsored violence against Adivasi women in the Bastar district of *Chattisgarh*. The documentary explored the ongoing war between the state and the Maoists in the state of *Chattisgarh*, through the lens of gender. It showcased how the Adivasi women in Bastar region of *Chattisgarh* had become collateral damage in the

ongoing war. It dealt at length, with brutal torture and abuse on the adivasi women by the security forces operating in the region.

The following episodes were aired under the theme of violence against women.

- ‘*Gurugram Shocker: No Country for Women*’- Aired on *Agenda* on 7 June, 2017.
- ‘Why Haryana’s school girls are on strike?’ - Aired on *Reality Check* on 7 June, 2017.
- ‘Weapon of war: The Women of Bastar’ - Aired on *India Matters* on 8 June, 2017

The first debate was on a chilling incident of sexual assault in a village near *Gurugram*. The channel reported that a woman belonging to Khanda village was raped by three men on the night of 29th May, 2017. It appeared that the woman had a tiff with her husband and she walked out of the house along with her six month old daughter at night. As she was walking towards her parents’ home in another village, she was forced into an auto rickshaw by three men. The men threw her wailing daughter on the road and took the women to a nearby field and raped her for hours. After the men left her in the field, the woman came back to the road and found her daughter lying unconscious. She then took her to a nearby hospital where the doctor declared the child dead. Unconvinced by the doctor’s report, the woman boarded a metro train and took her daughter to AIIMS hospital for a second consultation. The doctors at AIIMS too declared the child dead. The woman then took the child and boarded the metro back to *Gurugram*. She got down at MG Road metro station and then went to her husband with the dead child. She did not inform her husband that she was raped, fearing that he might disown her. Finally after two days, she told her husband about the incident and they went to the nearby police station and filed a First Information Report (FIR). After describing the gut wrenching account of the women, the channel raised questions about the lack of women safety in India. It stated that this incident should not be seen as a *Gurugram* specific but as a pan-Indian issue impacting women. It raised an extremely vital question about the need in society to introspect how it treats its women. It stated that despite stricter laws in place, there is an urgent need to understand the mindset that perpetrates such violations. It raised a question to the audience- what are we as part of this society doing to address such violence?

The second debate was a reality check on the education status of women in India. In an episode ‘Why Haryana’s school girls are on strike?’, the channel addressed the issue of gender discrimination in education and exposed the hollow claims of the government’s much hyped scheme of *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*. It aired a debate on the issue against the backdrop of two incidents of hunger strikes organized by girl students in the two districts of Rewari and Faridabad in the state of Haryana. The channel compared the girl students with the character from the movie *Wonder Women* and commended their courage in breaking the stereotype of being suppressed and silenced by *Khap Panchayats* in the region. The channel stated that the girls demanded the state government to provide better secondary schools in their villages. In the absence of schools in their vicinity the girls were forced to travel long distance to other places. Besides incurring the travelling expense, the girls complained of sexual harassment by boys and men, especially in public transport. The channel added that such problems discouraged many girls to pursue higher education. It further stated that these girls belong to a region where getting married at an early age was the norm. Moreover the staggering crime rates in the region were also a cause of worry. It stated that the region has the highest number of gang rapes at 204 cases per lakh women. Regressive social practices coupled with high crime rates had compounded the problems of the girl students in the state. The channel claimed that this problem is not just limited to Haryana. Across the country the dropout rate among girl students is a whopping 8.4 crore. The channel said that it is imperative that the state government tackles the problem at two fronts, first provide proper educational facilities and second, improve law and order for women safety in the state.

The documentary *Weapons of War: The Women of Bastar* focused on the ugly reality of brutal sexual abuse that was subjected on Bastar’s improvised tribal women. It showcased how Adivasi women had become collateral damage in the ongoing war between the state and the Maoists. The channel spoke to some of the survivors who narrated their ordeal. The women recalled few actions like squeezing breasts to check lactation, stripping for body search, hurling abuses, giving death threats as some of the standard operating procedures used by the security agencies in this region. The channel interviewed *Mahesh Kunjam*, Leader, *Adivasi Mahasabha*, who described the abuse. He remarked,

Jab forces gaon main jaate hai, toh wahan koi rehta nahi hai. Agar ek do ghar main koi mahila ya bache dikh jaate hai, toh unhe puchte hai, tumhare aadmi kahan gaye hai. ussi beech bahut aise ghatnayee ho jati hai. Qarib qarib barah ghaante tak, ladkiyan forces ke kabje main rehti hain.

(When security forces enter a village, the men would run away for the fear of getting arrested or killed. If some women are left behind, then the forces would pick them up and take them to their camps and interrogate them for up to 12 hours).

The documentary also highlighted how along with the tribal women, the people who work to bring them justice are also intimidated by the agencies, particularly by the Inspector General of Police for Bastar Subdivision, *S.R.P. Kalluri*. The channel spoke to a few journalists, social activists and academicians who worked in this region and they narrated their experiences of abuse and intimidation. It played out an interview with *Prof. Nandini Sundar*, Sociologist, Delhi University, where she spoke of how sexual violence and intimidation had become the new normal in Bastar. She stated,

The ongoing violence has led to complete dehumanization of Adivasis in Bastar. The conflict has led to large scale destruction of livelihood. Almost 49% of women in the region are malnourished. Illiteracy levels are the highest. There are also signs of increased vigilantism by state sponsored social groups like Salwa Judum and Samajik Ekta Manch who threaten them. Many of the activists and academicians have been falsely implicated by the police’.

The channel also spoke too an Adivasi women *Sunita Pottam* along with *Shalini Gera*, Lawyer, *Jagdalpur Legal Aid Collective*, who had filed a First Information Report (FIR) against a fake encounter in Bijapur district. They described how Adivasi women have been forcibly picked and taken away from their homes and projected as surrendered Maoists by the state. These women are shown as being engaged in livelihood training institutes by the state government, to showcase its progress on the war against Maoists. The channel concluded the documentary by saying that women have been the worst suffers in this ongoing battle. While some have been courageous enough to demand justice, many others are still getting caught in the crossfire.

Women’s Reproductive Health

The episode titled ‘No meat, pure thought’: Ayush Ministry Pregnancy Advice’ debated the repercussions of a government advisory on the health status of pregnant women. The channel informed that the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unnani, Siddha and

Homeopathy (AYUSH) had issued an advisory for pregnant women in the run up to the International Yoga Day on 22nd June. The advisory suggested a series of discriminatory and unscientific practices that need be adopted by pregnant mothers for delivering a healthy baby.

The following episode was aired under this theme.

- ‘No meat, pure thought’: Ayush Ministry Pregnancy Advice’- Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 14 June, 2017

NDTV 24x7 stated that the advisory issued by the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India had generated lot of controversy. It showed a graphic which listed out the recommendations made in the advisory. Titled ‘bizarre tips for would-be moms’, it mentioned measures like, ‘hang beautiful pictures in the bedroom, which will have an effect on the child, avoid bad company, stay away from desire, lust, attachment and hatred, avoid sugar, oil and fried items, avoid egg and non vegetarian food and focus on spiritual thoughts’. The channel questioned the need to issue such misleading advisories. It termed the advisory as unscientific and irrational and called for its withdrawal. After much criticism the Ministry overruled its previous decision and said that it was not mandatory to follow the advisory. The channel further stated that the present government has been indulging in promoting unscientific theories in health care. For example, the much talked about Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh’s (RSS) version of genetic engineering inside a womb to get the *uttam* or perfect baby or the consumption of cow urine for maintaining healthy life were some of the instances. The channel strongly objected to the dispensing of such unscientific advisories at the cost of the tax payers money. The debate however, turned out to be a shouting match between two panelists, *Rahul Eashwar*, Commentator and *Ranjan Kumari*, Director, Center for Social Research. *Rahul Eashwar* defended the advisory stating that the AYUSH recommendations were based on age old practices concerning health care in India. These practices were also being adopted all over the world. On the other hand, *Ranjana Kumari* rebuked the government for sidelining scientific temper and propagating myths in the name of health care.

Women Entrepreneurship

The last debate in this section dealt with the societal challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in urban spaces in India. It was based on a study conducted in The United States of America (USA) which highlighted that startups founded by women entrepreneurs had more women employees. The channel debated whether similar condition prevailed in India. It also discussed and deliberated on how Indian women entrepreneurs overcame organizational and societal challenges in their respective fields.

The following episode was aired under the section Women Entrepreneurship.

- ‘Only 9 % women entrepreneurs: Are startups ignoring women?’ - Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 20 June, 2017.

The debate about the presence of women employees in start-ups was in response to a study carried out in the United States of America (USA). The study reported that startups formed by at least one female founder have nearly 50% of women workforce. Such women-led firms, outpace some of America’s largest tech companies like Google, Facebook and Uber in gender diversity. The channel raised the question of whether something like this can be replicated in India. It spoke to a two female startup founders, *Sairee Chahal*, Founder, Sheroes and *Swati Bhargava*, Co-founder, cashkaro.com. The channel debated whether women led organizations lead to gender diversity? How do organizations challenge societal pressures? And is gender balance just talk or are they any substantial changes? There were two kinds of responses to these issues. One panelists stated that recruitment is entirely based on individual merit. The fact that there is a greater representation of women in start-ups is a mere coincidence. The other panelist had an entirely different take on this matter. She claimed that women heads are making a conscious decision to have a diverse and inclusive workforce. Women heads bring in empathy and sensitivity to the hiring policies. In short, the DNA of employers, becomes the DNA of the organization. The channel stated that the patriarchal structure of Indian society, throws up multiple challenges for women who work in diverse fields. However the need was to have more debates, discussions and deliberations on such issues as they are a small but significant step towards attaining gender equality.

The discourse on the theme of debating gender addressed the various kinds of concerns which have been a part of gender theorization. The discussion on violence against women was significant as it highlighted that such violence should not be viewed as essentially law and order issue. The need was to understand the mindset that normalized such violence. The discussion on state sponsored violence on the adivasi women of Bastar was also significant as it exposed the brunt the conflict through the lens of gender. The channel did bring in an important perspective which has been documented in records and academic books but rarely televised. The advocacy of right-wing politics through women's body also provided a useful insight to understand its spread. Banking on age old customs and evoking the glorious past have been the foundational pillars for the growth of this ideology. Discrimination against women was another aspect of understanding gender. The channel rightly called in the need to challenge the patriarchal mindset that is deeply entrenched in our society.

III

India in World Affairs

The issues debated under this theme relate to the discussion on both channels on the foreign policy of Government of India. *NDTV 24x7* debated and discussed the Paris Accord and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's four nation visit to Germany, Spain, France and Russia in 2017. Along with debating the PM's four nation visit, *Aaj Tak* debated about the alleged role of Pakistan indulging in gross human rights violation in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) region.

The following episodes were aired under the theme of India in World Affairs on *NDTV24x7*

- 'After US pullout from Paris Accord, will climate change fight unravel?' - Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 1 June, 2017.
- 'PM Modi's Europe Outreach' - Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 30 May, 2017

NDTV 24x7 held a discussion on the issue of climate change, after news came in that the United States of America (USA) had threatened to pull out of the Paris Accord. It started the discussion by providing an overview of the Paris Accord. It stated that the Accord was signed in

2015 by 195 countries to check climate change by curbing greenhouse gas emissions. India pledged to cut emissions by 30% by 2030 in comparison to the 2005 levels. Under the Accord, India and other developing nations are meant to get funds from developed nations to switch to cleaner technologies. The channel debated the repercussions on the Accord in case the USA pulls out of the deal. It specifically looked into the role of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi who played a key role in bringing other countries together as signatories. The channel was critical of the threat issued by the USA of a pullout from the Accord. It stated that USA ought to have the moral responsibility of checking emissions as it is the biggest emitter in the world. But it anticipated a bigger leadership role for India fighting climate change in case of the USA pullout. The four nation visit of the Indian Prime Minister in 2017 was the other topic debated. The channel discussed the strengthening of India and European nations. It stated that normally a visit to Europe by an Indian Prime Minister does not make the kind of headlines as it does with the visit to USA, Russia or China. The channel posed the question of the significance of the increasing interest in Indo- European relations especially through the prism of the One Belt One Road (OBOR)¹⁷¹ project. It asked whether India took a principled stand by boycotting the OBOR summit. It also looked the changing geopolitical relations and asked whether Indo-US relations were going through a slump and will India eventually fall back on its old and trusted ally Russia? The anchor, *Nidhi Razdan*, concluded the debate saying that she was happy that a sane debate took place without any flames on the screens (this was a dig at *Republic TV* where images of flames are used on ticker heads to signify that an important discussion is underway).

The episodes were aired under the theme of India in World Affairs on *Aaj Tak* are as follows.

- ‘Aathank Par Prahar, Panch hai Tayaar’ Aired on *Khabaraar* on 29 May, 2017.
- ‘POK: Bharat ka lalkar’- Aired on *Khabardaar* on 8 June, 2017

¹⁷¹ One Belt One Road (OBOR) is an initiative of the Chinese government to jointly build the Silk Road Economic Belt, which links China with Europe through Central and Western Asia. The objectives of the OBOR strategy are to promote economic prosperity of the countries along the belt and road and regional economic cooperation, to strengthen exchanges and mutual learning between different civilizations, and to promote world peace and development. The strategy also underlines the government’s push to export China’s technologies and production capacity in industries such as building materials, electronics, infrastructure and logistics. For more, read <https://www.cb.cityu.edu.hk/obor/about/intro>, accessed 31 June, 2017.

Aaj Tak lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's muscular foreign policy. It ran digital video graphics like 'pradhan mantra kin aye udaan (Prime Minister's new flight), char desho ki yatra par pradhan mantra (prime minister on four nation visit) to describe the Prime Minister's (PM) four nation foreign visit. It stated that PM has mastered the art of diplomacy. In the three years of being in office, the PM has travelled to 45 countries. It further stated that the PM prefers to travel at night from one country to another so that he can have an entire day to work for the nation. His visit to Europe will not only take the existing relations between the four nations to new heights but will also teach our neighbor Pakistan lessons in diplomacy. The channel concluded the discussion by saying,

Woh jahan bhi jaate hai, apni chap chod jaate hain.

(PM leaves an indelible mark in each of his foreign tours).

The next topic debated on the channel was the issue of the alleged human rights violations by Pakistan in the Pakistan occupied Territory (PoK) region. It stated that India had taken up the human rights violation by Pakistan in the international forum of United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR). It claimed that the people of PoK are demanding Azaadi from Pakistan. Although POK is part of India, Pakistan has illegitimately occupied it. India has now decided to reclaim its land from Pakistan. It further claimed that the Indian government has a new policy which states that whenever Pakistan raises the issue of Kashmir, India will raise the issue of atrocities on the people of PoK. The channel stated that Pakistan uses the soil of PoK for sending terrorists to India. PoK is just a launch pad for terror operations in India and its people do not matter to Pakistani administration. The channel also said that since the PM has openly declared that the entire Kashmir belongs to India, Pakistan should pack its bag from the PoK region. The entire debate was high on rhetoric. Phrases like 'dushmano ko sabak sikhana'(teaching the enemy a lesson), 'badla lena' (seek revenge), were used to frame the hostile Indo-Pak relations. Besides vocabulary, the use of war images, exploding missiles and bombs, army tanks, soldiers were also used to portray the bitter relations between the two countries.

Both the channels celebrated the emerging leadership role of India in the international forum. *NDTV 24x7* appeared to have a more nuanced discussion in framing the evolving

dynamics of India's foreign policy under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The channel also gave a brief background of the issue being debated so as to make the audience aware of the context of the discussion. The debate on climate change was extremely relevant to understand India's position on tackling climate change vis-à-vis the super powers of the world. The channel framed the debate on climate change in the larger context of geopolitical maneuverings. On the other hand, the discussion on *Aaj Tak* appeared as a tribute to the PM. The channel lauded the PM's role in making Indian presence felt in world politics. The usage of terminology like 'badla lena', 'sabak sikhana' was done to celebrate the muscular foreign policy of government. As is evident, any discussion involving Pakistan is high on rhetoric. The same happened here during the discussion on the role of Pakistan in the PoK region.

IV

Politicization of Institutions: Indian Army and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)

The channels debated how political interference in premiere institutions like the Indian Army and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) were undermining the credibility and autonomy of the institutions. The debates entailed discussions on two specific events, the surgical strikes in September 2016 and the human shield incident in April 2017 in Kashmir. These events were widely reported in media. They had generated diverse responses, from heated debates in television news studios to polarized viewpoints on the print and digital platform. They were also used by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as an electoral issue in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections in 2017¹⁷². The issue of misuse of the premier investigative agency the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) by political parties to target their opponent was the second issue debated in *Aaj Tak*. This discussion was held on account of questioning of a Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi and senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Manish Sisodia by the CBI.

¹⁷²In the piece 'Riding surgical strike wave, BJP sets sights on UP elections', Saba Naqvi, Journalist, describes how the party intends to use the war rhetoric as a poll rhetoric. She highlights past instances like, the Bangladesh war in 1971 and the Kargil War in 1999, where the then existing government milked the respective 'victories' for gaining political mileage. She prophesizes that BJP will use the surgical strike event to tide over the challenges, emanating from changing political landscape of the region. For more read, <https://thewire.in/politics/will-surgical-strike-help-bjp-elections>, accessed 26 May, 2017.

Indian Army

The following episode was aired under the theme of Indian Army on *NDTV 24x7*

- ‘Is the Army getting Politicized?’ - Aired on *The Big Fight* on 27 May, 2017

The issue was debated on the show *The Big Fight*. The opening remarks by anchor *Vikram Chandra*, outlined the need to debate on this issue. He said,

We all are very proud of our army. Soldiers operate in difficult terrains and sacrifice their lives. But all these years the Army has never been politicized. It has always stayed above politics. By now the party in power, as well as the opposition, are politicizing it.

The channel maintained that the Indian Army is a secular and apolitical institution. It listed out a few instances like the photos of BJP leaders on posters taking credit for the success of surgical strikes against Pakistan in September 2016, Congress’s questioning the basis of elevation of Army Chief Bipin Rawat superseding his seniors, BJP leaders supporting the actions of Major Leetul Gogoi over the human shield issue in the midst of Along with blaming the political parties, the channel was also critical of a section of media for politicizing the Army. The channel stated that a section of media is using the Army for its own agenda. These media groups have indulged in marketing of dead soldiers for TRPs. *Saikat Dutta*, Journalist, also made similar interventions. He said,

Marketing dead soldiers is excellent because no one will question it. Addressing a dead soldier as martyr means glamourising his death and television channels are precisely doing that.

However, Major General G.D. Bakshi, Retired Army officer, took a contrasting stand. He said, ‘the media coverage of dead soldiers is right, it is a recognition of their contribution’. It must be noted that the use of the word ‘martyr’ in news channels to describe soldiers who die on the line of duty is a recent trend. Karan Thapar¹⁷³, Journalist, makes up an argument of why using the term martyr is wrong. He explains that traditionally the term martyr has been used to describe people who are killed defending their faith. But soldiers are not defending any faith,

173 For more on Karan Thapar’s argument read, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/columns/soldiers-killed-in-action-are-not-martyrs-martyr-has-religious-overtones/story-Fs84kHSrSBDEckwKVL8npN.html>, accessed 7 October, 2018.

they are defending a secular nation. Hence, their duty is mandated by constitution and not any faith.

The show also on how a democratic system gives its citizens the right to question its Army, judiciary, polity. It is wrong to dismiss the questioning of institutions and term it as anti-national. The channel criticized the government strategy of hiding behind the garb of army to quell dissent. The topic of the debate was extremely relevant, considering how the dose of hyper nationalism seeps into all discourse. The anchor makes important interventions and moderated the discussion well by giving time to all voices on the panel.

The following episode was aired under the theme Politicization of Institutions on *Aaj Tak*

- ‘Patharbazon se pyar, Army Chief par vaar’ (Partha Chatterjee’s article) – Aired on *Halla Bol* on 6 June, 2017.
- ‘Sena Par Sadak Chap Siyasat!’ (Congress leader Sandeep Dixit’s comments on Army chief)- Aired on *Halla Bol* on 12 June, 2017
- ‘Salman ko Vivad Pasand Hai’ - Aired on *Halla Bol* on 15 June, 2017

The debates on Indian Army in *Aaj Tak* focused on two levels, first, it called out the political interference in Army as unwanted and second it debated the *wrongness* of the voices that are critical the Indian Army. It must be noted that these discussions were not separate and were instead woven together to frame the discourse on the importance and credibility of Indian army. The first debate on the issue was in response to an article¹⁷⁴ titled ‘In Kashmir, India is witnessing its General Dyer moment’ dated 2nd June, 2017 written by prominent historian Partha Chatterjee in the digital news website *TheWire*. The channel severely criticized the historian on

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In this piece, Chatterjee argued that the recent incident of using a Kashmiri Farooq Ahmed Dar as a human shield (Dar was tied to the bonnet of an Army jeep and paraded through the streets for hours, supposedly to deter crowds from throwing stones at security forces who were on election duty in Budgam District) by the Indian Army is condemnable. He further compared the present Army General’s justification for the incident with General Reginald Dyer’s justification of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy in Amritsar in April 1919. He further stated that although it would be unfair to suggest that the Army chief’s motives were same as General Dyer, the similarity in their justifications concerning both incidents suggest that both believed that to maintain its authority a nation’s army has to be feared by its people. For more on the article, read <https://thewire.in/government/general-dyer-indian-army-kashmir>, accessed 27 June, 2018.

two fronts, first, that Chatterjee had questioned the Army Chief's action of giving commendation to a Major Leetul Gogoi, who used a civilian Farooq Dar as a shield to protect himself and other officers from stone pelters in Kashmir and second that he had likened the Army Chief action with that of General Reginald Dyer of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy. The channel raised a question,

Kya abhivyakti ki azaadi par, sena ke saman ke saath khilwad kiya ja sakta hai?

(Can freedom of expression be used to question the Indian army).

It refereed to Partha Chaterjee as a,

Namchin itihaskaar jise Kashmir main sena ki karwahee kadwi lag rahi hai.

(A famous historian who has issues with the form army operations in Kashmir).

It played out a slide with pictures of Army Chief Bipin Rawat and General Dyer on the left and right respectively. It then started listing the contents of the letter written by Partha Chatterjee. It further targeted two political parties, namely, Communist Party of India (CPI) and Trinamool Congress (TMC) who supported Chatterjee and said that such people harbor anti-national feelings and that a nation does not need enemies like Pakistan when it's has such enemies residing in its territory. It termed their actions as 'mansik diwaliyapan' (mental imbalance) and 'baudhik pagalpan' (intellectual madness). These statements were played along with a movie clipping of the Jalianwala Bagh incident. It played out a sound bite by R.K.Singh, Member, Loksabha, where he termed Partha Chatterjee as gadaar (anti-national). The channel further said that for communists and intellectuals a soldier is an indispensable commodity while the rights of stone pelters are paramount. It says that soldiers have every right to protect themselves and if circumstances demand innovative measures (in this case a human shield) to tackle protestors then they should not hesitate to do so. The channel praised the concerned Army officer for his innovative thinking and said that due to his sensible actions no force was used on the stone pelters and there were no deaths or casualties. The debate was acrimonious. The anchor was seen as encouraging the confrontation. It was an extremely biased debate which encouraged the pro-army voices and rebuked the voices which questioned the army actions. She concluded saying,

Yeh bahut dukh ki baat hai ki Kashmir ka sankat, aatanwad aur Pakistan ke dariye se nikal kaar manavadhikar tak pahunch gaya hai.

(It is sad that the Kashmir issue is no longer viewed from the prism of terrorism and Pakistan but from a human rights perspective).

In another debate show the channel was critical of derogatory remarks made by Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit concerning the Army Chief. The channel said that Dikshit had compared the Army Chief with a 'sadakchap gunda' (street goon) and that his remarks should not be dismissed as he is a Congress leader who has a good educational background. Similarly, in another debate the channel condemned the remarks made by the Bollywood actor Salman Khan on the Army. Terming his remarks as 'yudhniti' (war plan) the channel said that while promoting his movie Salman Khan had said that those who advocate war between India and Pakistan should be sent to the border with guns. The two countries should shun violence and settle the dispute through dialogue. The anchor said,

Unhe army ko upadesh dene ki zaroorat nahi hai, army apna kaam janti hai.

(The actor has no business giving sermons to the Army. The army knows it's job).

He is advocating for peace without understanding the complexities of the Kashmir issue. All this is just a publicity stunt for his fans in India and across the border. It ran digital video graphics of the number of deaths in the valley due to terrorist attack in 2016. The channel vociferously defended the Indian Army on all occasions. It defended all kinds of action deployed the Army for fighting anti-insurgency. It questioned all voices critical of Army actions by raising the issue of human rights of soldiers who operate under difficult and dangerous circumstances. It framed such questioning as wrong and termed these critical voices as enemies of the nation. It has been observed that any debate on the Army is always in the form of a binary i.e. national and anti-national. Any voice that is critical of Army action is termed as anti-national. The channel claims that anti-nationals want to divide and destroy the Indian nation. They raise anti-India slogans and grieve the funeral of terrorists and not Indian soldiers. It advocated that,

Humari army ko aise logon ko sabak sikhana chahiye aur pure desh ko army ka saath dena chahiye.

(It is the duty of the Army to teach lesson to such people and that the Army would receive support from all Indians towards this endeavor).

The debates on Indian army are extremely polarizing. It can be seen that usage of language *Aaj Tak* in defense of the army is emotive. The channel blocks any questioning of the army by invoking the phraseology,

Sarhad par hamare jawan sahed ho rahen hai.

(our soldiers are dying in the borders).

In comparison, the debate on *NDTV 24x7*, was more nuanced. It raised valid points by criticizing both political parties and media for politicizing the army.

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)

The other issued that was debated on *Aaj Tak* was political interference in the functioning of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The following episode was aired in under the theme on *Aaj Tak*.

- ‘AAP par vaar, CBI Hathyaar’ - Aired on *Halla Bol* on 16 June, 2017

The issue of misuse of the premier investigative agency the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was the second issue debated in *Aaj Tak*. This was in relation to a case pertaining to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The CBI had questioned M.S.Sisodia, Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi, on the money spent (1.25 crores) by his party (AAP) on a promotional campaign called ‘Talk to AK’, during the campaigning for the assembly elections in the state of Goa and Punjab. The channel raised the issue whether the Central government was using the CBI to target the opposition parties. It stated that while CBI investigation was not allowed in the major Vyapam Scam¹⁷⁵ in Madhya Pradesh state government, the CBI was used to target AAP in Delhi. The channel was critical of the political interference in CBI and stated that successive governments have used it to settle political scores. The debate ended abruptly without any concluding remarks. The moderation was also weak as all the panelists were talking at the same time. It appeared like

¹⁷⁵The Vyapam scam was an admission and recruitment scam which came to light in 2013 in Madhya Pradesh. Vyapam (Vaivashik Pariksha Mandal) is an apex body set up by the MP state government that conducts entrance examination for admission into educational institutions and recruitment in government jobs. The scam involved politicians, senior and junior officials and businessman who employed imposters to write answer sheets, forge question papers and manipulate the results.

the anchor was interesting in provoking confrontation rather than conducting a meaningful debate.

V

Region and Politics: Gorkhaland and Kashmir

The discussion under the theme of Regional Politics: Gorkhaland and Kashmir centered on the large scale violence erupting in the two regions of Darjeeling and Srinagar in 2017. Both the regions have been witnessing demands for separate statehood for a long period of time. While the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland¹⁷⁶ has been raised off and on since 1952, the *Kashmir* issue has been in a bone of contention between India and its neighboring state Pakistan since 1947.

The Gorkhaland Crisis

The channel stated that although the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland has been going on for years, what triggered the latest round of violence was an order by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) led West Bengal Government to make mandatory the study of Bengali language for classes I to X, all over the state, including the Nepali-speaking areas administered by the Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA). The latest agitation led by a political outfit Gorkha Janmukti

¹⁷⁶In 1865, when Britishers started plantations in the tea gardens of the Darjeeling region, a huge population of people migrated from Nepal to work there. There was no international border then and these people considered Darjeeling as their home. But after independence, in 1950 when the border was drawn, these people did not go back to Nepal and continued staying in India. In 1952, the All India Gorkha League submitted a memorandum to PM Jawaharlal Nehru demanding a separate state for people speaking the Nepali language and residing in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and other hilly districts of the region. Since then Gorkhas have been demanding a separate state of Gorkhaland which would protect their language, identity and culture vis-à-vis the interests of the Bengali speaking population of West Bengal. In 1977-81, the West Bengal government passed a unanimous resolution supporting the creation of an autonomous district council. But Govt of India has always been apprehensive that if Gorkhaland is allowed then this region will secede from India and merge with Nepal. The part of West Bengal which is being demanded to be made Gorkhaland is 6246 sq. kms. In 1980, the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), headed by Subhas Gising was formed. After violent protests for two years, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was formed. Divisions took place in GNLF and Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) headed by Bimal Gurung separated from GNLF. After Mamata Banerjee assumed power in West Bengal she set up the semi-autonomous administrative body Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA) which replaced the DGHC. Bimal Gurung was made its chief. For more on the issue read Rajat Ganguly (2005) 'Poverty, Malgovernance and Ethnopolitical Mobilization: Gorkha Nationalism and Gorkhaland Agitation in India', in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 11, No.4, pp. 457-502.

Morcha (GJM) was essentially directed towards this order. However, this order revived the struggle for old demand of Gorkhaland. The channel reported that the GJM was again at the centerstage of the Gorkhaland agitation.

The following episodes were aired on the issue of Gorkhaland Crisis on *NDTV 24x7*

- ‘Didigiri in Darjeeling: GJM crisis mishandled by TMC?’ - Aired on *Left, Right and Center* on 15 June, 2017.
- ‘Gorkhaland: Mountain Echo’- Aired on *We The People* on 25 June, 2017

NDTV 24x7 reported that large scale violence had erupted across the Darjeeling region since the announcement of the government order. Seeing the violence blowing out of proportion, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) led state government had later withdrawn its order. But the intervening period had caused much unrest. The channel blamed the state government for stroking fire on the contentious issue. It raised three important questions on the state government’s approach to Gorkhaland statehood issue? First, it linked the Gorkhaland issue with the Kashmir issue and asked: just as it suits BJP to keep Kashmir burning, does it suit TMC to keep Darjeeling burning? Second, why the region of Darjeeling was not developed as the rest of Bengal? Third, was the TMC countering the agitation by waving the flag of Bengali nationalism? It framed the agitation as an ethnic clash between Nepali nationalism and Bengali nationalism. The channel mapped the trajectory of the Gorkhaland agitation through a series of digital video graphics titled ‘110 summers of discontent’. The first slug mentioned 1907 as the year when Hillmen’s association demanded separate administrative setup. The second mentioned 1977 as the year when the Communist party asked the Constituent Assembly to form an Autonomous District Council. The third slug mentioned 1980 as the year when Subhash Gurung floated the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). The fourth mentioned 1986, when GNLF launched violent agitation resulting in the death of over 1000 people.

Besides, the TMC, the channel also questioned the stand of the BJP led central government for its double standards. It stated that while the party had promised in its election manifesto to look into the issue, now it is maintaining silence. The party has majority in Lok Sabha and even the Darjeeling Minister of Parliament S.S. Ahluwalia belongs to BJP. The Gorkha parties had

supported the BJP. Then why is the party ignoring the demands of these parties by not looking at the Gorkha identity issue? Moreover why does it have different parameters for Kashmir and the demand for Gorkhaland?

Along with debating the political reactions to the agitation, the channel also raised an important question about the statehood demand in the context of formation of states in the Indian union. One of the panelist, Neera Chandoke, Academician, pointed out the need to have a second state reorganization committee. She further cited past instances and opined that political opportunism has been at the forefront of state formation. For instance, BJP created Uttarakhand, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand and Congress created Telengana in an ad-hoc manner. This ad-hocism strategy is dangerous, because eventually it becomes a tool for the next demand. It must be remembered that state formations have always been violent. The violence needs to be tackled through negotiation, dialogue and clear policy guidelines and not merely be treated as a law and order issue.

The debate was well moderated with every panelist getting a chance to put forth his/her views. The audiences were allowed to ask questions and put forth their views as well. The debate did provide an insight into understanding the complexity of the century old statehood agitation. The channel was critical of the politicization of the Gorkha issue by successive governments. It appealed for securing and preserving the social, political and cultural diversity of the Gorkha population.

The following episode was aired on Gorkhaland crisis on *Aaj Tak*.

- ‘Darjeeling Hinsa’ - Aired on *Khabardaar* on 15 June, 2017

Aaj Tak had a completely opposite stand in comparison to *NDTV24x7* on the issue. It ran the headline ‘Phir Dhadakta Darjeeling’ (Darjeeling is burning again). It termed the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) as a separatist group which has always indulged in violence for the implementation of their demand of Gorkhaland. It termed the protestors ‘upadhravi’ who had attacked a police station and killed one policeman too. Images of cars set on fire were displayed on the screen. The channel showed live images from the scene where the deployed army personnel were seen as trying to control the protestors by hurling tear gas shells. The channel

was critical of the fact that GJM had indulged in vandalism over the government order. It stated that when the police raided the office of Bimal Gurung, Leader, GJM, it found huge stock of bows and arrows and cash. All this was to be used to spread more violence. Due to threat of police raid, Bimal Gurung had gone underground. The channel further stated that it there were no signs of the protests dissipating soon. The channel's main focus on the issue was how the GJM was resorting to violent protest against the state government's notification. It did not have any discussion on the issue of the Gorkhaland agitation. The protests by GJM were merely shown as a law and order problem.

The Kashmir Crisis

The other issue debated under this theme was the untimely death of Mohd Ayub Pandith, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Kashmir who was lynched by a mob in-front of Jama Masjid, Srinagar. The issue was debated within the wider context of the political turmoil in the region.

The following episodes were under the section of Kashmir Crisis on *NDTV 24x7*.

- 'Policeman beaten to death by mob: Can Delhi delay talks anymore?' - Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 23 June, 2017.

NDTV 24x7 described the incident 'as one, in one of the bloodiest period for the Jammu and Kashmir police who are caught between their own people and terror'. It then showed images from the funeral procession of Mohd Ayub Pandith and said,

A son bowing before the casket of his father, brutally murdered by a mob of 200 in Srinagar, last night. At his home in downtown Srinagar, a sense of utter disbelief- why would Mohd. Ayub Pandith be killed in his own neighbourhood?

It played sound bites of the Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti where she refereed to this incident as 'murder of trust!' The channel gave the horrific details of how the DSP was lynched by over 200 people for over thirty minutes in-front of the Masjid. His body was then thrown in a drain. The severe injuries had made his body unidentifiable. It was only after his family registered a complain of him being missing that the police undertook a search operation and found his body in a drain near the Jama Masjid, Srinagar. The channel also played out a tweet by Mirawiz Farooq, separatist and head priest of the Masjid, where he said 'deeply disturbed and

condemn the brutal act at Nowhatta. Mob violence and public lynching is outside the parameters of our values and religion. We cannot allow state brutality to snatch our humanity and values’.

The channel maintained that occurrence of incidents like mob lynching, stone pelting highlight the continuous brutalization of the Kashmiri society. It indicted every government for failing to political solution to the issue. It further said that there appears to be no political will to solve the crisis in the state. It is disheartening to see young kids turning into stone pelters. The channel called for serious introspection by the government and asked the government to reach out to all stakeholders through dialogue.

The episodes aired on Kashmir crisis on *Aaj Tak* were as follows.

- ‘Jab khuni bheed ne DSP Ayub ki hatya kar di’ - Aired on *Halla Bol* on 23 June, 2017

Aaj Tak started the discussion on the issue by stating how DSP Ayub was lynched. It showed a video which showed a mob shouting slogans for Pakistan and the Islamic state ISIS. The channel stated that though the video is not clear, the circumstances under which the attack took place are clear. It blamed the separatists for instigating the mob to lynch the policeman. The anchor started the debate by making the statement,

Har aisi ghatna desh ko andar se jhanjhor kar rak deti hai, lekin hum sirf kya aise desh ban gaye hai jo sirf garajate hai inn par, par in gadaron pe baraste nahi hai.

(The nation’s conscience is shaken whenever such an incident occurs. But have we just become a nation which just vents anger but does not take any action against such culprits).

It termed the separatists as them as ‘*aatankwadi*’ (terrorists), ‘*gaadar*’ (back stabber) and ‘*sahib*’ (masters) of the stone pelters who want to silence every voice that speaks for India. It stated that over the years, these separatists have threatened Kashmiris who stand with India and now they are killing the brave sons of Kashmir. The anchor asked a question to all panelists,

Kya aaj bhi hum sirf ninda karenge ya koi kariwahi bhi hogi?. (Will we just condemn the incident or strict action will be taken?)

The anchor had a confrontation with panelist *Shabnam Lone*, Lawyer. While condemning the act, Lone made a statement,

Jahan yeh hayta hui hai, us majid ke head priest Mirwaiz Farooq hai aur main Mirwaiz se ek behen ke nate darkhast karungi ki, woh iss hatya par police main complain darj karayen.

(Mirwaiz Farooq is the head priest of this mosque and as his sister, I appeal to him to register a police complaint against this murder).

The anchor rebuked Ms. Lone for claiming on national television that she is Mirwaiz Farooq's sister. She accused her of defending the stone pelters. The debate was acrimonious, where the anchor was busy shouting down the voices of the Kashmiri guests on the panel. She shouted at Engineer Rashid, MLA, saying,

Aap isi desh ke Jammu Kashmir ke vidhan sabha se sadasiyan hai, aap us kursi pe baithathe hai, aur aapki himaqt dekhiye ki aap kaise in algawadiyon aur patjar bazon ka saath dete hai.

(You are a member of the J and K legislative assembly and yet you speak the language of the separatists and the stone pelters).

She further said,

Aap jaise log isi bharat Kashmir ka muda banate hai, bhagwan se dariye, aap unse nazar nahi mila payenge!

(People like you make it an India vs Kashmir issue, do fear the almighty!).

The channel concluded the debate by saying that the time has come to for a final action to tackle these separatists. The killers of DSP Ayub need to caught and punished.

Bharat ko uske bete ki maut ka badla lena hoga.

(India needs to avenge the death of its son).

The debate on region and politics was framed differently on both the channels. *NDTV24x7* debated the issue from the framework on people's movement. Although, the issue of terror did creep in, in its discussion on Kashmir, the focus was on understanding how the failure of political leadership has pushed the region back to the troubled times of the nineties. The Gorkhaland agitation was similarly viewed through the prism of social, cultural, political identity of the Gorkhas. On the otherhand, *Aaj Tak* framed the statehood agitation as a merely law and order issue that needed to be handled through brutal state repression. The issues of human rights and identity were conveniently under the carpet. The debate called for revenge as the ultimate weapon to crush dissent.

VI

Religion and Politics: The Ayodhya Dispute

The *Ayodhya* Ram temple issue was back in the news during June 2017, when the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) filed its charge sheet in the Babri Masjid¹⁷⁷ demolition case in the Special CBI court in Lucknow. The charge sheet named seniors BJP leaders Lal Krishna Advani, Uma Bharati and Murli Manohar Joshi and nine others as the main conspirators behind the demolition of the mosque.

The following episode was aired under the theme Religion and Politics: The Ayodhya Dispute on *NDTV24x7*.

- ‘Political ramifications of Babri Masjid chargesheet?’ - Aired on *Left, Right and Center* on 30 May, 2017.

NDTV 24x7 debated the ramifications of the Babri Masjid charge sheet, which indicted the senior BJP leaders Lal Krishna Advani, Uma Bharati and Murli Manohar Joshi, as conspirators for the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. It particularly focused on the political fallout of the charge sheet, raising the question- ‘will Babri demolition case hurt or help the BJP?’ The anchor, Nidhi Razdan, asked two questions to the panelist Sambit Patra, Spokesperson, BJP. First, was the charge sheet filed to checkmate the senior leader L.K.Advani who harboured Presidential ambitions? Second, why does the BJP keep hiding behind the garb of development, when it is Hindutva which gets them vote?

The channel provided a timeline of the Babri Case File in the form of digital video graphics that provided information about how the case has legally moved since December 1992, the year the Masjid was demolished. For instance, the first slug dated December 1992 mentioned- 2 FIRs filed, Advani and M.M.Joshi, and others named for alleged communal speeches. Similarly, the second slug dated October, 1993 mentioned- CBI chargesheet accuses Advani, others of

¹⁷⁷The Babri Masjid was a 16th century mosque in Ayodhya. It was built during the regime of the Mughal emperor Babur. The site of the mosque has been contested by nationalist right wing groups who claimed that the Mughal emperor demolished a Ram temple and built the mosque on it. These groups demanded that the mosque be brought down and a temple in honour of Lord Ram be erected in its place. This led to the demolition of the mosque by Hindu right wing groups on 6th December, 1992. This act triggered large scale riots in India during 1992-93.

conspiracy. Likewise, the third slug dated May 2001 mentioned- Special Court drops proceedings against Advani, Joshi, Uma Bharti, 10 others. A total of nine digital video graphics were played out which provided information regarding the progress in the case. The final slug dated 19th April, 2017 mentioned- top court restores criminal conspiracy charge against BJP veterans. Besides the case time-line, the channel also played out few snippets from the Liberhan Commission Report of 2009 in the form of digital video graphics. The channel also ran old images of the charge sheeted BJP veterans from the demolition site, courtesy the Indian Express archives. The channel also debated on the sluggish condition of the judicial process in the country considering that it took 25 years for the court to frame charges in the demolition case.

The debate was acrimonious with the BJP and Congress spokesperson each accusing the other of trying to gain political mileage out of the issue. The BJP spokesperson was constantly targeting the Congress spokesperson by making statements such as- '*aap gayee ko sadak main kate hai*' (you slaughter cows in the roads), '*hum gayee ki puja karte hai aur aap isko marte ho*' (we worship cow and you slaughter it). The anchor too allowed this frivolous chitchat to continue without making any interventions. However, she was also seen as adopting a questioning stance towards the BJP. She was in agreement with the Congress spokesperson and another panelist, Shivam Vij, Political commentator, when they declared that the timing of the charge sheet was a masterstroke by the BJP government. She concluded the debate by stating- 'you will get to see more and more of the Ram temple issue as one gets closer to the 2019 general elections'. It is important to point out that the debate was held during the completion of the three years of the Modi government. It was evident that with no significant achievement happening the entire five year term, the government would definitely plan its electoral campaign by raking up its Hindutva agenda.

The following episode was aired under the theme Religion and Politics: The Ayodhya Dispute on *Aaj Tak*.

- 'Seila tayaar, mandir ka intezaar!' - Aired on *Halla Bol* on 21 June, 2017.

The anchor *Anjana Om Kashyap* started the show by saying,

Case hai court main, par pathar pahunch rahe hai ayodhya main

(The case is still in the court but preparations for the construction of temple have started in Ayodhya).

She further stated,

Aaj hum Yogi-modi ke mandir plan par vistar se charcha karenge.

(Today we will debate about Yogi-Modi temple plan).

The channel flashed few questions on the screen- '*kya ayodhya main ram mandir nirman ka countdown shuru ho gaya hai?*' (Have the preparations for the construction of Ram temple started in Ayodhya?) '*Mission 2019 ke liye Yogi ki agwae main banega ram mandir?*' (Will Yogi be in charge of the construction of ram temple which is part of mission 2019?) '*26 July ko Yogi ke Ayodhya daure se shuru hoga mandir ka kaam?*' (Will the temple construction begin from Yogi's 26th July tour?). The channel then showed images of stones getting unloaded from trucks in lieu of the preparations for the temple construction in Ayodhya. It reported that stones from Rajasthan to be used for construction of the temple have reached Ayodhya. The work on engraving Lord Ram's name on these stones has commenced. After the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's visit to Ayodhya, the temple construction will be started. The channel repeatedly raised the question of why the government cannot wait for the court order? In response to this, the BJP spokesperson remarked,

Mandir banana hinduon ka ashta se juda hai, kya hindu abhi yeh ashta bhi chod den, ram ka naam bhi na len, yeh congress, sapa, bsp kya yehi chahati hai.

(Ram temple is a matter of faith for Hindus, should the Hindus stop believing in their faith, should they stop uttering ram's name? Does Congress, SP and BSP want this?).

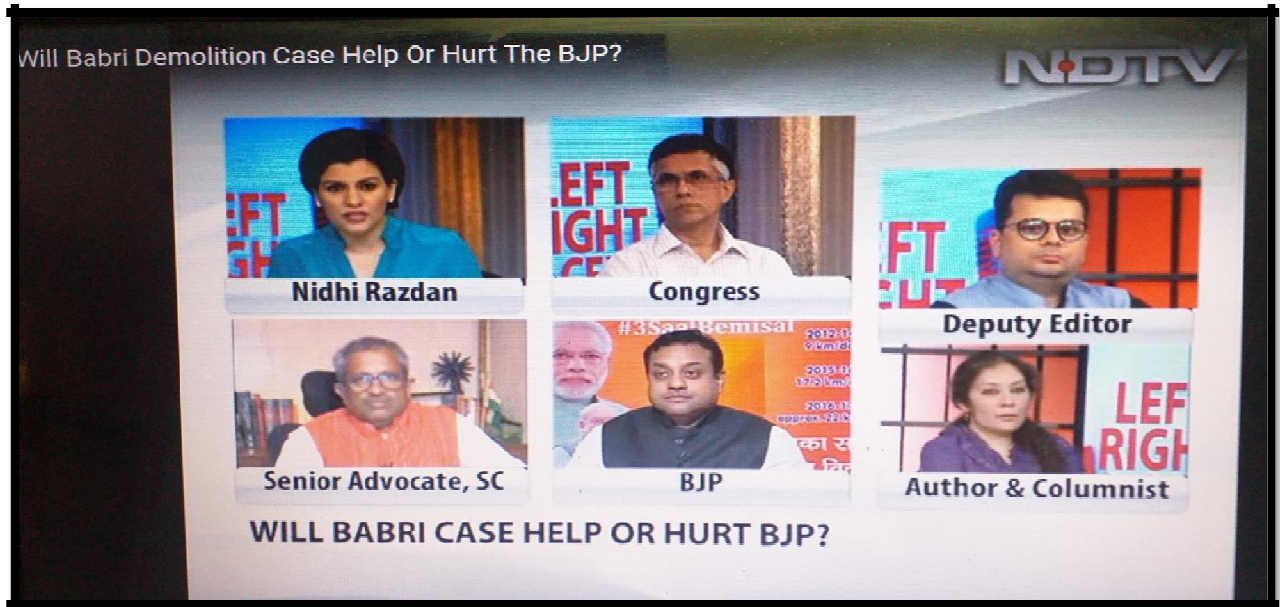
The spokesperson repeatedly mocked the opposition by uttering words as '*das janpath*', '*chutkula italy main chutti mana raha hai*'. The anchor did not intervene to stop such frivolous comments. The debate was extremely loud with all the panelists speaking at the same time. The panelists were also allowed to joke and use crass language. It appeared as though the anchor was intentionally not intervening and allowing the on air drama to continue. The debate ended abruptly without any concluding remarks by the anchor.

The issue of the Ram temple was debated on both the channels in the light of the CBI charge sheet against senior BJP leaders. Both the channels discussed the political ramifications of the

latest development in the case. *NDTV24x7* additionally raised the issue of the sloppy judicial system existing in the country. The graphics used in the channel were quite informative. Besides giving information about the time line of the case, they also provided information from official reports. The debate on *Aaj Tak* was shrill. The BJP spokesperson was allowed to make mockery of opposition leaders. The moderation by the anchor was lousy as she failed to maintain decorum and allowed obnoxious remarks on air. It appeared as though the debate was being conducted to fill air time.

The following figure shows panel discussions on *NDTV24x7* and *Aaj Tak*.

Figure 11: Panel Discussion on *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*



(Source: *NDTV 24x7*-<https://www.INDTV.com/video/news/left-right-centre/will-babri-demolition-case-help-or-hurt-the-bjp-458656> and *Aaj Tak*- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GAH2iZ-fN4>)

VII

State, Policies and Governance

The issues debated and discussed under the theme of State, Policies and Governance primarily consisted of the ailing education system in Bihar; agricultural distress and farmer suicide; jobless growth and choking of the landmark Right to Information (RTI) Act. The channels highlighted how loopholes in government policies and programmes were undermining the development agenda of the state. They also showcased how systemic misgovernance in various sectors of the economy has given rise to unemployment, corruption, economic stagnation, poverty and social unrest across the country.

Bihar's Education System

In the education sector, the two channels debated the repercussions of the scam in the 2017 intermediate examination conducted by the Bihar School Examination Board (BSEB). Along with this issue, another debate relating to the distortion of history textbooks by the Rajasthan Government was taken up by *NDTV 24x7*. The issue was debated within the larger context of the push by the right-wing government towards saffronization of education.

The following are the episodes aired on the theme Bihar's education system on *NDTV 24x7*.

- 'Exam Scam: Bihar and Beyond' - Aired on *Agenda* on 5 June, 2017.
- '#bihartopperscam: Nitish Government in dock?' - Aired on *The Buck Stops Here* on 5 June, 2017

NDTV 24x7 argued that the education system in Bihar is ailing due to the State government's ineptitude. The channel reported two incidents to buttress its claim. The first was the decline in the pass percentage, from 87.45% in 2015 to 62.18% in 2016 to 37% in 2017 in the intermediate examination conducted by the Bihar School Examination Board (BSEB). The second was the arrest of dubious Arts stream topper, Ganesh Kumar who had forged his age. This incident has an uncanny resemblance to a similar incident in 2016, when another topper Ruby Rai was arrested for failing to answer basic question of describing political science as being related to cooking! The channel stated,

From fake toppers to record failures to mass cheating to money laundering charges, we ask what is ailing the education system in the state and can the Nitish Kumar government duck the responsibility?

The channel played out images of Ganesh Kumar playing a harmonium, cheating during examinations, arrest of the alleged toppers and Nitish Kumar's press conference promising stiff action.

It stated that the state government's allocates 15% of the annual budget to the education system. This shows that funds are not the problem. It refuted the claims made by *K.C.Tyagi*, Spokesperson, Janata Dal (United) that tighter invigilation processes set in place by the state government had led to declining pass percentage. The channel also played out three digital video graphics titled 'Fuzzy Logic' which showed statements made by the Bihar's Education Minister saying 'lower pass percentage shows cheating successfully curbed'; 'Arts student Ganesh Kumar is a genuine student' and 'CM happy as this time only meritorious students have passed'. The channel refuted the claims of the Minister by stating that despite tighter invigilation, mass cheating still persists during examinations. The channel also pointed out the existence of an underground nexus between the politicians and teachers which has corrupted the education system in the state. It stated that the state government has failed to tackle the education mafia which has political underpinnings. It fixed the responsibility of tackling such malpractices on the state government.

The debate was well moderated and each panelist was given ample time to put forth his view. A large part of the debate was also conducted in Hindi, where panelists from the state of Bihar gave their comments in Hindi. In the episode *Exam Scam: Bihar and Beyond*, the anchor, *Sunetra Choudhary*, invited two students from Bihar to share their 'first hand' experience of the kind of malpractices that run in education sector in the state. Their revelations provided insight into the systemic flaws that have crept into the education system, thereby hampering the future of the students.

The following is the episode aired under the section Bihar's crumbling education system on *Aaj Tak*.

- 'Kaise Padhega Bihar?' - Aired on *Halla Bol* on 1 June,

The channel maintained that the development of a nation rests on its education system. But the scam in the intermediate examination conducted of the Bihar State Education Board highlighted the rot in the education system of the state. It ran the headline ‘jiya ho bihar ke lala’,¹⁷⁸ (Live o son of Bihar) and said- ‘Bihar main bacche ji nahi rahen hai par jhel rahen hai!’ It showcased a few instances from its investigative reporting on the issue that pointed out the lapses in the education system. For example, Ganesh Kumar who was the music topper failed to play a harmonium; Anuj Kumar cleared the IIT-JEE but failed in the Physics and Chemistry paper, Vishwas Kumar did not appear for the Biology paper but was awarded marks, Ravi Kumar cleared IIT-JEE but failed in English and Chemistry paper. The channel rebuked the state’s education minister who did not participate in the discussion. It pointed out that the Nitish Kumar government was indulging in blame game and not taking responsibility for its inaction. The anchor repeatedly used the word ‘deemak’ (termite) to highlight the inefficient system. It further stated that it is wrong to pin the blame of the students. The anchor stated,

Main toh yeh kehti hun, ki yeh apradhik connivance hai, sarkar aur education mafia ke beech main, jo deemak ki tarah is system ko barbad kar rahen hai.

(The criminal connivance between the government and education mafia is the root cause of the disaster in the education system).

She repeatedly criticized the government representatives for their ineptitude and lack of responsibility in addressing the crisis.

Rewriting History

The following episode was aired on the issue of rewriting history on *NDTV24x7*.

- ‘Rajasthan text book row: Distorting History?’ - Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 12 June, 2017.

The second issue debated on the theme of education was the attempt to distort history in the revised class 10th and 12th textbooks of the Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education (RBSE) by

¹⁷⁸The line is borrowed from the famous song ‘jiya ho bihar ke lala’ featured in the Hindi movie ‘Gangs of Wasseypur’.

the BJP led Vasundhara Raje government in the state of Rajasthan¹⁷⁹. The channel claimed that deliberate effort is being made to give a dose of the saffron style of nationalism to the school children in the state. Nidhi Razdan, Anchor, made an introductory remark. She said,

Title of ‘the great’ was removed from Akbar’s name, Nehru was nearly erased from class 8th textbook, and now the class 10th textbook have given a larger than life to Veer Sarvarkar while Mahatma Gandhi is merely a passing reference.

She quoted the state’s education minister Vasudev Devnani’s remarks where he said, ‘Indian history will no longer be about one family but will include heroes like Veer Sarvarkar, Subhash Chandra Bose and many others who have contributed to the nation’s history’. In response to this statement, the anchor asked the question – ‘is there a deliberate attempt to rewrite textbooks?’ She then introduced the panel which consisted of Prof. Sucheta Mahajan, Center for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Prof. Ashis Nandy, Sociologist, Prof. Rakesh Sinha, RSS Ideologue and Sachin Pilot, Congress Leader.

The discussion started with the question of why such attempts at rewriting history are being witnessed specifically in the state of Rajasthan. The channel ran a series of digital video graphics which highlighted the changes being incorporated in the textbooks. The graphic played out in the following order- ‘class 10 textbook: Veer Savarkar edges out Nehru, Gandhi just a mention’; ‘Savarkar a great revolutionary, patriot and “sangathanwadi”’; ‘PM Nehru erased from class 8 textbook in 2016’; ‘class 11 textbook: Congress ‘nurtured baby’ of British’; ‘Rajasthan Education Minister: Every hero can’t be included in every book’ and so on. While the graphics played out on the left side of the screen, the anchor kept raising questions like - is it right to deny the role of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in India’s freedom struggle? Why is Veer Sarvarkar dominating the narrative and Mahatma Gandhi given a miniscule role? to the panelists. While trying to understand the reason for Rashtriya Swamsewak Sangh’s (RSS) contempt for Nehru, the anchor made a statement- why is Jawaharlal Nehru being blamed for everything from drought to high temperature by the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) government? The RSS ideologue chided the anchor was making comments and said that people are unnecessarily talking about

179 For more on this read <https://thewire.in/147887/rajasthan-textbooks-revised-glorify-modi-government/>, accessed 16 June, 2017.

attempt at distortion without reading the textbooks. In response, the anchor said that her reporter had gone through the textbooks and had conveyed to her the changed contents in the textbooks. She then took up the proposal of having an independent commission that should look into framing of school syllabus. She raised the question of- ‘who ought to be the members of such a commission, considering the polarizing times that we are living in, pitting *our* history with *their* history, labeling people as *left* and *right*, where would a consensus emerge from on what should be there in the syllabus?’

The debate was well moderated. There was no noise as has become the norm when issues of nationalism are debating on primetime television. The anchor allowed ample time to all panelists to express their views. However, she made her disagreements with Prof. Sinha amply visible by making sarcastic remarks. She ended the show by stating it was a fascinating issue to debate and there is a need for having debates and discussions at a larger platform. It further said that it is important to understand why BJP is trying to appropriate national leaders like Sardar Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose.

Agricultural Distress

Although generally ignored, news related to the agricultural sector, made it to the headlines across news platforms, due to the farmer protests which started in Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh (MP) and later spread to other states in June 2017. These protests starting 1st June, 2017 were organized by farmers from the Mandsaur District of Madhya Pradesh demanding agriculture loan waiver, Minimum Support Price (MSP) for their agricultural produce and compensation for failed crops. On 6th June, 2017, five protesting farmers died in police firing in Mandsaur. The subsequent protests turned violent when public buses were stoned and set on fire. The violence then spread to the neighboring Dewas District in MP.

The following are the episodes aired under the theme of agricultural distress on *NDTV 24x7*.

- ‘Farmer unrest: Minimum support, maximum rhetoric?’ - Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 7 June, 2017
- ‘Farmers in Distress: Politics at Play?’ - Aired on *The Buck Stops Here* on 7 June, 2017.

- ‘The Unquiet Fields: Farmer Protest from Maharashtra to MP’ - Aired on *Truth vs Hype* on 11 June, 2017.
- ‘Farmer Distress: Political Opportunism?’ - Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 13 June, 2017.
- ‘Maharashtra Handout: The Note ban hurdle’ - Aired on *Reality Check* on 20 June, 2017

NDTV 24x7 aired four debate shows and one investigative story on the issue of agricultural distress. The first episode on this theme was aired on 7th June, in response to the tragic death of five farmers who were protesting against the MP government in *Mandsaur* district on 6th June.

The channel reported that the farmers of *Mandsaur* district had organized a ten day strike demanding loan waiver, MSP and compensation for their failed crops. These protests had turned violent after five of the protesting farmers died in police firing. The channel questioned the misplaced priorities of the BJP-led government on the issue. It was critical of the fact that the government was making tall claims about his achievements in the agriculture sector on a day when five farmers had died. It asked the question whether the government at least acknowledged that farmer distress is a serious issue and needs its urgent attention. The channel claimed that if the issue of farmer agitation not addressed immediately it may lead to more serious and untoward protests in other parts of the country.

The protests continued unabated and slowly started spreading to nearby areas. In order to curtail the protests from getting worse, the Maharashtra government made an offer of loan waiver to the farmers. In the episode *Farmer Distress: Political Opportunism*, the channel debated the fiscal prudence of loan waiver scheme to tackle the protests. It raised the issue of whether the idea of loan waiver, which would put more financial pressure on each state, a feasible option? It further stated that the issue of farmer distress was getting lost in the political slugfest between the BJP and Congress. ? The channel stated that the Chief Minister of MP is blaming the opposition party for creating unrest. He said that protests are not due to anti-farmer policies but due to anti-social elements.

The channel aired an on ground report *The Unquiet Fields: Farmer Protest from Maharashtra to MP* from the protest side which attempted to explain the spreading unrest from

MP to Maharashtra. It stated that the unrest is surprising as India witnessed a bumper harvest due to good monsoons and despite the devastation brought about due to demonetization. Citing an example of *Tur Dal* production in Maharashtra, the channel said that after two years of consecutive drought the state had bumper crop due to good monsoon. The government also procured the dal produce but failed to give remuneration on time. Two months have passed and yet the farmers have not received the payment.

The channel pointed out the duplicity of BJP-led government which had promised the implementation of the *Swaminathan Report* in its 2014 election manifesto. After coming to power, the central government had given an affidavit to the Supreme Court saying that the implementation of the prices as stated in the report is unfeasible as it may distort market and led to high inflation. The channel said that the duplicity of the government has angered the farmers. It also stated that lack of urgency in addressing the farmer issue is responsible for spreading of the unrest. Further, the channel also aired an investigative report from Maharashtra which showed how demonetization has stalled Maharashtra's government's cash handout to farmers. In order to control the farmer protest in the state, the Maharashtra government had promised a sop of 10,000 rupees of cash to farmers till their demand for loan waiver was addressed. The government had announced that the farmers can this cash from cooperative banks in the state. However, an investigative story *Maharashtra Handout: The Note Ban Hurdle* done by Sreenivasan Jain, Anchor, showed how the farmer protests had links with the Demonitization (note ban) policy which was implemented in November, 2016. The report showed that the cooperative banks in Maharashtra were still stuck with the old cash as it had not been converted to new cash. This because the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had said that cooperative banks do not come within its purview and hence the cash with them is not legal tender. RBI feared that because many politicians head cooperative banks and therefore such banks would be used to convert their black money to legal tender. Given the complexity of the issue, the channel stated that it is the duty of the government to provide redressal to the farmers. It called for fundamental changes in the agricultural policy to address farmer distress.

The following are the episodes aired under the theme of agricultural distress on *Aaj Tak*.

- 'Kab aayenge kisano ke acche din?' –Aired on *Dustak* on 6 June, 2017

- ‘Zameen Kisan Ki, Kheti Siyasatdan Ki’- Aired on *Halla Bol* on 8 June, 2017.
- ‘Na koi sarkar, na koi policy, phir bhi kaha ‘annadata bhavo’ – Aired on *Dustak* on 8 June, 2017.
- ‘Rajya dar rajya sulagti andolan ki chingari! - Aired on *Dustak* on 12 June, 2017.
- ‘Kisano ki maut aur akaadon ka khel’-Aired on *Dustak* on 14 June, 2017.

The issue of farmer protest was debated within the wider context of farmer suicides in India on *Aaj Tak*. In the episode, *Kisano ki maut aur akaadon ka khel*, Punya Prasun Bajpai, Anchor, quoted figures from the National Crime Record Bureau to show the number of farmer suicide in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh during the past 5 years. He further said that during the past 15 years, different political parties like Congress, BJP, Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party have been in power in these states. Yet, none of the political parties have addressed the issue of farmer suicide. This shows that none of the governments have any commitment towards welfare of the farmers. While every political party makes the farmer issue its primary issue to attack the government when it is out of power, they conveniently skirt the issue when they come to power. On one hand debt ridden farmers are committing suicide, and on the other hand, political representatives, even when they are out of power continue to enjoy state privileges.

The channel also said that few governments in the past have waived farm loans. But such action had little impact on the ground. This was because year after year, farmers meet the same hindrances like improper irrigation, no MSP, high credit rates, rising input costs and so on. The debt cycle keeps repeating every year. No government has worked diligently towards addressing these concerns of the farmers. The channel further stated that elections in India are fought in the name of farmers. Each party announces large scale benefits for farmers if it comes to power. However, nothing happens. It is because political parties in India largely rely on corporate and industrial houses for their party funds. Such business ventures accrue benefits from government policies which are largely skewed in their favour often by overriding the interest of the farmers. Moreover, questions are always raised about fiscal prudence only in relation to farm loan waiver. No one ever raises questions about corporate loan default. Successive governments have conveniently written off corporate loans. In the case of Madhya Pradesh, the government is shifting the blame of the violence on Congress Party. On the other hand, the Congress is trying to

get political mileage out of the issue. In this battle of political supremacy, the farmers are losing out. The channel blamed the political system of the country for the distress in agricultural sector. Farmers are an important constituency for vote bank politics only. They are being used as a stepping stone for achieving political power. The channel chided the systemic failures of the government to uplift the social and economic conditions of farmers in the country. It stated,

Sawal system ke fail ka hai. Jab system ka matlab satta ho jayee, toh koi kya kare. toh hoga yeh ki, aloo doo rupaiye kilo aur aloo chips 400 rupaiye kilo hoga. Tamatar 5 rupaiye kilo aur ketchup 200 rupaiye kilo hoga. Aur sansad ki canteen main chips aur ketchup dono hai. Aur PM bhi canteen ki diary main likh dete hai, annadata sukhi bhava.

(The issue is the failure of the system. When system is reduced to just holding political power, what can one do. Then potato will cost 2 rupees per kilogram and potato chips will cost 400 rupees per kilogram. Similarly, tomato will cost 5 rupees per kilogram and ketchup will cost 200 rupees per kilogram. Both chips and ketchup are available in the Parliament canteen. And our PM also writes in the diary of the canteen, hey food provider, be blessed).

Jobless Growth

NDTV 24x7 aired two shows on the current state of Indian economy. The discussions centered on the issue of jobless growth in the economic sector. The growth in Indian economy was not resulting in job creation, especially for the low skilled and unskilled population of the country. The discussion also centered on the government's failure of its much hyped initiative of skill development for job creation. The channel also aired an interview with Amitabh Kant, CEO of NITI Aayog where it questioned the tall promises of the government's achievement in the economic sphere.

The following episodes were aired under the section Jobless Growth on *NDTV24x7*.

- 'Jobless Growth: The New Normal?' - Aired on *The Big Fight* on 10 June, 2017.
- 'Where are the Jobs? NITI Aayog's Amitabh Kant on India's missing jobs'- Aired on *Truth vs. Hype* on 17 June, 2017.

NDTV 24x7 stated that the Indian economy is in a state of flux, especially in the job market. It's debate on jobless growth provided new insights into how non-human jobs like

artificial intelligence, robotics would make human labour especially the semi-skilled and unskilled labour, redundant in the near future, thereby generating unemployment and underemployment in the economy. The channel was critical of the much hyped initiative of skill development which had failed to achieve any target. It stated that results from the past four years show that the scheme failed to make much headway because of the abundance of semi-skilled and unskilled labour who do not even have basic minimum requirement to be part of such schemes. Coupled with this, is the low absorption rate of labour in industry and manufacturing sector which are looking for skilled labour. The channel also quoted an Ernst and Young and FICCI study which highlighted that almost 80% of engineering graduates and 90% of management graduates are unemployable. This shows the pathetic state of the education sector of the country. The channel also linked the increase in social tensions like Jat agitation, Maratha agitation to the lack of job opportunities in the country.

Misgovernance: Choking the Right to Information (RTI) Act

NDTV 24x7 also took up issue of the implications of dilution of the landmark to Right to Information (RTI) Act¹⁸⁰ and the political interference in the premiere investigative agency the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to highlight the misgovernance of the government. The RTI was a crucial pieces of legislation passed 2005. The Act enabled citizens to ask for information on any matter from public authorities. However, this landmark Act was being choked by the central government as putting information about government ministries, schemes and policies in the public domain was being curtailed¹⁸¹.

The following is the episode aired under the section Misgovernance: Choking the Right to Information (RTI) on *NDTV 24x7*.

¹⁸⁰ The Right to Information (RTI) was a landmark Act passed by the Parliament in 2005. Under the provisions of the Act, any Indian citizen can request information from a public authority. In turn, it is incumbent on that authority to provide the necessary information expeditiously.

¹⁸¹ On 26th July 2019, the Union government passed the RTI (Ammendment) Bill, 2019 in Parliament. The proposed amendments, in effect, give the union government the power to fix the tenure, salaries, and terms and conditions of service of the information commissioners (ICs), including the chief information commissioner (CIC) and the state information commissioners (SICs). For more on this read, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/30/law-and-society/true-dangers-rti-amendment-bill.html>, accessed 15 August, 2019.

- ‘Is RTI being choked?’ - Aired on *Agenda* on 1 June, 2017.

The channel stated that the political interference by the central government is choking the landmark RTI Act. The government through various interventions is making it difficult to access information from its ministers. While on the one hand, the government is promising transparency and accountability in the governance process, on the other hand, it is creating impediments to block flow of information. Many RTI activists are being threatened by hooligans and criminals. The channel quoted official reports saying that 56 RTI activists have been killed between 2005-2016. There has also been an increase in the number of applications being rejected by government, for example, from 60127 in 2013-14 to 63551 in 2014-15 to 64666 in 2015-16. The channel questioned the increase in rejection of applications. It stated that RTI is right that has been granted to the citizens and no amount of threats or rejections should deter them from holding the government accountable.

In the section, the issue of mis-governance became the rallying point for discussion on issues of agricultural distress and deteriorating education system in both the channels. Additionally, *NDTV 24x7* also debated the issue of jobless economic growth and the undermining of the landmark *RTI Act* by the government. Both the channels pointed out how systemic failure in the governance system is leading to distress and social unrest among vast sections of the population. The failure of successive governments to address the concerns in the education, agriculture, economic and financial sector, highlighted how the issue of progress and development has been pushed to the margins, by every political party which comes to power.

VIII

The Politics of Caste Identity

The channels debated two issues that made headlines under the theme of politics of caste. The first issue debated was the caste violence that erupted between the Dalit and the Thakur community in the *Sahranpur* District of Uttar Pradesh in April-May 2017. The second issue that

occupied most airtime on both the news channels was the election to the post of President of India in 2017¹⁸².

Caste Violence

The issue of caste violence was debated on *NDTV 24x7*. The channel debated the larger issue of caste politics by taking recourse to the caste riots in Saharanpur in 2017. The channel reported that violent clashes broke out between the two communities, Thakurs and Dalits on the occasion of the celebration of Ambedkar Jayanti. The Dalits had celebrated the birthday of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar on 13th April. However, seven days after the celebrations, the Thakur community took out an unauthorized rally in honour of B.R. Ambedkar on 20th April. This miffed the Dalits and clashes broke out between the two communities. In response to atrocities on Dalits in Saharanpur and elsewhere, a major Dalit gathering took place Delhi's Jantar Mantar in May, 2017. Many Dalit groups organized themselves under the banner of *Bhim Army* and protested against atrocities on Dalits in the country.

The following is the episodes aired under the section *Caste Violence* on *NDTV 24x7*.

- 'The Curse of Caste?' - Aired on *We The People* on 28 May, 2017

The issue was debated on the channel in the audience based talk show *We the People*. The opening montage of the show showed pictures of Dalit protesting in rallies, flogging of Dalit boys by upper caste cow vigilantes in Una and Chandrasekhar, Leader, Bhim Army addressing a rally. The anchor, *Sarah Jacob*, made provided some background to the issue under debate. She said,

Western Uttar Pradesh is on the boil. Disturbing caste clashes are becoming the order of the day. In response to major caste clashes during the course of two months in the region, Delhi's Jantar Mantar witnessed a major Dalit rally this week in response to the alleged upper caste violence, to which the recently appointed Chief Minister of UP and Hindutva hardliner Adityanath belongs too.....we are asking today is Dalit affirmation taking centerstage, has the Dalit uprising 2.0 begun?.

182 V. Geetha argues that the BJP's pick of Kovind goes against Ambedkar's idea of democracy. For more on this see, <https://thewire.in/150537/ram-nath-kovind-bjp-dalit-president-ambedkar/>, accessed 23 June, 2017

The anchor began the discussion by asking *Satpal Tanwar*, Bhim Army Core Member, the reason behind the recent clashes. Tanwar's response of Bhim Army's efforts to not establish a 'ram rajya par ek manavta ka rajya' invited applause from the audience. The channel played out a few digital video graphics which narrated the sequence of events that led to clashes in Sahranpur. Next, the channel discussed the evolution of *Bhim Army*. It stated that the evolution of Bhim Army signaled that mainstream Dalit political fronts are losing their ground. Despite the Dalit uprising in Una and the Rohit Vemula incident, the Bahajun Samaj Party (BSP) failed to capitalize on the Dalit anger. It was wiped out in the elections. The emergence of Dalit groups like *Bhim Army* highlighted the evolution of new young Dalit leaders in the country.

The role of the right-wing organization, Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), in co-opting the Dalits was also debated. *Jignesh Mevani*, Independent MLA, a panelist in the show, categorically rejected the claims of the right-wing that Dalits are part of the Hindu religious system. He revoked Babasaheb Ambedkar's thoughts where he stated that 'we have to become a secular, socialist democracy, not a Hindu rashtra. Hindu rashtra will be an absolute, complete disaster not just for Dalits but for the entire nation'.

The channel also highlighted the duplicity of the UP government in maintain law and order in the state. It stated that although, the Adityanath government had made maintenance of law and order a primary electoral issue, it had failed to control the situation. It appears that the government is more interested in what people eat and whom they love (referring to anti-romeo squads) than maintaining law and order. Moreover, the connivance of the UP administration in caste clashes is out in the open. Does it mean that the administration has different laws for different sections of the population?

It was a well moderated debate which raised pertinent questions about the Dalit movement. The panel consisted of representations from different walks of life. It was interesting to note that besides spokespersons and political activists, the channel also had four Dalits (an entrepreneur, a singer, a farmer and a student) on its panel who narrated their life experiences. They spoke about their struggles against caste discrimination in their respective professions. The anchor concluded the show by stating that the evolution of *Bhim Army* suggests that a new

movement has been born. The young and articulate Dalits are taking head on the centuries old discrimination against them.

Presidential Election 2017

The election was keenly contested between the two candidates belonging to the opposing camps. While *Ram Nath Kovind* was the nominee of the National Democratic Alliance, *Meira Kumar* was the nominee of the United Progressive Alliance. Both the channels were critical about how political parties in the two camps indulged in caste politics for electoral gains. The channels called out the fake symbolism of Dalit upliftment, as projected by both the camps in their selection of their nominees. The channels stated that the oft repeated practice of politics in the name of caste, has not led any social and political emancipation of the Dalits. The election was fought between the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) nominee *Ram Nath Kovind* and the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) nominee *Meira Kumar*. Both the nominees belong to the Dalit category. The choice of a Dalit nominee by the NDA was seen as appeasing to the large Dalit vote bank which was seen as getting alienated from the NDA. The alienation was a result of a series of atrocities against Dalits in Una, the Rohit Vemula incident in Hyderabad under the watch of the central government.

The following are the episodes aired under the section *Presidential Election 2017* on NDTV 24x7.

- ‘First ‘real’ Dalit President?’ - Aired on *Agenda* on 20 June, 2017.
- ‘Race to Raisina: Dalit Duel’- Aired on *Left, Right and Centre* on 22 June, 2017.

The other issue debated under this theme was the Presidential Election in 2017. The election to the highest office was contested between *Ram Nath Kovind*, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) nominee and *Meira Kumar*, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) nominee. The discussion on the issue of Presidential elections was done through the prism of caste. The discussion on the election in the audience show *Agenda*, anchored by *Sunetra Choudhary*, was framed as a Dalit Vs Dalit election. It was a studio based debate show which comprised of experts like *Chandra Bhan Prasad*, Dalit Writer and student activist *Doleshwar Bhoi* from Jawaharlal Nehru University and *Sukkani Munna* from Hyderabad Central University. Likewise,

the audience largely comprised of Dalit students from New Delhi. The anchor raised two questions in relation to the practice of caste politics in the Presidential Election. First, whether caste should be the criteria for the selection of the President? Second, aren't political parties engaging in mere tokenism rather than addressing the issue of Dalit protests and agitations earnestly?

The channel also discussed the relationship between BJP and the Dalit community. It asked whether it is right to view BJP as anti-dalit, given that amongst all the political parties in India, it is the BJP which has the maximum number of Dalits members in lower house of the Parliament, the Lok Sabha. Don't these numbers speak about their political representations of the Dalits?

The channel also debated about the implications of the Presidential elections on the larger political churning leading up to the 2019 general elections. It said that while the numbers are in favour of the NDA nominee, how it will be interesting to see how the defeat of the UPA nominee, impacts its unity in 2019. The channel also raised an apprehension of how neutral the President can be, if she/he is chosen by political parties?

The episodes aired under the theme of Presidential elections on *Aaj Tak* are as follows.

- 'Mahanama ki khoj' Aired on *Dustak* on 19 June, 2017
- 'Ram vs Meira' - Aired on *Halla Bol* on 22 June, 2017.
- 'Jaat hi pucho neta ki!' - Aired on *Dustak* on 22 June, 2017

Aaj Tak stated that the nomination of *Ram Nath Kovind* as NDA candidate was a part of 'surprise rajneeti (politics)' practiced by Prime Minister (PM) *Narendra Modi*. It referred to the selection of *Yogi Adityanath* as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in the 2017 assembly elections as also a part of PM's 'surprise rajneeti'. It further said-

Iss bar bhi pradhan mantra ne apne surprise rajneeti se sab ko chaunka diya hai.

(This time also the PM has struck again, leaving the opposition surprised).

In the successive discussions on the issue, the channel raised the issue of identity politics. The channel said that the nomination of *Ram Nath Kovind* by the BJP for the Presidential post

was clearly done to capture the Dalit votes. It mentioned how the party had put allegations on the opposition for highlighting the caste of *Rohith Vemula*. It stated,

Rohit vemula ki jati ko leke, BJP ne aarop lagaya tha ki Congress jati ki rajneeti kar rahi hai. Abhi BJP khud ek dalit ko rashtrapati chunav main uttara hai. Toh kya, jati ki rajneeti thek hai?

(The party had alleged that the opposition parties were practicing caste politics. Now, the party itself is indulging in such kind of politics. Is this politicization of caste fair?)

The channel then showed digital video graphics of past leaders who belonged to marginalized communities and were elected to high offices. It stated that past instances show that the election of a person from minority community has never benefitted that community. For example, Indira Gandhi was a woman Prime Minister, K.R.Narayan was a Dalit President, Zakir Hussain, Mohammad Hidayatullah, Fakruddin Ali Ahmed and A.P.J Abdul Kalam were Muslim Presidents. Yet, the social groups to which these leaders belonged continue to be marginalized. Hence, election to the highest office does not guarantee emancipation.

The discussion on the theme of caste politics was done on two core issues relating to Dalit identity. One, is the upper caste atrocity on dalit groups and second, the participation of dalits in the mainstream political process in the country. While *NDTV 24x7* aired shows on both the issues, *Aaj Tak* engaged primarily with the issue of political participation of dalits. The narrative woven on the theme of caste politics by both channels questioned the use of caste identity by every political party in India. *NDTV 24x7* particularly raised the issue of how the right-wing was trying to co-opt dalits in view on the ensuing general elections. However, both channels labeled such kind of politics as regressive. They also highlighted how dalit groups have just been used for vote bank politics without any transformative changes in their marginalized status in the country.

IX

Framing of Narrative(s): A Comparative Assessment of *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*

It can be seen how both *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak* framed their respective media discourses around themes that made headlines during the period of the field study. Based on the above analysis, I try to cull out the points of similarities and dissimilarities in the media narratives of

both the news channels. The similarities that emerge from both the channels is only vis-à-vis their production technique, for instance, selection of topic, selection of guests, episode designing, audio and visual elements, tweets and videos. Likewise, the dissimilarities that emerge from both the channel is vis-à-vis how they frame their discourse through their editorial positioning. It should be noted that not all kinds of discourses are divergent. In the context of this study, it was observed that dissimilarities arose only in relation to certain themes. For instance, *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak* had divergent narratives on the issues which were debated within the cultural nationalism¹⁸³ framework. However, the narratives on issues debated from the mis-governance perspective were similar. I explain this in detail in the later part of this section.

First, I provide an overview of the similarities in the production of media narratives. A glance at the type of episodes aired on both channels suggests that a range of issues ranging from the social, political, cultural, regional, economic spectrum occupy slots in news programming. It appears that talk programming in the form of debates, discussions and deliberations in news channels on contemporary issues plays a key role in center-staging them to the mainstream public discourse. For instance *NDTV 24x7*, hosted an array of topics in its primetime programming like, '*PM Modi's Europe Outreach*', '*Didigiri in Darjeeling: GJM crisis mishandled by TMC?*', '*Exam Scam: Bihar and Beyond*', '*Rajasthan Textbook Row: Distorting History?*', '*Farmer Unrest: Minimum Support, Maximum Rhetoric*' and so on. Similarly, in *Aaj Tak*, the topics aired for debate and discussions related to social, cultural, political issues which made headlines during that period of time. Thus episodes like *Kab aayenge kisano ke acche din?*, *Kisano ki maut aur akaadon ka khel*, *Kaise Padhega Bihar?*, *Darjeeling Hinsa*, *Patharbazon se pyar*, *Army Chief par vaar*, *Gaukashi*, *Seila tayaar*, *mandir ka intezaar*, *Beef Karobar aur Siyasat* etc. were aired on the channel. Selection of topics for discussion entirely rested on the prime story of the day. However, discussions on certain issues like the farmer protest, cattle trade regulation and Presidential elections did continue for three to four days. It

¹⁸³Cultural nationalism generally refers to ideas and practices that relate to the intended revival of a purported national community's culture. It is focused on the cultivation of a nation. Here the vision of a nation is not a political organization, but a moral community. As such, cultural nationalism sets out to provide a vision of the nation's identity, history and destiny. The key agents of cultural nationalism are intellectuals and artists, who seek to convey their vision of the nation to the wider community. The need to articulate and express this vision tends to be most acutely during times of social, cultural or political upheaval resulting from an encounter with modernity (Woods 2014: 1).

was also observed that at times, the topics chosen for discussion were based on tweets and sound bites which were framed as controversial by the channel. This was evident in episodes like *Salman ko vivid pasand hai*, *Sena par sadakchap siyasat*. Such episodes were based on tweets and sound bites on politicians and film actors which were picked up from their social media handles. The channel aired debate shows on these sound bites. Chapter 5 highlighted how the saleability of a topic is the primary criteria for its selection in debate shows. Saleability essentially refers to producing content that attracts eyeballs and ratings. Topics that provide scope for heated arguments and discussions are more likely to be selected for debates. Each of the episodes mentioned turned out to be shouting matches.

Along with themes, the format of programs like studio debates, documentaries, interviews, audience shows are also similar in both channels. For instance, within its current affairs genre, the *NDTV 24x7* channel offers a mix of programming formats. The weekday shows like *Agenda*, *Left, Right and Centre* and *The Buck Stops Here* generally pick up the central news story of the day. As the story keeps developing till its telecast time, the channel is left with minimal time to provide comprehensive background information on the issue. Moreover, their focus is limited to how the issue developed through the day. On the other hand, the weekend audience based shows *We the People* and *The Big Fight* focus on issues that have become the talking point of the week. Such shows have the advantage of long format which provides time for better research, moderation, audience participation and in-depth discussion of the issue at hand. As stated earlier, the producers of these shows believe that such shows help their audience to get a grounded understanding and form an opinion of contemporary issues debated in the larger context. During the telecast of these shows, it was seen that audience participation in the discussion was encouraged. Questions and counter questions to the panelists were encouraged. Views of the audience were welcomed. This was in stark contrast to many other news channels where harping on the channel's agenda has become the norm. A few episodes that were aired on these shows like 'Holy Cow', 'Unholy Politics, Gorkhaland: Mountain Echo', 'Is the Army getting Politicized?', 'Jobless Growth: The New Normal' and 'The Curse of Caste' did meet the requirements of long format. Each of these issues had gained prominence during the period of the fieldwork and hence were debated and discussed in the channel. Besides the primary focus on weekday and weekend talk shows, the channel also aired a few episodes based on investigative

reporting like ‘*Cattle Ban: Behind the Numbers*’, ‘*Maharashtra Handout: The Note Ban Hurdle*’, ‘*The Unquiet Fields: Farmer Protest from Maharashtra to MP*’, interviews like ‘*Where are the Jobs? NITI Aayog’s Amitabh Kant on India’s missing jobs*’ and documentary like ‘*Weapon of War: The Women of Bastar*’ featured on the channel. Similarly, in *Aaj Tak*, the current affairs genre consisted primarily of studio debate show like *Halla Bol*. A few episodes aired on *Halla Bol* were ‘*Ram versus Meira*’, ‘*Zameen Kisan ki, Kheti Siyasat Dan ki*’, ‘*Kaise Padhega Bihar*’, ‘*Gaukashi, Beef Karobar Aur Siyasat*’, ‘*Beef ke Bahane Kitne Akhlaq?*’ and likewise. Two other shows *Khabardaar* and *Dustak* were news analysis show which provided an in-depth analysis of a news item. Some of the episodes that featured in such format were ‘*Mahanama ki Khoj*’, ‘*Jaat na Pucho Neta ki*’, ‘*Darjeeling Hinsa*’, ‘*Kab aayenge kisano ke acche din?*’, ‘*Zameen Kisan Ki, Kheti Siyasatdan Ki*’ and so on.

The designing of these shows in both channels is another point of convergence. Both the channels make extensive use of video footage, windows, slugs and digital video graphics alongside their discussions to make their shows more appealing. It was observed that digital video graphics were extensively used to give provide a brief overview of the historical legacy of issues like the Babri Masjid and Gorkhaland agitation. They were also used to provide a timeline for contemporary issues like Bihar education scam, cattle trade regulation, climate change, presidential elections and so on. They would also cite data from government records, historical reports and official records. Many times, the discussion would be divided into segments and the slugs would showcase the questions that would come up in the next segment.

The selection of panelists, experts or guests for studio debates is also similar for both channels. The panelists/ guests/ experts who appeared on the debate shows came from various occupational backgrounds like official party spokespersons, social activists, academicians, bureaucrats, politicians, journalists, youth leaders and so on. As mentioned earlier (chapter five and six), the evolution of talk programming, has necessitated a rise of official spokespersons, who appear on television discussions to put forth the party mandated view on the issue under deliberation. All political parties both national and regional have appointed their own team of spokesperson who appear on television debates. For instance, during the course of the field work, the Congress party was represented by *Sharmistha Mukherjee*, *Dr. Ajoy Kumar*, *Randeep Surjewala*, *Akhilesh Pratap Singh* and *Jaiveer Shergill*, the BJP was represented by *Sambit*

Patra, Gautam Bhatia, Sheshadari Chari, Sudhansu Trivedi and GVL Narsimha Rao. Ghanshyam Tiwari represented the Samajwadi Party, *Sunit Chopra* and *D. Raja* represented the Community Party of India, *K.C. Tyagi* represented the Janta Dal (United) and likewise. Besides spokespersons, social activists like *Sunita Narain, Rahul Eshwar, John Dayal, Ranjana Kumari* were also panelists on both channels. Academicians like *Prof. Sucheta Mahajan, Prof. Ashis Nandy, Prof. Arun Kumar, Prof. Rakesh Sinha* also appeared on the two channels. The youth leaders who appeared as panelists were *Saket Bahuguna, Shehla Rashid, and Sukkanni Munna*.

Next, I provide an overview of the dissimilarities in the production of media narratives. As mentioned earlier, the dissimilarities emerge primarily from the way the two news channels frame their discourse in terms of their editorial positioning.

NDTV 24x7 is primarily seen as professing a liberal discourse in its news orientation. This was reflected in its discussions and deliberations on themes like beef politics, state of nation, Indian Army, gender, saffronization of education, censorship of cinema, Ayodhya agitation and Sahranpur caste riots, where the channel resisted the imposition of the cultural nationalistic agenda by BJP led government in power. In each of these thematic discussions, the channel highlighted how the government was trying to promote its divisive agenda by resorting to tactics like censorship of free speech, controlling dietary practices, advocating Hindu religion and upper caste supremacy. The channel stated that such exclusionary politics ran counter to the ethos of plurality and diversity as espoused by the Indian constitution. It further said that the government was resorting to diversionary tactics like banning cinema, regulating food habits, fanning Hindu sentiments while keeping silent on more pressing concerns like lack of employment opportunities and low economic growth. Similarly, the advocacy of the RSS led world view on issues like women's body and procreation, distorting Indian history, banning consumption of beef, organizing caste riots, were all part of a well thought strategy of mainstreaming Hindutva politics for electoral gains. The channel was critical of the jingoistic nationalism which has been ably supported and promoted by the government. It targeted the government of shooting down criticism by hiding behind the façade of nationalism. In the episode, *Is the Army getting Politicized?*, the channel categorically stated how sections of Indian media have played a pivotal role in advocating this form of hyper nationalism. It accused the government for creating a divide within the media fraternity for electoral gains. On the other

hand, sections of media have blatantly flouted the norms of profession and have become mouthpieces of the government. This has resulted in the media pitching debates on various social, political and cultural issues within the framework of national vs anti-national divide and thereby preventing any serious and meaningful discussions on such issues. It was observed that while cultural nationalism was one frame for analyzing the discourse at *NDTV24x7*, the other was lack of governance/mis-governance.

Likewise, discussion on thematic issues like farmer protest, education scam, violence against women, statehood agitation, by the channel, pointed out to the systematic failure of government policies in furthering the agenda of inclusive development. The channel stated that the failure of successive governments to address the pressing issues in the agriculture sector is responsible for spreading of the farmer unrest across India. It called for fundamental changes in the agricultural policy to address farmer distress. Similarly, the scam in the intermediate examination in Bihar was the result of loopholes in the education polices. The channel stated that despite tighter invigilation, mass cheating still persists during examinations. It pointed out the existence of an underground nexus between the politicians and teachers which has corrupted the education system in the state. It stated that the state government has failed to tackle the education mafia which has political underpinnings. In the episode '*Gurugram Shocker: No Country for Women*' and '*Why Haryana's school girls are on strike?*', the channel targeted state government and union government for failing to ensure safety and security of women in the country. It stated that the launch of government schemes like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* were more about creating media hype that addressing the issue of women empowerment on the ground. On the issue of statehood agitation in Darjeeling, episodes like '*Didigiri in Darjeeling: GJM crisis mishandled by TMC?*' and '*Gorkhaland: Mountain Echo*', the channel accused the government of using the Gorkha identity issue as rallying point in the run up to the 2014 elections and later neglecting it after coming into power. The channel framed the issue of Gorkhaland agitation through the prism of social, cultural and political identities of Gorkhas. Each of the discussion highlighted how the promise of governance¹⁸⁴ has taken a back seat. In common parlance, governance refers to act and manner of governing over action, policies with authority. The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) defines governance as management of all such processes that, in any society, define

¹⁸⁴The Tenth Five Year Plan is available at http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/10th/volume1/v1_ch6.pdf, accessed 10 September, 2018.

the environment which permits and enables individuals to raise their capability levels, provide opportunities to realize their potential and enlarge the set of available choices. These processes, covering the political, social and economic aspects of life impact every level of human enterprise, be it the individual, the household, the village, the region or the national level. It covers the state, civil society and the market, each of which is critical for sustaining human development. The state is responsible for creating a conducive political, legal and economic environment for building individual capabilities and encouraging private initiative. The market is expected to create opportunities for people. Civil society facilitates the mobilization of public opinion and people's participation in economic, social and political activities (ibid: 177). Thus, governance can be understood as working together of state, civil society and market towards the realization of the goals of social development. In its ideal form, governance is seen as a panacea for addressing human wellbeing and sustained development through strategies like people's participation, decentralization, civil society involvement, empowerment of marginal groups. However, in practice, one finds that poor or lack of governance becomes a breeding ground for various kinds of unrest across the country. It leads discrimination and exploitation of the marginal sections of the population. The channel debated agricultural distress, faulty education system, statehood agitation, discrimination and violence through the lens of misgovernance.

On the other hand, the editorial policy of *Aaj Tak* has always been to provide news that has a mass appeal. This is delivered by framing a news policy which promotes majoritarian agenda with a concoction of entertainment. This mix also imbibes the important aspect of television ratings. The journalists employed by the network do openly accept that the primary aim of the channel is to garner maximum ratings through its programming.

The aspect of presenting news in an entertainment format is largely done through the use of language. As the channel largely caters to the Hindi speaking viewership in small cities and towns and middle and lower middle class strata, the focus is to present news in a language which is similar to the language spoken by its audience. The channel feels that Indian audience relate easily to the Hindi film industry, Bollywood's style of language, informal and colloquial. This was the main factor which shaped the language policy in the channel during its foundational years. Thus the language policy of *Aaj Tak* is similar to the language used in Bollywood (chapter 5). This strategy is well evident in the titles of the debate shows aired on the channel in the

contemporary time. There have been instances where songs and dialogues from Bollywood movies have been used as titles of debate shows. A few instances like, '*Modi vs. All. Abhi toh party shuru hui hai!*' (aired on 13th march, 2018), '*Sena par Sadakchap siyasat!*, '*Sena ki Keemat tum kya jaano sandeep babu!*' (aired on 12th June, 2017). According to the employees of the channel, such catchy phrases attract eyeballs. The entertainment quotient is also met by presenting studio debates as wrestling bouts. It was observed in episodes like '*Salman ko vivid pasand hai*, '*Sena par sadakchap siyasat*, '*Pakistan ki jeet*, '*Deshdrohion ki Eid*, '*Sheila Tayaar*, '*Mandir ka Intezaar* and '*Zameen Kisan Ki, Kheti Siyasatdan ki*, which turned out to be mud-slinging matches. The anchors would purposely try to provoke the spokespersons to create conflict. Many times, the spokespersons indulged in blame game, accusing the dissenting voices of politicizing the issue being debated. The channel would allow the mudslinging to continue without any intervention. In such situations, the chat windows of the conflicting guests would be enlarged and a 'versus' sign would be superimposed on their chat windows. Such strategies would dilute any kind of sane discussion on the issue concerned. It appeared as though, the main motive of the channel was to fill air time and not contribute to any genuine engagement with the issues being debated. Many of the debates were also pre-concluded where the focus was on harping the channel's agenda and subduing the critical voices. This was evident when statements like- '*moo todh jawab us soch ko jo Army chief ko General Dyer se compare karti hai*' (episode- '*patharbazon se pyaar, army chief par var*), '*Pakistan ki jeet par, Kashmir main phute phatake*' (episode- '*Pakistan ki jeet, Deshdrohi ki Eid*), '*khane ki azadi ke naam par shakaharion ki samvednao par kutharaghaat kyun?*' (episode- '*Virodh ke naam par gauvadh*) were made during the course of the show.

The editorial positioning of the channel was reflected in its discussion of several thematic issue like beef politics, Indian Army, religion, cricket and caste. These issues were debated within the context of the prevailing hyperbole of cultural nationalism. For instance, on the issue of the ramification of the cattle trade regulation on beef consumption, the channel portrayed the controversy as a geographical north-south division in the country. It stated that in North India the cow issue is essentially seen as a sentimental issue being linked to Hindu religion. Here people are worshipping cow. In South India it is being seen as a right to food issue where people are slaughtering a cow and organizing beef festivals. It further stated that slaughtering cow and

organizing beef festivals has hurt the religious sentiments of large section of population. Similarly, on the issue of the Ayodhya dispute, the channel maintained that construction of a Ram temple is about Hindu faith. The BJP government should hasten the process of temple construction and uphold the sentiments of the majority Hindus. Along with cricket, discussion on Indian Army was also done on similar lines. The channel was critical of the voices that questioned the Indian Army. It framed such questioning as wrong and termed these critical voices as enemies of the nation. Every debate on the Army was framed in the form of a binary i.e. national and anti-national. Any voice that is critical of Army action was termed as anti-national. The channel claimed that anti-nationals want to divide and destroy the Indian nation. They raise anti-India slogans and grieve at the funeral of terrorists and not Indian soldiers. The channel advocated that it is the duty of the Army to teach lesson to such people and that the Army would receive support from all true Indians towards this endeavor. The issue of caste politics in the run up to the Presidential Elections in 2017 also found its share of space on the channel. The channel stated that the nomination of a NDA led Dalit candidate was a part of the surprise politics practiced by the Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi. In the past too, the PM has surprised everyone with the selection of Yogi Adityanath as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. This time around, the PM has struck again, leaving the opposition in disarray. While eulogizing the PM electoral tactics, the channel also questioned the use of caste identity for electoral politics. It stated by pitching the contest between ‘My Dalit’ and ‘Your Dalit’, political parties were essentially playing caste politics without any genuine concern for the up-liftment of the Dalit community. It argued that in the history of Indian nation, people from marginalized groups have occupied the highest offices in India. Yet, such form of empowerment had not led emancipation of these marginalized groups.

Like *NDTV 24x7*, the theme of mis-governance became the rallying point for discussion on issues like farmer protest and education scam in Bihar. The issue of farmer protests in 2017 was debated within the wider context of farmer suicides in India. The channel cited official records to show how the issue of farmer suicides continues to be unaddressed by the entire political spectrum. None of the governments have any commitment towards welfare of the farmers. While every political party makes the farmer issue its primary issue to attack the government when it is out of power, they conveniently sidetrack the issue when they come to

power. No government has worked diligently towards addressing these concerns of the farmers. The channel further stated that elections in India are fought in the name of farmers. Each party announces large scale benefits for farmers if it comes to power. However, nothing happens. It is because political parties in India largely rely on corporate and industrial houses for funds. Such business ventures accrue benefits from government policies which are largely skewed in their favour often by overriding the interest of the farmers. Moreover, questions are always raised about fiscal prudence only in relation to farm loan waiver. No one ever raises questions about corporate loan default. The political system of the country is completely at fault for the mis-governance in agricultural sector. Similarly, the channel argued that the examination scam in Bihar is due to the improper implementation of the policies of the state government. It stated that the education is the foundational pillar of development of a country. Yet, one finds that mis-governance has led to rot in the education system. There is criminal connivance of the education mafia and the government. Year after year scams are being unearthed and the government fails to take any stringent action. As a result, students have become the worst sufferers of the defective system.

Thus, it can be seen that cultural nationalism and mis-governance were the two overarching frames within which the discussions on both the news channels took place. On the issue of mis-governance both the news channels appear to be framing a similar narrative. In both the news channel, the issue of mis-governance was seen as failure of government policies. Both the channels contended that elections are fought on the promise of better governance on issues like infrastructure, agricultural, education, health, environment etc. However, they are conveniently sidelined by all political parties after attaining power. Both the news channels were univocal on their stand of calling out systemic inefficiency of the political system which was paralyzing the governance structure of the country.

However, the divide in Indian media was clearly visible on the issues debated within the overarching theme cultural nationalism. The ascendancy of the right-wing politics in India has resulted in the center-staging of the idea of cultural nationalism into the mainstream discourse. Some media groups have been important constituents in constructing and legitimizing this discourse. In contemporary times, one finds that while one section of media accepts the government ideology and propagates its majoritarian views, the other section is critical of the

current dispensation. This division was clearly visible in the manner in which the two news channels framed their discourse on social, cultural and political issues. While *NDTV 24x7* spoke about upholding the rule of law, *Aaj Tak* called for upholding the rule of the majority. The shrill discourse on cultural nationalism by *Aaj Tak* was in sync with the ideology of the government-hyper-nationalist, majoritarian and divisive. This style of framing discourses differently showcases how different media, consciously adopt different orientations, to produce and represent their discourses. This finding concurs with Stuart Hall's idea that media institutions work actively to structure and shape discourses that provide account of every day events and occurrences.

The next chapter looks at the third aspect of consumption of media texts. It attempts to engage with the voices of the viewers of the English news channel *NDTV24x7* and the Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak* and make sense of their interpretation of the divergent discourses that the channel frame.

Chapter 8

Consumption of Current Affairs Programming: Mapping Voices of Viewers

Earlier chapters mapped out the dynamics of the production and representation of media texts in *NDTV24x7* and *Aaj Tak*. This chapter focuses on consumption of media texts. I approach the issue of consumption from two levels- organizational and viewership. At the organizational level, the focus is to examine how journalists and news professionals working in the two news organizations, identify their viewership base. What perhaps is not visible is that news channels too strategize to engage ‘their’ audience. I further probe into the kinds of ‘engagements’ employed by them for producing content for their targeted audiences. At the viewership level, an attempt is made to make sense of how news audience understand and interpret news reporting by news channels in general and the sample news organizations in particular. It is within these dynamic interrelationships between media institution and audience that one seeks to explore the role of news media in making of an informed citizenry.

The chapter draws from the New Audience Research to explore how audience and media texts on their screens interact. It is divided into five sections. First, it maps out the views of news audience on the role of media in democracy. Besides examining audience responses to specific issue like media as a source of news and information, making government accountable and mediating between citizen and government, the role of media in framing public discourse at large, is discussed in detail. Second, it tries to examine how news professionals and news audience engage with the issue of Hindi-English language differentiation, as playing an integral role in the framing of content on television news. Third, it takes up the case of the English news channel *NDTV 24x7* and explores the channel’s understanding of its audiences. It also probes into the how news audience view the functioning of the channel. The fourth section deals with the Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak* and here too seeks to understand the approach of the channel in identifying its audience and the audience perception about the channel. This analysis is crucial as contributes towards understanding the why, how and what news content is produced and circulated to the audiences. The fifth section tries to map out the reasons for the transformation of media audiences from *citizens* to *consumers* in the context of growth of private television news media space.

The next section looks at audience's understanding of the role of media in a democracy. While it maps out their responses on the four specific roles (information, accountability, mediator and opinion maker) mentioned earlier, it probes deeper into the role of media in framing the public discourse(s) in society.

I

Role of Media in Democracy: Voices of the Viewers

As discussed previously, some of the key responsibilities of media in democratic societies are providing information to citizens, facilitating citizen participation and deliberation, opening up space for marginal voices and holding government accountable have been identified as some of the vital responsibilities of media in democratic societies. Summing up on the role of media in democracy, Rajdeep Sardesai remarks,

The basic role of media is to inform, educate and in a sense create public opinion hopefully in a manner that strengthens democracy, effectively meaning that inform and create public opinion that strengthen core constitutional values. The constitutional values of equality, gender justice, ensuring just for victims in any situation, tolerance, pluralism, protecting the dignity of individual citizens should be strengthened by media. I think media's role is to ensure that these constitutional values are preserved and enhanced by informing, educating, creating public opinion.

Taking cue from the above defined roles, I intend to look at how the audience respondents view the role of television news media in a democratic country like India. The respondents were asked to rank their preferences on a scale of 1 to 4 i.e. from their most important to the least. The following table shows the result of their ranking.

Table 8: Role of Television News Media in Democracy

Sl.No	Reasons	Scale				Rank
		1	2	3	4	
1.	Provide information	74(65.48%)				Provide Information
	Help in formation of opinion	12(10.61%)				
	Make government accountable	30(26.54%)				
	Act as mediator between government and citizens	24(21.23%)				
2.	Provide information		14(12.38%)			
	Help in formation of opinion		33(29.20%)			
	Make government accountable		38(33.62%)			Government Accountable
	Act as mediator between government and citizens		27(23.89%)			
3.	Provide information			12(10.61%)		
	Help in formation of opinion			33(29.20%)		Opinion formation
	Make government accountable			28(24.77%)		
	Act as mediator between government and citizens			23(20.35%)		
4.	Provide information				9(7.96%)	
	Help in formation of opinion				32(28.31%)	
	Make government accountable				17(15.04%)	
	Act as mediator between government and citizens				36(31.85%)	Mediator between Govt and Citizens

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

The above table lists the rankings of the role of news channels in the following order. The first role of news channels is to provide information (65.48%), the second role is to make government accountable (33.62%), the third role is to help in formation of public opinion (29.20%) and the fourth role is to act as a mediator between government and citizens (31.85%). As one middle-aged migrant¹⁸⁵ who works as a driver in Noida remarks,

Samachar channelon se mujhe bahut khabaren milti hai. Dilli jaise sahar main, jahan hum apne padosiyon ko bhi nahi janta, wahan pe samachar channel se hame khabaren milti hai. Isse ham eek anjan jagah main jene ke liya seekh milti hai. Mujhe Noida main hue Nithari Kand aur Arushi murder ke bare main, samchar channel se khabar mili. Kai channelon ne, Arushi ke ghar ke chat pa padi khonh kese lipte bistar ko bhi dikhaya. Waise hi, ek Amerika ka Rashtropati Obama, hamare desh aaye the, unko bhi channelon ne dikhaya. Maine unko phele kabhi nahi dekha tha. Aam Aadmi Party ko bhi bahut dikahte hai channel wale. Unhe phele log pasand nahi karte the, fir bhi woh election jeet gaye. Isi tarah ke lag alag khabrein dekhni ko milti hai samachar channel main.

(News provides a lot of information. In a place like Delhi where we do not even know our neighbours, news is a means through which we get information. This helps in our survival also. I came to know about Nithari murder case and Aarushi murder case through news channel. Many channels showed the blood soaked mattress recovered from Arushi's terrace. Similarly, the visit of the President of America, Obama was also shown on news channel. I had never seen him before and saw him for the first time through news channel. News channel also show a lot about the Aam Aadmi Party. Initially no one liked them but then slowly they gained support and formed government in Delhi. We get to see and hear such kind of information through news channels)

Another middle-aged *Safai Karamchari* (sweeper) replies,

Samachar channel se pata chalta hai hi hamare pradhan mantri bahut videsh jaate hai. Hamare desh main garibon ke pass paise nahi hai aur hamare pradhan mantra videsh ke sair karte rehte hai. Aisi khabaren channelon main dikhate hai.

(I got to know from news channel that our Prime Minister goes on a lot of foreign tours. In our county there are so many poor people, yet our Prime Minister is always visiting foreign countries. I get such kind of information from news channel).

A retired bureaucrat, remarks,

These days you get all kinds of information on news channels, be it politics, sports, entertainment, economy, foreign affairs and so on. Earlier, news was just restricted to politics. But these days one gets all kind of information on news channels.

Responses such as above show that media act as a primary source of news and information on a range of social, political, religious, economic issues at both the local and the

¹⁸⁵ The names of the audience respondents has been anonymous to as per their request.

national level. There is also a tendency to relate the available information to the day-to-day existence and also make sense of the world around oneself.

Coming to the second role, 33.62% of the respondents feel that the second important role of media is to make government accountable. Talking specifically about the issue of accountability of politicians, the following table shows the percentage of response regarding this issue.

Table 8.1: Have News Channels made Politicians Accountable?

Sl. No	Response	No. of response (%)
1.	Yes	59 (52.21%)
2.	No	34(30.08%)
3.	Can't Say	20(17.69%)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

52.21% of the respondents believe that news channels have made politicians accountable. 30.08% respond by saying that news channels have not made politicians accountable and 17.69% opt for cannot say option. Accountability espouses a moral condition in which journalists hold responsible those in power by exposing their misdeeds. In journalism, accountability is, in Newton, Hodges, and Keith's terms, akin to 'responsibility'; journalists' responsibility is to seek and ask the government to justify the ways they perform their duties (2004: 174). A majority of the respondents believe that news channels have made politicians accountable by investigating and bringing out in to the public domain the various scams like 2G spectrum, Vyapam Scam, Sharada chit fund scam, Commonwealth Games scam, which are the outcome of corruptibility in governance. Viewers feel that by showcasing the involvement of politicians and businessmen in such scams, news channels do meet their second important role of making politicians in particular and government in general accountable to their citizens. Sharing the optimism of the viewers, the founder of *NDTV*, Prannoy Roy says, 'One of the fundamental ways in which the media has impacted politicians and the political process in the country is in its expose of corruption. The media is, in fact, a driving force in this aspect and increasingly so. As scams and

scandals emerge every other day, today's India appears more corrupt than ever before but, in truth, corruption was always as endemic as it is today. Unlike the past, for the first time corruption is being exposed and politicians are being punished. With the media's unrelenting focus on exposing corruption, India is perhaps beginning a 'cleansing process' towards a truly 'swachh Bharat'. In the short run, exposing scams and scandals may be harmful for the image of the country but in the longer term, I firmly believe that all this is likely to lead to a better, cleaner India (Roy, in Kagal 2016:10).

The third important role for news channels is aiding the formation of public opinion on contemporary issues. 29.20% of respondents feel that news channel should help in the formation of opinion on issues that are debated and discussed in the larger realm of the society. As discussed earlier, the three main reasons that have facilitated the emergence and growth of the talk format of news programming are- cheaper production costs; filling in the space of an 'extra' that needs to be provided with news, hence news and views; acting as a platform to provide opinion on contemporary issues and to meet the target of achieving high television ratings points (TRPs) to stay ahead in the business of news making.

I ask the respondents about the relevance of the news debates and discussions on their everyday lives. The following table shows the results.

Table 8.2: Relevance of Debates in News Channels

Sl. No	Response	No. of response (%)
1.	Yes	56 (49.55%)
2.	No	43(38.05%)
3.	Can't Say	14(12.38%)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

While 49.55% viewers feel that debates are relevant for them, 38.05% viewers feel otherwise. 12.38% cannot choose between the two options. The relevance of a news debate is intricately linked to how a viewer perceives an issue in the broader context. Arguing about the context as well as the duration of viewing/reading in influencing the reception of any kind of

media text, Hobson (1982) remarked, 'The audience do not watch programs as separate or individual items, nor even as types of programs, but rather that they build up an understanding of themes over a much wider range of programs and length of time of viewing' (ibid: 107). This aspect was starkly visible in the viewers response to the relevance of the debate under consideration. Viewers would often position their beliefs, experiences and feelings vis-a-vis the theme being debated and form their individual opinion. I asked a middle aged female advertising professional about the relevance of the documentary *Weapons of War: The Women of Bastar* that she watched on *NDTV 24x7*. She replied,

From a point of view of whether I am following that story, then no, I am not. But the fact that if I was flipping through channels and I saw something like that coming then I would probably stick around and watch it because I have grown up in Raipur and the places shown in the documentary seemed very familiar to me. So from that point of view, yes, and of course a lot of part of whatever was said in the documentary, apart from being the same geography it is also women related like atrocities on women typically and what hardships they are facing. So I think the entire point of view of having women related issue is something that I am more akin to watch. Two things that worked for me-one the geographical relevance and two the fact that it was a women related issue.

Relevance on account of geographical similarity as a factor that influences reception was also highlighted by a male public relations professional who watched the debate show *Bihar Topper Scam Resurfaces: Nitish Kumar Government in the Dock?* on *The Buck Stops Here* on *NDTV 24x7*. He replied,

A very relevant topic was debated, but the issue is that everybody was beating around the bush. Everybody has a political agenda. So while factual things are definitely there but this has been going on for ages and blaming the students for that matter may not be the right way to look forward to as is being done over here. I remember during my school days, students used to cheat. Although our school made proper arrangements for invigilation, some students would pass chits and show answer scripts. So cheating does happen. However, I would say it was a genuine and nicely done debate to be very honest unlike *Republic TV* and *Times Now* where you don't even get to hear the panelist point of view. This is a much welcomed debate, even if it is very politically driven, but at least you are hearing a point of view.

Here, the respondent connected the Bihar topper scam debate with his school education. He reflects back on his school days and makes a point as how such scams are not new and that they have been happening for quite some time.

Another male respondent who watched a debate on *The Jobless Growth: The New Normal?* on *NDTV 24x7* remarked,

The issue was very relevant. And it is something that concerns each one of us as we all hold a job. So if anything is happening in a systematic fashion in the job industry then it can one day or the other happen too us to. So in that sense it was very relevant.

Thus, it can be seen while watching a debate, respondents would often position their own experience vis-a-vis the theme and form their own opinion. Along with personal opinion, a view about how the issue is being debated and discussed in the larger society would also form. One of the prevalent perceptions about some television news debates is that they are polarizing. Talking about how debates on news channels largely reflect the growing polarization in society, a middle aged female professional who saw the debate *Selective outrage on Documentaries on JNU and Kashmir* aired on *NDTV 24x7* said,

It is very relevant for me because right now we are in a situation where the society or country is really dealing with polarizing forces. I mean the whole basis of governance at the moment is based on polarization. So when the agenda is polarization, I mean it is very relevant topic. It's very scary also.

There are also viewers who feel that manner of debates in news channels is noisy, shrill and jingoistic. The themes picked up are also done by keeping TRPs in mind. As a young male viewer who watched the debate *Shiela Tayaar: Mandir ka Intezaar* on *Aaj Tak* remarked,

The topic was not as relevant as other national issues currently being debated. I believe the topic and the anchors who choose such topics are highly concerned about the TRPs for their show and many times I have also observed that there are political agendas that motivate an anchor to choose a particular topic. So as far as relevance is concerned being a show which is aired around 6.00 pm, I think the topic could have been on the on-going deaths of farmers in MP or security issue in Kashmir. This issue was not as relevant as some other issue would have been.

Adding to the shrill and noise aspect in television debates, another viewer says,

The problem is that in today's date and time debates are no more debates. They are just mud-slinging on each other. So the moot cause is nobody understands the issue being debated. At the end of every show you just get to know whether BJP is good or Congress is bad. This is happening across channels.

It must be mentioned that not every kind of debate is polarizing. Among a plethora of issues debated, there are certain themes will invoke shrill and noise and laced with jingoistic overtones. In the previous chapter, I discussed how social, cultural, religious issues are debated within the cultural nationalism framework. For example, few debates on *Aaj Tak* which centred on such issues point out to the fact that the channel deliberately picks up contentious issues and frames

the debate in a national vs. anti-national framework precisely to target higher ratings. While issues like mandir, masjid, love jihad, mob lynching, cow slaughter invoke extreme reactions, debates on issue concerning national security can also be bracketed under this category. Within the course of the fieldwork three such debates *Salman ko vivid pasand hai*, *Sena par sadakchap siyasat* and *Patharbazon se pyar, army chief par var*, were aired which primarily centred on glorifying the Indian army and dubbing all critical voices against the Army as anti-national. Two of these debates were also based on some remarks made by a Bollywood actor and a politician on the Army. The channel did an entire 45 minutes discussion on these two incidents. One viewer who watched the debate *Patharbazon se pyaar, army chief par var* remarked,

See, I don't see a point in why the discussion happened. What Partha Chatterjee wrote is also not true in the sense that the time when General Dyer was there was different, what is happening in Kashmir now is different. There is no relation. Why he wrote it's up to him to say but why this discussion happened, I am absolutely sure that a sane person would have not picked up this topic for discussion. I don't work for *Aaj Tak* so the only reason I think for having this debate was because it is a touchy topic, it might get the numbers, some eyeballs to grab and that is the only reason why it was held. Other than that there is no relevance for this discussion.

Similarly another viewer who watched *Salman ko vivad pasand hai* episode on *Halla Bol* in *Aaj Tak* news channel said,

According to me, there was no need to have a debate on it because Salman Khan is doing publicity for his movie and before also he has done a lot of publicity for his movies. He made the statement just for publicity and did it purposefully. Only army jawans can go to the border. It is their duty. It is the duty of army officers to go to border and make strategies. There was no need to have a tv debate on this and that too for only 25 mins when the show is for an hour. Rest of the time its only advertisement.

Many times, a news item is also turned into a full debate show as happened in one of the show *AAP par var*, *CBI hathyaar* on *Halla Bol*. The viewer who watched it remarked,

It was absolutely irrelevant because it was a topic around preliminary investigation that the CBI is conducting. There is no FIR or prima face evidence. As far as I am concerned, CBI goes to places and does investigation in every state of the country. I don't know why they wanted to create a half an hour show out of it. It could have been an item in a news bulletin like the one which we used to see in our younger days. It could have been a news item, but it was not required to have a debate on it.

Highlighting the need to fill air time without any effort to do a genuine and proper debate, a middle-aged viewer who saw *Pakistan ki jeet, Deshdrohion ki 'id'* said,

This debate was not relevant at all. I did not understand the objective behind this 45 minutes show. If they show me the objective, then I am ready to listen to them.

Adding to the same argument, another middle-aged female home maker who watched the *Sena par sadakchhap siyosat* debate on *Aaj Tak* remarks,

It was of medium relevance but the channel was trying to sensationalize the whole issue and they were biased. It could just have been a news item, they didn't have to do a half an hour show it on just a comment because Sandeep Dikshit (a Congress politician) is not such a national leader. They were trying to blow it out of proportion to sort of influence viewers. The media in general also works in the same manner.

It appears that viewers are equally divided on the issue of relevance of debates and discussions in news channel. Here, it would be pertinent to recall Hall's idea of encoding and decoding media texts (discussed in chapter 2). The above audience responses showcase, that the discourse framed on issues debated in the news channels were either accepted, negotiated or opposed/rejected. Such interpretations were based on how the audience perceived the issue in hand. For instance, on the issue of education scam, the viewer agreed with the *NDTV's* stance that the scam was due to the misgovernance of Bihar's state government. Likewise, the responses of many viewers on topics like Indian Army, politicization of CBI and Ram temple can be seen as opposing the discourse aired by *Aaj Tak*.

As this study is concerned with understanding the nature of media discourse, I probe a bit more into the public opinion formation aspect of news media from the point of viewership. The following two tables highlight the percentage of preference and the reasons for the preferred viewing among the respondents.

Table 8.2.1: Preference for Watching Debates in News Channels

Sl. No	Response	No. of Response (%)
1.	Yes	76 (67.25%)
2.	No	37 (35.57%)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

A high percentage i.e. 67.25% of respondents, like to watch debates and discussions in new channels and 35.57% do not like to watch such shows. The reasons for watching debate shows in news channels are as follows.

Table 8.2.2: Reasons for Watching Debates in News Channels

Sl. No	Response	No. of Response (%)
1.	Helps in acquiring in-depth knowledge on an issue	31 (27.43%)
2.	Helps in creating awareness on an issue	29 (25.66%)
3.	Helps in knowing the political position of a news channel on an issue	17 (15.04%)
4.	Helps in framing instant opinion on an issue	6 (5.30%)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

According to this data, 27.43% of respondents feel that debates and discussions in news channels help in acquiring in-depth knowledge on the issue being debated. A retired government employee says,

News debates are represented by several experts like social workers, academicians, policy makers, politicians etc. I get to listen to various points of views in debates. This helps me in acquiring an in-depth knowledge as well as form my own opinion on the various issues debated. One newspaper gives one viewpoint, the second may give another. Same is with news channels. There is availability of range of opinions.

This is followed by 25.66% respondents who feel that such shows help in creating awareness on issues. As one middle aged public relations professional puts it,

Television has always been a medium for generating awareness. Television as a medium is more potent compared newspapers because of the simple reason that newspapers are read by a certain section of people who are habituated to reading. But television is something for which one doesn't need to be educated. One can hear and know what is happening.

Similarly, a retired bureaucrat feels that,

Television discussions by and large create awareness. Certain issues which an ordinary viewer would not have been able to grasp are discussed in simple language by experts or intellectuals

belonging to diverse fields like diplomacy, policy makers, activists, journalists. These panelists bring in their domain expertise and contribute to the understanding of issues.

Television with its audio and visual capacity can have a wider reach both geographically and amongst a diverse segment of the population. Talking about the increase in awareness level via news television programming, a middle-aged male professional who watched the episode *Farmer Unrest: Minimum Support, maximum Rhetoric* aired on NDTV 24x7, remarks,

These days, a lot of issues are being discussed in news channels. It is not necessary that every discussion generate awareness as these days news channels openly take sides and give biased views. But discussion on some issues, like the farmer protest in Mandasaur did raise my awareness about the farmer issue as I was someone who did not follow the topic and after watching a debate on it, I did have some basic knowledge about the issue.

Stating that it is important to understand the context in which an issue is being discussed, a young student who watched a debate *Sheila Tayaar, Mandir ka Intezaar* (Foundation ready, waiting for the temple) aired on *Aaj Tak*, stated,

It is important to highlight the context surrounding the issue being debated. For example, if the Ayodhya issue is being debated, then instead of talking about temple and masjid, people should discuss what kind of ground level development has taken place irrespective of which political party was in the government. I remember watching a documentary on Ayodhya aired on CNN-IBN few years back, and it showed that compared to other cities, Ayodhya has been neglected by successive governments. That documentary was a very practical assessment of the entire city of Ayodhya. So the context becomes very important. Similarly, when there is a discussion on Kashmir, then instead of running headlines like- *aab Pakistan nahi bachega; aab India ke pass yeh missile aa gaya hai*, and bragging about India's military supremacy, they should talk of the local Kashmiris who are the most affected by such animosity between the two neighbours. So, I think, the context has to be well-placed.

Discussing about whether such awareness generation leads to any sort of social change, a female public relations professional says that such discussions do provide information but they do not bring about awareness in terms of any change or addressing the issue. She watched a documentary aired on NDTV 24x7 *Weapons of War: The Women of Bastar*. She recalls,

I was in one of these events where Soni Sori had come to give a talk and she exactly said the same things like nipples being cut, stone being inserted into her vagina, as shown in the documentary. In that event, I noticed a lot of people who empathized with what she was saying but were not even remotely aware of who she was. A lot of them did not even know that there is this struggle going on in Chattisgarh and parts of Odisha. They probably associate Naxalism with Bihar. They are not aware or some of even think that tribals are fighting for something like some war of independence. So what I am saying that such documentaries would give information but

not raise awareness about how to address that issue. I myself would not do anything about it besides having a drawing room chat.

Moving on to the next aspect, 15.04 % of respondents feel that such shows help in knowing the political position of a news channel on a specific issue. A middle-aged male professional who watched the debate show *Holy Cow: Unholy Politics* on NDTV 24x7, states,

Majority of debates today are biased and slanted as seen on channels like Republic TV and TimesNow. They have a certain agenda and they will get guests who talk only on those lines and if that guest does not speak their views than he is not given a chance again. And the problem is many viewers are falling for this agenda. A debate should be a debate, encouraging opinion from every side.

A middle-aged homemaker who watched the debate show *Sena Par Sadakchhap Siyasad!* on *Aaj Tak* feels that,

These days media is biased and it is very much evident in the debate shows. They are biased towards promoting their own agenda. They try to play up the nationalist issues. If one is critical of the system or any agency within India, then they are termed as anti-national. There appears to be an invisible directive to people to speak for the system and institutions. If one speaks against them, then he or she is wrong.

The biased debates argument is also highlighted by another viewer who believes that,

News debates misguide people by giving lopsided information. For example, if a channel supports BJP then they will have two Panelists from BJP, one RSS Vicharak and one person from the opposition. So in this case, they will have three people who will speak for BJP and one against. In such a scenario, how can anyone expect a balanced debate? And such debates result in skewed opinions. Moreover channels like Republic TV and Times Now force their opinions on viewers mind.

Talking about how debates have turned into shrieking matches, a middle-aged female professional remarks,

I think they do help in forming an opinion only if the debates are held in a healthy fashion. This shrieking just stirs up emotion. Ideally what the media's job is to present the facts and every side of a story, and let the reader or the viewer form an opinion on his own or her own. That is what it should be. You should give all sides and not take a stand unless it is such an important civil liberties issue where a particular right like right to freedom of expression has been infringed and that is unfair and therefore media is taking a stand. But shrieking matches on television just stir up emotions and don't allow any reasonable opinion and time for a viewer to form a value based opinion.

A minor percentage of 5.30% respondents feel that debate shows help in framing instant/quick opinion on an issue being currently debated. Explaining the need of having an instant opinion, Radhika Bordia, says,

Debate shows give you instant opinion. So for example, a format like *The Buck Stops Here* or *The Big Fight* gives you the ability to speak to your different representatives and different party spokespersons. So you get a very strong debate there instantly on what is happening. So for example, if the issue being debated is Aadhar card then you get a spokesperson from the Left, Congress, BJP and it is a understanding of how each political party is defending sometimes the indefensible, in any case what it's views are.

However, many viewers do not feel that they require instant opinion. This is reflected from the small percentage of response in its favour as a key role of media. One viewer who watched the show *Patharbazon Se Pyaar, Army Chief par Vaar* on *Aaj Tak*, rejects this aspect of instant opinion. He argues,

What is instant opinion? If you talk of this show, this opinion that the army is superior, and can't do any wrong, is wrong. There are several enquires going on till today. I am not saying army is wrong or whatever. Major Gogoi had to think out of the box and act, I am nobody to question it. But my only issue is this whole idea about army being sacrosanct and can't do no wrong, is wrong. If you want to frame opinion then you have to give the viewer the balanced view. This debate lacked content, lacked depth, it ended being a shouting match. For me, this debate was like rigging a poll. You get these many people and you know what they are going to say and even if you don't know what they will say, you have a fair idea of what they will say. So you make a panel in such a way then you can get away with the point that you want to your viewers to know. So I don't know the point of having this debate. Maybe their marketing department must have told them to pick up this topic, this is controversial, maybe it will them get eyeballs. My only issue is if you are having a debate then have a good debate.

Whether in-depth or instant, a majority of the respondents feel that news channels do aid in the formation of opinion. The following table reveals the figures.

Table 8.2.3: Debates in News Channels Help in Forming Opinion

Sl. No	Response	No. of response (%)
1.	Yes	60 (57.69%)
2.	No	25(24.03%)
3.	Can't Say	19(18.26%)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

The table shows that while 57.69% of the respondents feel that news debates help them in forming opinion on the issue being debated, 24.03% do not feel so and 18.26% of the respondents fall in the cannot say bracket. This finding adds to Walter Lippmann's, classic work, *The Public Opinion (1922)* where he said that 'political opinion is not shaped by direct experience of politics but is rather a consequence of the images which we are given via news accounts of politics' (Lippman cited in K. Ross and V. Nightingale 2003:97). This implies that news media plays a crucial role in framing and presentation of issues that frame public opinion.

31.85% of respondents feel that the last role of news channels should be act as a mediator between government and its citizens. It should act as a bridge between the rulers and the ruled. It should help the government in formulating policies and also test the efficacy of those policies on the ground. However, the role of media being a mediator is getting obliterated as it is increasingly being seen as an extension of the government, especially in the contemporary scenario. Thus, it can be stated that the media is expected to perform its four roles in the following order- providing information, making government accountable, helping in formation of public opinion and acting as a mediator between the government and its citizens. These expected roles are in consonance with the liberal theorization of the role of media in democratic societies.

Discussions, in the previous chapters have highlighted the strained relationship between the present government and the media houses who question and are critical of the manner of its functioning. The government has successfully managed to create a divide in media- supporter and opposer. Hiding behind the facade of nationalism, a binary between national and antinational media has been created. This over shadows the need to have a critical public debate culture that is the foundation of a democratic society. In response to a question of whether news channels are biased towards the present government, the following responses were observed.

Table 9: Are News Channels Biased towards Government?

Sl. No	Response	No. of response (%)
1.	Yes	67 (59.29%)
2.	No	8(7.07%)
3.	Can't Say	38 (33.62%)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

A large percentage of viewers i.e. 59.29% feel that news channels are biased towards the present dispensation. 7.07% feel that news channels are not biased and 33.62% of viewers cannot decide between the two given options. The next table shows the ranking of certain factors that are responsible for the bias.

Table 9.1: Ranking of Reasons for Bias towards Government

Sl.No	Reasons	Scale				Rank
		1	2	3	4	
1.	Gain power and influence	32(47.76%)				Gain power and influence
	Popularize their political agenda	17(25.37%)				
	Gain higher ratings	23(34.32%)				
	Ahead in the competition	15(22.38%)				
2.	Gain power and influence		15(22.38%)			
	Popularize their political agenda		21(31.34%)			Popularize their political agenda
	Gain higher ratings		15(22.38%)			
	Ahead in the competition		15(22.38%)			
3.	Gain power and influence			9(13.43%)		
	Popularize their political agenda			18(26.86%)		

	Gain higher ratings			11(16.41%)		
	Ahead in the competition			13(19.40%)		Ahead in the competition
4.	Gain power and influence				10(14.92%)	
	Popularize their political agenda				12(17.91%)	
	Gain higher ratings				16(23.88%)	Gain higher ratings
	Ahead in the competition				22(32.83%)	

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

According to 47.76% of viewers, the primary reason for the bias amongst news channels is to gain power and influence. The power to influence large section of audience is intricately tied to the second most important reason. 31.34% of viewers feel that the media is biased to promote its own agenda. This happens when media houses are owned by political or corporate groups who use media to promote their agendas. A few examples like *Republic TV* owned by a BJP Rajya Sabha MP Rajeev Chandrasekhar, *News18* Network owned by Reliance group, *Zee* Network owned by BJP Rajyasabha MP Subhash Chandra are a case in point. The political economy perspective on media tends to portray the market and political democracy as essentially antagonistic. The functioning on the media must be understood in the socio-political context in which it is located. The media does not work independently but is dictated by the social, political and economic forces that surround it. The development of media markets, from this perspective, concentrates control of the media in the hands of business (both media owners and advertisers), limiting the range of points of view represented. It also, in some variants of the argument, tends to drive political content out of the media, replacing it with entertainment-oriented content that makes money for media corporations but does not contribute to the development of political democracy (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 90). Paralleling this theorization with the prevalent Indian media scenario, Sandeep Bhushan, remarks,

The liberal opinion has to be prepared for a right wing media. A right wing government with this kind of humungous majority with popular support, there will be a right wing media. The point is to stand up and call them out. The American media has done it all the time. Similar thing must happen here.

19.40% of viewers feel that competitive nature of news television is another crucial factor that is responsible for the bias in news channels. The intense competition between the two English news channels *Times Now* and *Republic TV* starkly reflects this aspect. The two channels have been criticized for openly professing their support to the current government. 23.88% of viewers feel that the bias is also a result of the quest for higher ratings (the ratings issue is discussed in detail in the next section).

Thus, it can be stated that a large section of news channels in India is seen as working in tandem with the current political dispensation. The cosy linkup of a certain section of media and the government does not bode well for the need of a democratic and pluralistic media in India. Audiences also feel that media no longer functions as a carrier of independent voice. Instead it has become a propaganda machine. It is the need of the hour for the all sections of media to uphold their independence and integrity and perform their democratic role.

II

Hindi- English News Audience

A primary objective of this study was also to understand the role of language in framing media discourse. It is presumed that English and Hindi news channels cater to different constituency of viewership. The factor which differentiates these audience constituencies is primarily language. Income level, occupation and educational status are some of the other factors which make this segmentation.

Hence, this section takes a look at how the language segmented news channels i.e. English and Hindi news channels understand their audience constituency. This is crucial as it is this significant feature that determines to a large extent the kind of content that is produced and circulated. Batabyal (2012) opines that the audience for news channels is always imagined. The construction of audience's 'preference' primarily draws from the likes and dislikes of journalists themselves. The journalists often position themselves as audience and create content. So, according to Batabyal the issue of 'missing audience' as cited in other studies, holds lose ground in Indian television newsrooms. His study suggests that newsrooms are obsessed with understanding their viewers. I probe into this issue by looking at how the language divide i.e.

English and Hindi, in the national broadcast media space, plays out in the understanding of the news audience. It is generally presumed that English and Hindi news channels cater to different constituencies of audiences primarily due to the distinction in language. Zakka Jacob, believes says that the segregated viewership impacts the treatment of content in the English and Hindi news space. He states,

Hindi news channel have 100 million plus viewership which is way bigger than English channels where average viewership per night is 5 million which may go up to 10 millions on a big news day. So it is a very small portion of English viewership that is largely concentrated in the big cities Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore. These 5 or 6 cities contribute more than 50 % of the English market. So therefore, the treatment of topics at least to that extent will differ a little bit from the Hindi channels.

Commenting on the aspect of language segmentation among the audience of broadcast media with that of print media and its influence on the content produced, Rahul Kanwal, replies that,

The audience for English and Hindi news channel is very different. There are lot of people who watch both Hindi and English. But in terms of general orientation the interests are different. A lot of English viewers are in the South India in cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai , a lot of Hindi viewers are in Bihar and UP, so naturally people depending on where they reside, their academic background, their socioeconomic background, their interests all of that varies and that of course dictates the kind of content that is created. The kind of content that you see on a Forbes magazine is different from a Navbharat Times. Forbes caters to a different kind of person, they have to come up with a type of content that is engaging to their readers, Navbharat Times similarly caters to different readers.

Some journalists agree that the audience of the Hindi and English news channels are different and therefore the content policy of both the kind of news channels is also different. However, an opposing view to this school of thought also exists. Proponents of the second school of thought disagree that audience segmentation on the basis of language exists. They feel that the divide between English and Hindi news channels, in terms of content policy and audience reach is disappearing. According to Rajdeep Sardesai,

There is different viewership if you look at the entire universe. There are people who know only Hindi so they will obviously watch Hindi channels. Then there are those who prefer to watch in English. But there is an area, what you call in mathematical terms, a common area where people will watch both Hindi and English. They do not live in isolation and each is influencing the other. Hindi never had so many debates till about four or five years ago. Now a debate show like *Halla Bol (Aaj Tak)* which started about three to four years ago was due to the direct influence of English news television. The idea that let us have a shrill, heated, polarized debate is an idea that

Hindi has borrowed from English. The idea that every news is breaking news is an idea English has borrowed from Hindi. So, both have in a sense cannibalized on each other.

It appears that the Hindi-English divide is dissipating. An interesting trend in the convergence of Hindi and English language in news programming is being witnessed. An article¹⁸⁶ on the digital news website *NewsLaundry* published in July, 2017 starts with how the English news channel *Times Now* launched a Hinglish (mix of Hindi and English) *NewsHour* on 8th May, 2017 in the morning 8 to 9am slot to counter the launch of its competitor *Republic TV* on 6th May 2017. Besides the news debate, the morning 6 to 8am slot was dedicated to speed news in Hindi. This strategy was adopted to increase the viewership of the channel beyond the urban regions. The article further says that the English news genre has only 0.07 per cent total viewership in the urban space as compared to Hindi news genre that has a viewership of 3.78 per cent. Other English news channels like *India Today* and *CNN-News18* have also adopted this strategy to expand their viewership base. Sumit Awasthi puts out this strategy lucidly. He remarks,

Mujhe lagta hai aaj ki tarikh main hindi English sab barabar ho gaya hai. English ke maximum primetime shows aajkal Hindi main hote hai. Bahut smartly English channels ne kya kiya hai ki kehne ko English category main aate hai, rating woh English ki lete hain, lekin primetime main apne aadhe discussion main 4 ya 5 guests aise bhithate hain jo hindi speaking hai. Toh anchor bhi hindi bol raha hota hai aur guest bhi. Toh sheer competition who Hindi channels ke saath karte hain. Who hamare share main se apna share dhoondte hai apni rating badhane ke liye. Aur yeh bahut smartly ho gaya hai. Actually woh English nahi hinglish ho gaye hain. Aur baade maje se aur comfortably who usko encash kar rahe hai. Jitna hindi ka content hamne dikhaya mujhe nai lagta utna kisi English ne nahi dikhaya hoga. English bhi wohi karta hai jo hindi karta hai. Aur hindi news ne bahut teezi se English news ko competition diya opinion making main kyunki apki reach zyada hai, aapka audience bahut wide hai, aaj bhi English ke comparison main hindi 10 guna zyada audience hai. Toh English ko abhi samajh main aa gaya hai ki hum toh bahut limited reh gaye hai toh smartly pehle 3 saal se aap dekhiye every channel has an anchor who is a bilingual, at least every one or two guests on a panel speak in Hindi, aur jo show main aake bolega aap mujhse Hindi main sawal kariya main hindi main jawab dunga. Toh unko samaj mania a gaya hai ki hindi audience main reach aise hi baad sakti hai, apna base aise hi badha sakte hain. Toh agar English kehta ki hum kharab karten hai toh mera kehna hai ki woh hamese zyada kharab karte hain

(In today's time Hindi and English channels are the same. In English news channels, maximum primetime shows are done in Hindi. The English news channels have very smartly adopted a strategy where they position themselves in English category and subscribe to the English news

186 For more on this, see <https://www.newsLaundry.com/2017/07/15/times-now-hindi-barc>, accessed 14 September, 2017.

ratings but in their debates they put up 4 to 5 experts who are Hindi speaking. Then both anchor and the expert converse in Hindi. In a way they are competing with Hindi channels. They are trying to find their audience share from our share. This is being done very efficiently. They are no longer English but Hinglish news channels. I believe that Hindi news channels offer more content in comparison to their English counterparts and hence now we are giving tough competition to the English channels in opinion making. Now English news channels have realized that they are facing stiff competition from the Hindi news channels. In the last three years, they have been deliberating putting up bilingual anchors in their shows so that they can have debates in Hindi and target the Hindi audience and increase their viewership market. So, if English news channels say that we Hindi ones are responsible for the falling standards of journalism then I would like to say that they are more responsible for this state of affairs than us.

Here, it would be pertinent to highlight how audiences view the issue of language divide in news programming, especially in debates and discussions based programming. I asked my respondents whether the nature of between English and Hindi news channels differs. Their response was as follows,

Table 10: Difference in Approach of English and Hindi News Channels to Debates

Sl. No	Response	No. of response (%)
1.	Yes	76 (67.25%)
2.	No	20(17.69%)
3.	Can't Say	17(15.04%)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

67.25% of the respondents feel that a difference prevails in the manner in which the English and Hindi news channels conduct their debates. A middle-aged male public relations professional remarks,

I think Hindi debates are much more meaningful and result-oriented. You watch NDTV India or Aaj Tak, Ravish Kumar and all the other guys, what they do and how they talk is much more straight forward and blunt and hard hitting.

Stressing on the centrality of language as determining the presentation of a debate show, a female public relations professionals says,

Language is a very big decider for the guests at least because someone who can converse in Hindi fluently is typically on a Hindi channel. I am sure a Hindi channel would love to have a Arun Jaitley as guest, but I doubt Arun Jaitley prowess of conversing in Hindi. So even in terms of

stories, I think they represent stories a little differently. I think while English channels try to be a lot more subtle about it. The Hindi brand of journalism is far more hard hitting, more loud while English will rely more on visuals to do talking and not so much the language. So it is the difference of the subtlety and reliance of visual vis-à-vis conversation.

A young viewer frames the English Hindi divide eloquently. He feels that there is a stark difference as far as topics are chosen for debate in both the mediums. He says,

I can categorize the quality of topics being picked up in English and Hindi channels. For example, channels like Times Now pick up topics only for TRPs. that is my personal view I might be very judgemental about it. They also present it in a very violent and aggressive style. On the other hand, NDTV 24x7, picks up topics which are more grounded, more related to people. I think India Today is somewhere in between. I haven't seen much of Republic TV. NewsX is out of the question, I don't think anyone watches it. ABP News picks up topics which are appropriate but again the presentation is a big question mark. News18 India is also for TRPs.

Another middle-aged male viewer feels that the divide exist as the channels cater to different kind of audience. He remarks,

English and Hindi channels do debates differently as each is addressing a different core constituency. Hindi is more mass and English more class. This was the difference but obviously now the lines have blurred. But Hindi addresses a far more rural constituency whereas English looks at a far more different clientele, middle and upper-middle class, the elite, the intellectual. So there you can see the quality of the debate. In reference to this debate, which was very civilized, polite, well done, Hindi would be shouting, the way of speaking would be cruder. So that is the fundamental difference between Hindi and English. But these days shouting in both medium blurs the line.

Pointing out to the role of anchors, another viewer replies,

It depends on the anchor as to how the debate is moderated. If you see someone like a Ravish Kumar (*NDTV India*) and compare him to Anjana Om Kashyap (*Aaj Tak*) which is more rhetoric. So it all depends on the anchor and the journalist involved in the debate and how he /she conducts it. So there is a marked difference between a Hindi channel debate and an English channel debate and I would say that *NDTV* is more sort of calm and civilized debate than any other news channel. Hindi becomes a more slanging sort of match between guests and the actual topic gets diverted into some big political slanging match.

On the other hand, 17.69% of respondents feel that there is no difference in the debates and 15.04% of the respondents cannot decide between the two options given. A middle aged female homemaker says,

Everyone is sailing the same boat. They have already decided their idea of a successful debate program and that is what is going on now. The more the shouting, the louder the voices, the more

the arguments, they think the more successful the program is. Some of the arguments are very silly.

Adding to this, a middle-aged male advertising professional remarks,

I think the tone is more or less the same. Somewhere, I think the English news channels like NDTV or to some extent India Today temper the debate a little bit but yeah all of them are otherwise towards hyper-nationalism, and each channel trying to prove itself as the true Indian. So they are all the same whether Hindi or English.

For a majority of the audiences the difference between English and Hindi news channels is thinning. They feel that barring a few, all other news channels in both languages are essentially following the format of shrill and noisy debates which are intended to push further a particular political agenda and also fetch high ratings. Audiences also feel that the anchor of the show also plays an important part in directing the course of an ongoing debate. Their moderation and interventions determine what kind of discussion takes place. This section provided a broader picture of how Hindi and English news channels understand their audience. In turn, it also mapped out how audience views on the Hindi English language divide in news channels. In the next section, I examine how the English news channel *NDTV 24x7* understands its audience and works towards addressing their preferences.

III

NDTV 24x7 and Its Audience

When asked about the audience base of the news channel, Sonia Singh, remarks,

I don't think we look at what kind of audience we cater to because I presume that we cater to everyone. It is not that we have something like our news caters to you and not others. So in fact, we cover a range of topics from drought to malnutrition to issues from tribal areas. Our show *India Matters* focuses a lot on rural India. Perhaps we do not have many viewers in rural areas because of the language issue. But we feel that these are issues every Indian should know or care about because they concern the country. So we don't cater to a specific audience at all, because I mean we don't want to go down on that route saying maybe urban India is watching us so we do more news on cars and bikes. So as a news channel, I think our job is to inform, illuminate viewers about the world around us, and that is what we look at. So there is no particular audience type that we cater to.

Talking about *NDTV's* approach to recognizing their audience, Nidhi Razdan, says,

The English news space is a very niche space compared to Hindi news channels. Everyone in that niche space is very sort after because I think the influence is very big. As a journalist, I would say, we are looking for stories that should interest people. Very often we also try to do stories which you will not see in other channels like *India Matters*, documentaries from rural India, stories on health, air pollution. So you will not generally see those kinds of debates anywhere else. During election season, there are lot of interesting political stories, so we would focus on that. But our intention is not to try and limit ourselves only to scandals and scams but also to try and look at the other India i.e. the India invisible. I think that is actually *NDTV's* strength and I am glad that, that it is one thing we haven't stopped doing. In this crazy market of TRPs, we haven't given up on programs like *India Matters*.

NDTV 24x7 believes that as a responsible news channel its primary job is to inform its audiences about events that happen around them. Being responsible is equated with doing news stories on issues like pollution, health, covering rural India, which hardly get coverage in mainstream media. It takes credit for airing documentary show like *India Matters* which brings the *invisible* India to the homes of its viewers. This kind of programming also gives rise to the perception of *NDTV* catering to a select audience and not having a mass appeal. Radhika Bordia, responds to this by saying,

I think probably because of the language. We are an English channel and by definition an English channel will have restricted audience. I do a lot of my reporting from rural India, as and when my episode goes on to the Hindi channel. i.e. *NDTV India*, it has a far greater viewership especially in smaller towns like Meerut or Baliya where the reach of our English channel is limited. So, some of it is of course due the language. The English news viewership is a very small percentage of the total viewership. Hence, as an English speaking channel, we will be seen in a much more restricted way. And what happens is that because *NDTV* has got such a long history, certainly in several English speaking circles, amongst a certain section of policy makers, etc. it is a channel that is viewed a lot. I am invited a lot by some development organizations like the United Nations to talk about their programmes. For example, some immunization scheme of UN would say that there is 60% immunization in the ground. But, I give them a feedback saying it is not so. So, a lot of that is of relevance to organizations that are directly working in the ground and they are watching our channel. We are not a channel that takes a populist view of the world. If the current mood is of particular way we are not going to only reflect that and hence we may have limited viewership.

The channel admits that it does not have a mass viewership base vis-a-vis other news channels. Its audience base is largely limited to the English speaking population. Although the base is numerically smaller, it is significant in terms of its reach in influencing and directing the course of policy making and directing the nature of public discourse in the country.

Within this scheme of things, it is pertinent to raise the issue of how does the channel deal with the business of TRPs. It appears that the reliance on Television Ratings Point (TRP) is

minimal as is evident from the airing of documentaries like *India Matters*, *Truth vs Hype* that showcase diverse range of social, political, cultural and economic issues and have limited viewership. Such shows confront and question the government, its institutions, social and cultural practices prevalent in the society. They showcase critical voices that challenge the system. Talking about ratings, Radhika Bordia says,

I know that ratings decide your advertising, ratings decide your survival. It is a luxury for a journalist and an incredible freedom to not be bound by ratings. I cannot imagine in a country where your 9pm or 9.30 pm, you can have channels who do half an hour on why Salman Khan is not married or do a lot of chest thumping on how wonderful the Hindu Rashtra is, I doubt given that there will be high ratings for maternal mortality. So I am assuming that unfortunately 90% of the viewers want to watch Salman Khan's marriage over why women are dying during childbirth. And I think this is worldwide. I think programs like *India Matters* have to be supported out of conviction rather than ratings.

Arguing that the *NDTV* style of journalism is less dependent on ratings, Sonia Singh, remarks,

I keep saying this that we are not in Bollywood and looking at what our ratings are or box office collections are every Friday. However, ratings are important because they give you a sense within your news framework, as to what shows do better, what shows don't do that well. So we look at it more over a longer period of 3 or 4 months, what the general ratings will show for a news bulletin or something and we look at it and make some editorial decisions based on what we think. In ratings it is still, because we know that perhaps if we do more entertainment news or more sports news we will get higher ratings in those shows but that is just not the road we are going down. I just said we want to be the gold standards of journalism like say *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* that is very much more our model. Now if ratings come with that then that is good but I think the current ratings system in India is flawed. It doesn't actually register the number of people who are there for more good credible news, and don't see news as entertainment. So that is really what we think about it.

Furthering this argument, Nidhi Razdan says,

I would say that ratings are not everything for *NDTV*. In any case right now, you would know that the ratings issue is under a big cloud and we have pulled out of the BARC system and that is not something that is new. *NDTV* has for several years been questioning the way ratings in India are done for television. It is not that every third day we as editors would panic and change our content based on ratings. So we are not guided by it but we keep an eye on it. But then rating is not paramount because then we would indulge in shouting and screaming and we are not going to do that.

The programming format in *NDTV* is definitely quite different from other news channels. The focus is to have sensible and meaningful debates and not get carried away by emotions as witnessed in other channels. This does set it apart from others in the cut-throat competition of

news business. At this juncture, it will be pertinent to understand how audiences perceive the role of *NDTV* as a news channel.

Recalling the earlier years of *NDTV*, a viewer says,

When *NDTV* was launched it was the pioneer of television news in India. So, there is this legacy which is always there in the back of your mind. Most of us grew up watching *NDTV*, and then *The World This Week* of Mr. Roy from DD News. So that is an attachment we all have to the channel. Recently, what has developed is that every other channel is a very educated fight. It means educated people are there to mud-sling each other without coming to the issue. However, at *NDTV* there is also this thing happening but at least you know for a fact that I can have a point of view even if I don't accept it I will get to hear it. And that is the only thing which cuts them apart.

On the issue of audience perception of *NDTV 24x7*, one viewer responds,

NDTV is definitely different from other channels as their programs are little more researched. There is a time restriction to all these shows and they want to bring out a few points and not all the points and they stick to these few points and the debate hovers around those few points. Their programming is sharp in terms of information and to the point than other news channels.

Echoing this thought, another viewer responds,

They don't play to the gallery. They pick up contentious topic but they don't want to go after a particular view. They encourage and have stuck to their DNA for long. Everyone gets a voice and they stand by – 'we will not take sides'. I think what is largely the problem in Indian media is that today everyone is starting to take sides. But media is not supposed to take sides. Media is called the fourth estate. It is supposed to question and keep the government on tenterhook. But now everyone wants to keep the government in the good books and the debates also reflect that. For example, if you look at India Pakistan cricket, then some section of media says that Indian should not play Pakistan. But that is an agenda that we will not play Pakistan, we will take a stand. Why take a stand? Media has to present facts and let people draw their own conclusions.

Supporting the above argument, a middle-aged female professional says,

They are the liberal left or the left of centre voice and they do have that tendency. That is their core personality A lot of people who are working for them also tend to believe in that philosophy and that is why they are in that organization.

Raking up the jingoism aspect, a middle-aged female professional says,

Most other channels appear shallow in their quest for jingoism. On issues of Pakistan most news channels are like a lynch mob which *NDTV* is not.

According to most viewers, *NDTV* is the only channel that gives voices to all sides in a debate. This exposes the viewers to a plurality of views which may help them in understanding

an issue on their basis of their mental capacity. This strategy does gel with the attempt of the channel to aid in the formation of public opinion on issues that are being debated and discussed in the larger society. Viewers also claim that the channel steers away from the jingoistic style of journalism that has become a benchmark in contemporary times. This is largely possible due to their fairly less reliance on TRPs as a key factor in producing news content. The channel accepts that it has a fairly small viewership base primarily due to its language. But the channel considers this small viewership base, a significant and important constituent, in contributing to the framing of public opinion in the country. Towards this end, the channel feels that it has the onus to provide fair and objective news that frames perceptions and opinions in the society.

IV

***Aaj Tak* and Its Audience**

Rahul Kanwal says that different kinds of viewers have different television viewing preferences. Hence, every news channel tries to cater to these different kinds of viewership constituencies. He equates news viewership preference with that of Bollywood cinema. According to him,

Hindi film caters to different people, the movie *Dabang* caters to different people, why doesn't *Dabang* cater to all is a meaningless question, I think each filmmaker targets a different audience and puts out content which is keeping in tastes of that audience, obviously the audience likes that content which is why it stays and if the audience didn't like that content, it wouldn't be there.

From this it can be deduced that the onus for the kind of content that goes on news channels rests solely on the audience. Audience preferences determine the nature of news content. The segmented audience base gives rise to segmentation in news content. Further, segmentation not only exists in terms of programming content but also in terms of time bands. The programming in *Aaj Tak* is divided into time bands and the focus is on targeting audiences who watch television during those corresponding time bands. The afternoon band is entirely dedicated to shows like *Saas, Bahu aur Saazish* (serials) and *Dharam* (religion). Sweta Singh remarks,

The saas bahu audience views news in the afternoon and rest of the time, there is news for the entire family.

Rahul Kanwal, also talks about the segmentation of the channel's audience in terms of time band. For him,

The afternoon band is one where the hardcore news viewership is not there and we discovered over a period of time that women sitting at home those who watch a lot of television serials, tend to watch at that time, so if you could expand the universe by putting out content that is relevant to them and their interest, the serial is news, so you can tell them like you tell a viewer what is happening in politics, similarly you are going to tell them what is going to happen in a serial, they tend to track that. So I think that is a very limited interest, limited time band kind of slot.

In its attempt to expand its viewership base, the channel has redefined what constitutes *news*. According to the channel, the definition of news does not necessarily mean collecting and disseminating information about events, incidents. The channel has gone a step further and added an entertainment quotient to the news business. Now, reporting about television serials, soap operas, musical shows, reality television and chat shows is also part of news content. For the channel, entertainment is an important component of news programming.

This brings in the next issue of TRPs. How does the channel view television ratings? Sweta Singh talks of the importance of ratings in *Aaj Tak* . She says,

For us, TRPs mean a lot because you don't want to make a show which nobody watches. So what is the point of making a show about an issue which people are not interested in. Why are you in television? You are in television because you want to give people what they want to see. If there is no one to see it then there is no point in making it.

Bring out an interesting aspect of how geographical distribution of news channels impacts their TRPs, Punya Prasun Bajpai, remarks,

Agar Tamil Nadu main koi political ghatana hoti hai toh, apne dekha hoga ki Hindi main bahut kaam dikhla rahen the aur English main zyada dikhla rahe the. Toh woh hamare TRP ki range main nahi aata hai. Aap isko aise samajhye ki south ki bhasha hai, toh en jagahon par to regional language hai ya toh english hai, hindi toh matter hi nahi karti. Toh Hindi channel aadhe Hindustan main nahi bhi ja rahe hai.

(Suppose a political story breaks in Tamil Nadu. You would have seen that its coverage is less in Hindi news channels and more in English news channels. So Tamil Nadu does not feature in our TRP range. In Southern states there is more reliance on regional language and English news channels and Hindi news channels do not matter there. So it can be said that Hindi news channels do not even reach half of the country).

Unlike *NDTV*, there is an unapologetic admission in *Aaj Tak* that ratings are important. Programmes are made keeping in mind the ratings factor. It is pertinent to raise the question-why TRPs? Somnath Batabyal explains how the privatization of news channels ushered in an era of commercialization of news market that necessitated audience measurement. He argues that a significant part of the financing model of news channels in India is through advertising unlike most western countries where money is raised from subscriptions. News channels attempt to demonstrate audience preference for their channel to potential advertisers using TRP measurements as their marker. Having higher ratings makes it easy for news channels to sell their advertising slots and generate revenue (2010:388-89). The following table shows the percentage of response to ratings influencing news content.

Table 11: Television Ratings Point Influence Content in News Channels

Sl. No	Response	No. of response (%)
1.	Yes	98 (86.72%)
2.	No	8(7.07%)
3.	Can't Say	7(6.19%)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

A very high percentage of 86.72% of the respondents feel that television ratings points influence news content. 7.07% feel that ratings do not influence news content and 6.19% opt for cannot say option.

The engagement of the viewers with *Aaj Tak* is also largely in terms of how the channel frames the issues that are debated on it. One male viewer who watched the debate *Patharbazon Se Pyaar, Army Chief Par Vaar*, on *Aaj Tak* states that the channel deliberately tries to whip up the nationalist frenzy to frame its debates. He remarks,

Like I said, everybody in his country romanticizes the army. Army can do no wrong and that sentiment comes on air. Even in this debate, like I said, the moment you see the panel, I am not going to say that it was made to order to make army look better, but again pro-army. The moment the anchor comes and says her opening lines, you get the sense that they are out there to support the army and they will criticize Partha Chatterjee for what he wrote. They will criticize TMC for saying that they support Mr. Chatterjee for what he wrote and CMP we all know that is it as anti-

national party because they did not support the army when the China war happened. So that sentiment comes out.

Along with the jingoistic discourse framing, the argument of the TRP driven content is also made by a middle-aged homemaker who says,

Yes, the channel often frames the debates through nationalism perspective. It's okay, if they are debating an issue like Kashmir. Kashmir also has its own problems. We also realize that the government all along the years have made a lot of mistakes. Kashmir is not an issue of nationalism, like you still have atrocities there and still say it is all right and part of nation. Then why are you trying to sort of push your views to the viewers. I feel that a lot of debates these days is about tamasha and TRPs, filling airtime without any grounded research. They can have better programs and better debates also. Basically everything is for the channel's TRPs and I think they believe that the louder they shout, the more the viewers are going to watch.

It can be said that *Aaj Tak* has branded and marketed itself as a tabloid family news channel which caters to the taste and requirements of each member in a family in the middle and lower middle class strata. There is segmentation of content that caters to different segments of its viewers. Unlike *NDTV 24x7*, *Aaj Tak* does not claim that it acts as agency for opinion formation. Rather its content policy is geared towards providing an entertainment model of news. This justifies the existence of a bulk of programming genres like crime, cinema, astrology, mythology, tourism, lifestyle etc. on the channel. Moreover, the journalists working in the channel also do not shy away from admitting that their content policy is solely determined by TRPs. The audiences also feel that the loud, noisy and jingoistic tone of framing television discourse helps the channel to draw huge TRP. The audiences also call out the non-seriousness and tardy journalism of the channel as evident in a host of it's on air discussions on trivial issues like tweets, videos and sound bytes of public personalities.

The next section examines an important shift in the imagining/construction/understanding of news audience- *citizens* to *consumers*.

V

Audience as 'Citizen' and Audience as 'Consumer': The Shift

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the reasons and their likely impact of the transformation in television news media from a state-centric to a market-based model in India.

These changes can be amply seen in the way media reports and frames discourses around the issues that make it to the television screens. As stated earlier, the production, representation and consumption of media products are interlinked and changes in one or the other segments does necessarily have an impact on the other. In lieu of this understanding, it can be stated that the changing dynamics of news production and representation also impacts its consumption. It appears that Indian news channels have completely reoriented their approach to addressing their audiences. There has been a rapid shift in imaging of the audiences from media citizens to media consumers. Ang (1991) links this paradigm of audience as citizen to the 'transmission' model of communication as practised by the public broadcasters. Under this system, it was incumbent upon public broadcasters to adopt a 'paternal system' of informing, educating and guiding their citizens. In contrast to this paradigm, Ang links the audience as consumer to the 'attention' model of communication as practiced by the private broadcasters. Here audiences are treated as consumers whose attention needs to be cashed in as it fuels the news business. The audiences are constituted as a 'market to be won', which also explains the importance of ratings in commercial television (ibid: 29). Qamar Waheed Naqvi, speaks of this prevalent public and private dichotomy in Indian media. According to him,

There is a fundamental difference between state and private television. The tone of communication depends on the relationship. What relation does government media have with its audience? For government we are citizens and government media addresses its citizens, it tries to educate its citizens, make them aware about its schemes, about their duties, what they should do for nation building. So when govt speaks to its citizen, it's tone will be like, we have done this for you, you should do this, because you are a citizen. But for private media, its audience is like consumer. The relationship has changed. One media addresses its citizen, the other its consumers. So the tone and tenor changes from one media form to another. In private media, I become a salesman who sells his product i.e. news. I cannot speak in govt language as no one will then buy my product. So therefore, the language between state and private media will always be different as their relationship with their respective audience changes.

Thus, while public broadcasting is seen as catering to citizens, private broadcasting is seen as catering to consumers. The Indian television news media sector offers a mix of both public and private broadcasting. As this chapter is aimed at understanding news consumption in contemporary India, it will be important to map out what audiences think of the two modes of broadcasting. This would contribute to an in depth understanding of the citizen-consumer shift which is being. I probe into how audiences perceive the role of *Doordarshan* as being a credible media institution. I start by asking them whether they watched any of the news channel offered

on the *Doordarshan* platform, namely *DD News*, *Loksabha TV* and *Rajyasabha TV* and the reasons for their response. The table shows the percentage of viewing and the reasons that impact such viewing.

Table 12: Preference for Watching Government-owned News Channels

Sl. No	Items	Response (%)	Reasons	Response (%)
1.	Never	33 (29.20%)	Government Mouthpiece	19 (16.81%)
			Reliable News	- ¹⁸⁷
			Unbiased News	-
			Less commercial breaks	-
			Low production quality	14 (12.38%)
2.	Some time	74 (65.48%)	Government Mouthpiece	20 (17.69%)
			Reliable news	15 (13.27%)
			Unbiased news	6 (5.30%)
			Less commercial breaks	18 (15.92%)
			Low production quality	15 (13.27%)
3.	Always	5 (5.30%)	Government Mouthpiece	1 (0.88%)
			Reliable news	2 (1.76%)
			Unbiased news	-
			Less commercial breaks	2 (1.76%)
			Low production quality	

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

29.20% of the respondents said that they never watched any government news channels. The two main reasons for not watching were- first government news channels are considered as government mouthpiece (16.81%) and second the production quality of such channels is low (12.38%). A middle-aged male public relations professional, remarks,

Doordarshan is the only channel which gives you the highest reach in this country. The problem is that probably *Doordarshan* being a government backed channel so one can only hear the government. I do feel that it really needs to improve. It is a government backed channel and what is surprising to me is that a government backed channel is letting other private entities grow and actually day by day its own production quality or content quality is deteriorating. So god only knows whether there is any attention to it or not.

¹⁸⁷ Options that did not receive any response from respondents is marked as '-'.⁴

The above response does raise a valid point. Private news media has been allowed to flourish at the cost of the public service media. Government inaction in addressing the institutional failure of the state broadcaster does raise concerns.

The changing preferences of audiences also impact their news consumption habits. An elderly female home maker talks of why viewers prefer private news channels to *Doordarshan*. She says,

I don't watch Doordarshan now. I just watch ABP News, Aaj Tak, NDTV India. In our times, there was only Doordarshan. Doordarshan news is not aggressive and provoking. But private channels do provocative news. They provoke and people also get provoked. Doordarshan airs simple and to the point news. In today's time people love aggressive debates. Their thought and mentality has become aggressive. Nationalism feelings are just on the outside, there is no patriotism. Now everyone has a right to show news the way they want whether right or wrong. There are so many private channels that nobody has time for Doordarshan now. There is also masala in private news channels, some entertainment shows, some satires, so people like to watch these mores and hence have stopped watching Doordarshan.

Another male viewer remarks,

I do not relate to Doordarshan news. I haven't seen it for the longest time. I don't think they have an English news channel and because they don't market themselves well or those yesteryears of anchors, people on Doordarshan who you could recognize and therefore follow are all gone. I don't even who reads news in Doordarshan now. That is the basic thing you watch a news channel to know what an anchor is saying. These days there are celebrity anchors and led by the biggest celebrity among them Arnab Goswami.

Talking of how *Doordarshan* always evokes nostalgia but fails short in making itself relevant to contemporary demands, a female viewer says,

I have stopped watching Doordarshan for many years. But I have great memories of that channel. So any day I thought that News at 9 on Doordarshan was something I could go back to. That brand of journalism. I still remember all of those news readers who were like semi-stars at that point of time (talking with a sense of nostalgia). I would see my mother dress in sarees like those anchors, Usha and Nidhi Ravindran, there were a lot of those smart ladies and Prannoy Roy with his *The World This Week*. So Doordarshan has a lot of nostalgia value, but I don't see myself relating to what is happening as of now. But I also feel that even the current band of news channels per se have also lost their relevance. I would rather search for news online and read about it.

65.47% of viewers watch *Doordarshan* occasionally. The reasons for such viewing is- 17.69% perceive it as a government mouthpiece, 13.27% feel it provides reliable news, 5.30% feel it provides unbiased news, 15.92% feel it offers less commercial breaks in between the

programs and 13.27% feel its production quality is low. A very miniscule percentage i.e. 5.30 % of viewers, prefer watching *Doordarshan* only. Out of them 0.88% watch it because it is a government mouthpiece and 1.76 % watch it for reliable and trustworthy news as well as less commercial breaks.

The low viewership figure for *Doordarshan* is because it is generally perceived as being promoting a discourse that is uncritical of the government. However, the debate and discussions on the channel are not shrill and noisy as with private news channels. The following table shows the audience response to the question of whether there is any difference in the approach of public and private news channels to debates and discussions.

Table 13: Difference in Approach of Public and Private News Channels to Debates

Sl. No	Response	No. of response (%)
1.	Yes	83 (73.45%)
2.	No	6(5.30%)
3.	Can't Say	24(21.23%)

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

A high percentage i.e. 73.45% of respondents feel that there is a difference in the manner the talk format is presented in both the kind of news channels. A low percentage of 5.30% do not find any dissimilarity. However, 21.23% of viewers cannot decide between the options. While, a majority of respondents feel that *Doordarshan* and other news channels function differently and this is highlighted in their programming content. Elaborating on how *Doordarshan* functions, a male professional responds,

At times I watch Rajya Sabha TV and DD News. Although they are government channels, their coverage is like if something is going anti-government then they will just touch it. It is like kind of obligation but still on Rajya Sabha TV, I found the debates to be much more relevant. They were calm, gave time to panelists to talk, and the way of talking in terms of facts and much more civilized debate. Not shouting at each other. People sit and talk as required in a debate and not a tussle between two to three people and with less commercial breaks also. That is how debate should happen.

Adding on to the nature of debate in *Doordarshan*, a female professional who watched the a debate show ‘*Selective outrage over films on Jawaharlal Nehru University and Kashmir*’ on the show *Left, Right and Centre* on *NDTV 24x7*, replies,

I always consider Doordarshan as a government channel regardless of which government is in power. The discussions are balanced on issues which are not politically dominated. It can bring out voices. There I must give credit to Doordarshan. At least in Doordarshan you don’t have ranting and screaming and shouting, two panelists and ten different windows and everybody talking at the same time. At least debates are professionally conducted. But Doordarshan doesn’t give you the scope for a heated argument because it is a government vehicle after all.

Talking about the likelihood of the debate she watched on *NDTV 24x7* being aired on *Doordarshan*, she said,

Doordarshan is a Sarkari (Government) channel so they will not allow somebody let’s say from Kashmir and talk about suppression of art. They will not allow it in the first place, so will not see such discussions. They will not invite anyone to talk about it. Debate like this one will not only come in Doordarshan. Because it is a sensitive topic, they will not take such controversial issues.

A majority of the respondents feel that the discourse on the state broadcaster is sanitized. Although, the topics that are debated are wide ranging, the discussion around them are generally seen as being pro- government. Public broadcasting was set up in India to be a vehicle for promoting all-round development in a young independent nation. The responsibility of nurturing a feudal order to a democratic nation rested on the shoulders of a vibrant communication model. While the roadmap for this communication model was laudable, the failure to map out a system of financing that would translate this grand vision into practice has resulted in weakening of the public broadcaster. Successive governments, over the years, have used *Doordarshan* for their propaganda, leaving its autonomy in tatters. The viewers also feel that public broadcaster has turned into government mouthpiece and no longer functions as an independent state broadcaster. Chapter 3, highlighted how *Doordarshan* was used as a political tool by every government since the seventies. This state of affairs continues till date. It is a sad commentary on its potential as a public broadcaster, given its geographical outreach. *Doordarshan’s* stagnation in the media space has led to the growth of private news media. Private news media despite its various shortcomings appears to attract more viewers. Premised on the notion of providing independent news, it becomes an attractive proposition for viewers.

I next ask the respondents to rank their *expected* coverage of various issues in private news channels. By expected coverage, I mean coverage of those issues that are perceived as being vital and should be ideally and necessarily be reported or debated in news channels. The following table shows the results.

Table 14: Ranking of Issues that Should Get More Coverage in News Channels

Sl. No	Issues	Scale						Rank
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
1.	Employment	41(36.28%)						
	Health	21(18.58%)						
	Politics	27 (23.89%)						
	National Security	43(38.05%)						National Security
	Crime	9(7.96%)						
	Entertainment	2(1.76%)						
2.	Employment		17(15.04%)					
	Health		27(23.89%)					Health
	Politics		13(11.50%)					
	National Security		26(23.00%)					
	Crime		22(19.46%)					
	Entertainment		4(3.84%)					
3.	Employment			17(15.04%)				
	Health			24(21.23%)				
	Politics			16(14.15%)				
	National Security			21(18.58%)				
	Crime			25(22.12%)				Crime
	Entertainment			6(5.30%)				
4.	Employment				16(14.15%)			
	Health				15(13.27%)			
	Politics				23 (20.35%)			Politics
	National Security				12(10.61%)			
	Crime				14(12.38%)			
	Entertainment				8(7.07%)			
5.	Employment					12(10.61%)		Employment
	Health					16 (14.15%)		
	Politics					20(17.69%)		
	National Security					7(6.19%)		

	Crime					23(20.35%)		
	Entertainment					10(8.84%)		
6.	Employment						6 (5.30%)	
	Health						2(1.76%)	
	Politics						7(6.19%)	
	National Security						3(2.65%)	
	Crime						11(9.73%)	
	Entertainment						67(59.29%)	Entertainment

(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

This table reveals data regarding the ranking of issues that should ideally be covered by news channels. 38.05% of the respondents say that issues related to national security must get the highest coverage. This must be followed by health as stated by 23.89% respondents. 22.12% of the respondents place coverage of crime at the third place. This is followed by 20.35% of respondents who place politics at the fourth place. 10.61% of the respondents feel that employment should occupy the fifth place and 59.29% of respondents feel that entertainment should occupy the sixth place. This table shows that different types of audience watch different kind of new items and debates. According to the viewers, issues of national security, health, crime and employment are considered important and must be reported and debated in news channels. These issues are related to the day-to-day affairs of viewers and there is a demand that information that addresses such concerns must be made available. However, in practice, such issues get highlighted only when some incident concerning such issue occurs in any part of the country. These vital issues do not find space in the everyday programming of news channels. Within the sample organizations, *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*, it can be said that *NDTV 24x7* is more likely to discuss issues on health and employment than *Aaj Tak*. During my fieldwork, I observed that when the cattle trade ban¹⁸⁸ issue was being debated in media in the month of June 2017, a common refrain across the *NDTV* platform was that discussion on issues like beef eating ban, declaring cow as national animal were trivial and insignificant. There was also discussion of how the government had intentionally passed orders on such emotive issues to divert attention from its failure to deliver the much promised development model i.e. *Acche Din* of Modi Sarkar.

¹⁸⁸This is in reference to a government order that was passed on 25 May, 2017 that imposed restrictions on the sale of livestock in animal markets.

Since then, *NDTV 24x7* has been doing debates on the economy, falling growth rate, failure of demonitization, on a frequent basis to highlight how the government has completely failed in the development front and is resorting to flaring up communal issues to divert attention from its failures. As stated earlier, an integral aspect of the news programming is entertainment. Although entertainment news figures prominently in both *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*, viewers say such content should be the last priority for news channels. Thus, it can be stated that there is much demand for citizen-centric issues to be reported and debated in news channels. These issues impact the everyday existence of viewers and hence there is a great interest in getting aware about them. Here, I would like to highlight the case of an English news channel *Mirror Now* owned by the Times Television Network (TTN) that was launched in March 2017. This news channel has been positioned as a citizen centric news channel as is evident from a plethora of issues debated like the importance of child-lock in cars, how the Goods and Service (GST) tax impacts common citizens, increase in fuel prices, holding government accountable for its inability to deal with natural disasters, poor civic amenities, on the primetime show. Faye D'Souza, Executive Editor, *Mirror Now*, remarks on the channel's positioning as,

The mandate is to be citizen-focused, because we noticed now that if you look at prime time news a lot of it is very nationalist....we have a Times Now in the system that does nationalist stories and focuses on national pride and the national anthem and those things. But there is also a need then a focus on citizen-based news¹⁸⁹.

However, the other side to this editorial freedom is the freedom of not being a part of the breaking news race. For D'Souza,

The cushion of being a part of the Times Group has certainly helped. We have a tremendous luxury because the network already has Times Now, so I don't have to compete with anybody else, we are not in the breaking news race to get it before anyone else, we are a really low cost channel so we aren't under as much pressure to bring in a lot of advertising. And that gives us editorial freedom.

While *Mirror Now* has the luxury of not being too dependent on advertising and hence retaining their editorial independence, this is not the case with a majority of news channels that are dependent on TRP based content for getting revenues. This TRP-advertising-revenue model lies at the core of how a major section of news media works. Siddharth Vardarajan, coherently

189 For more read, <https://scroll.in/magazine/851067/how-faye-dsouza-became-the-rising-star-of-indian-tv-news-without-yelling-or-finger-wagging>, accessed 27 September, 2017.

explains this revenue model in the print media sector which has consonance with the electronic media as well. He says,

Unlike other countries, in India, readers are charged a fraction of the costs that are incurred for producing a single newspaper copy. Hence, the marginal revenue from sale of every copy is negative. So in such a scenario how does a newspaper make profit? This is done by relying on advertising revenue. While the global norm is 60% revenue comes from advertising and 40% from subscription, in India the norm is 90% revenue from advertising and 10% from subscriptions. This allows the publisher to subsidize the cost of each edition and increase circulation rather than have high cost and low circulation. The production costs are covered by selling advertising space. While it does make newspapers affordable but it prioritizes advertisements over news and it colours the kind of news that is produced.

It is this business model that determines the content policy of private news channels. As stated before, the relationship that public broadcasters have with their audiences is different from the relationship that private broadcasters have with their audiences. The changing relationship is most evident in the changing nature of content that is delivered on air. All news channels have realized the power of Hindi film industry and broadcast regular programmes about the glitz and glamour of the film industry. A few examples being, *NDTV 24x7 -Saturday Night Fever and Spotlight, Aaj Tak -Movie Masala, News18-Now Showing, News18 India- Bhabhi Tera Deewar Deewana, Republic TV-Anupam Kher Show and Glitz, Zee News-Bollywood Breaking, Times Now- Bollywood Uncensored, ABP News- Saas, Bahu aur Saazish and Love aur Dhokha, Aaj Tak- Saas, Bahu aur Betiyaan, News Nation- Serial Aur Cinema, India TV-Saas, Bahu aur Suspense..* All these shows are about reviews of new films, celebrity interviews, gossip, scandals, soap operas etc. Within sports, cricket is covered extensively while other sports gain traction during international games like Asian games, Commonwealth game and the Olympics. Crime and Astrology are the best-selling content that have dedicated shows in all Hindi news channels. A few examples of some crime shows are *ABP News- Sansaani, Aaj Tak- Vardaat, News Nation-Hadsaa, News18 Hindi- Saazish and Criminal*. Similarly, a few examples of astrology and faith based shows are, *India TV-Bhawaishyawani, Aaj Tak- Aapke Taare, Adhbhut, Avishwasniya, Akalpaniya, ABP News- Guruji, News Nation-Bhabhijiyan*. The English news channels refrain from airing any crime, soap operas, religion and astrology based shows. Such shows are indicative of news programming as infotainment based. In the mad race of ratings competition, news channels keep introducing such content to expand their viewership market. Information that aims to be entertaining becomes what Bob Franklin calls ‘*newszack*’: a product designed and

processed for a particular market and delivered in increasing homogenous snippets which makes only modest demands on the audience (1997:4-5). Within this entertainment laced model of news creation, news channels no longer consider audiences as citizens or active participants in a democracy but as mere consumers. So like a typical business model, news content is marketed as a product that should appeal to a large base of consumers. The tendency of revenues and profits determining editorial content in news channels parallels with Murdock and Golding's (1974) argument of how media corporations in pursuit of profits produce and circulate commodities for the largest possible market. In effect, information about lifestyle, sports, entertainment and leisure that promote consumerism get centre-staged as news, thus replacing citizenship with consumerism.

This chapter has attempted to map the voices of the audience who regularly consume news. Located within the interpretive audience theorization, it makes a case for understanding the transformative changes in news viewership. News channels are no longer mediums for accessing news and information only. The increasing prominence of talk mode of programming in the form of debates, deliberations and discussions on contemporary issues is finding its audience. While some viewers feel that such discussions are not relevant to their everyday life, many others find this model of programming relevant. This format is seen as providing information and moulding opinion on events and occurrences getting reported by media. It also allows an insight into knowing the editorial positioning of news channels.

Further, the idea that functioning of English and Hindi news channels is different, especially in terms of their content policy, viewership base, also seems to be thinning. There is near unanimity that these differences are largely disappearing and a common format of doing news programming is emerging. There is also an attempt by English news channels, to have programming in the either Hindi or *Hinglish* (Hindi and English) language. This is because the viewership of English news channels is miniscule in comparison to their Hindi counterparts. Along with targeting their regular viewers, English news channels are attempting to bring in the Hindi viewers to their fold.

On the issue of the viewers response to *NDTV24x7* and *Aaj Tak*, viewers feel that the two channels are seen as functioning diametrically opposite to each other. *NDTV 24x7* is seen as a

having a liberal editorial positioning whereas *Aaj Tak* is considered to be taking a populist editorial positioning. *NDTV 24x7* is seen as providing platform for articulation of diverse views through its talk programming. Its programming is considered well researched and informative. On the other hand, *Aaj Tak* is seen as promoting sensational and divisive discourse for capturing higher ratings.

Although the Indian media does meet its expected role as subscribed in the liberal theory of media, the manner in which it is achieved leaves much too to be desired. This is especially true in the case of news channels that have emerged as significant players in the formation of public opinion in contemporary times. Indian news channels reach a vast population of the country. Hence, it becomes all the more crucial for news channels to put out facts and viewpoints with more diligence and care. But unfortunately, news channels have failed to put up with this most essential requirement. One finds that the viewership of television news media in India straddles between two universe. On one hand, there exists the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* and on the other a plethora of private news channels in English, Hindi and other regional languages. The increasing marginalization of the state broadcaster due to the continuing bureaucratic control over its financial and functional authority, has led to erosion of its credibility. Private news channels with their fast paced reporting, better programming content and sleek production technique have grown in numbers to offer stiff competition to *Doordarshan*. The transformation from a state centric to a market centric ownership control of news channels has come at the cost of the transformation on news audience as citizen to news audience as consumer primarily through the changing news content on air. The practice of market, determining the nature and form of media system, raises questions about the efficacy of the institution that is celebrated as being the fourth pillar of democracy.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

The study shows that despite stiff competition from other mediums (print and digital), television news remains one of India's most important communication medium. Reaching to a billion homes across the subcontinent, television dominates the dissemination of information and in shaping public opinion. The study has charted this story of Indian television's rise in framing and shaping public discourse amidst massive structural transformations in the broadcasting sector. It is in order that as one concludes, it may be productive to recall the central objectives that this study began with. They were, schematically put:

- To trace the history of the growth and transformation of Indian media in general, and television news media in particular.
- To understand and analyze the nuances of production and representation of texts in the select news channels.
- To examine the nature of consumption of the stated texts by diverse audience constituencies.
- To interpret and analyze the production, representation and consumption of the stated texts, within the broader understanding of the relationship between media and democracy.

It is towards answering these objectives that one seeks to provide an overview of the state of television news in contemporary India in Part I and then map how the two private news channels *NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak* that have been the central object of inquiry in this study framed media discourses.

I

State of Television News Media in Contemporary India

The birth of television news took place in Independent India. The leaders of the young nation were deeply inspired by the development paradigms of the sixties which advocated the use of

television as a powerful tool for nation-building and national integration. The state broadcaster *Doordarshan* was used as a pedagogic tool for promoting economic and social development through education and attitude change in a country which was plagued by traditional beliefs of caste system and mass literacy. The period of the seventies and eighties witnessed significant policy changes like hardware expansion, advent of advertising, colour transmission, entertainment centric programming in the functioning of the broadcaster. However, in the course of time, excessive political interference and the use of the state broadcaster for political propaganda, lack of institutional autonomy, Hindi-centric programming, Delhi focused policy and programming decisions and blatant promotion of the ruling party, raised questions over its credibility. Voices from the field, lamented the decline of the state broadcaster *Doordarshan*. A majority of the viewers feel that the discourse on the state broadcaster is sanitized. Although, the topics that are debated are wide ranging, the discussion around them are generally seen as being pro- government. There is a pervasive thinking that the autonomy granted to the state broadcaster *Doordarshan* is a misnomer. The autonomy finds its place only on paper and not in practice.

The structural reforms of 1991 ushered in dramatic changes in the television news space. Like other sectors, the government, lifted its controlled in the broadcasting sector, to show its utmost commitment to free market policy. Government relaxation paved the way for private and foreign participation in the broadcasting sphere. Private participation paved the way for the entry of a market-centric model of news business. The operation of a market model led to the emergence of certain key trends which became the cornerstone of the 21st century television news media industry. The study shows how some of the major trends, namely, market reliant revenue model, skewed regulation policies, changing content policy, and news consumption pattern, impinge on the structure and mode of operation of television news media.

The adoption of a market-reliant revenue model had salient impact in the broadcasting sector. Private players consisting of businessmen and politicians invested in television media for attaining power, political patronage and influence policy making. With zero revenue from television licensing, and minimal subscriptions charges, their business model was geared towards generating revenue from both public and private entities in the form of advertising. Similarly, advertisers were drawn to the medium due to its geographical reach. Television provided them a platform to showcase their products to millions of potential consumers across the nation. Albeit

started by *Doordarshan*, the shift in the imagination of news viewers from citizens to consumers was accelerated with the entry of private media. The entry of private media, made the market competitive. Now, advertisers would flock to those channels which promised highest viewership numbers. The news channels in their effort to outbid their competitors to acquire more advertisers, made innovative strategies in their content policies. Their content was fine tuned to address the needs of not citizens but consumers. The study documents some of the cutthroat interventions like content segmentation and content replication towards developing an infotainment based content policy, by tracing the competition in the Hindi news channel segment from 2003 onwards. Such type of content was considered to be the driving force by the Hindi news channels. These early years in the expansion of private television news media set the template for the nature of content policy in the Hindi segment. The English segment was influenced by this template, too.

This study, challenges the prevailing perception that news programming in English and Hindi news channels is different in terms of their content policy, advertising revenue and target audience. Earlier Hindi news channels were accused of tabloidization of news with focus on superstition, astrology, myth and cinema based content. It was believed that these news channels essentially catered to the mass audience in small towns and village. On the otherhand, English news channels were considered as catering to the niche upwardly mobile class residing in cities and metros. Their content was considered to be more superior vis-à-vis their Hindi counterparts. Similarly, differing advertising revenue was considered as another vital factor that marked the distinction between the English and Hindi segment. It was believed that English news channels received more advertising revenue, as their audience, had the purchasing power to buy the products advertised by them. However, in contemporary times, there is near unanimity that these differences are largely disappearing and a common format of news programming is emerging. There is also an attempt by English news channels, to have programming in the either Hindi or *Hinglish* (Hindi and English) language. This is because the viewership of English news channels is miniscule in comparison to their Hindi counterparts. Along with targeting their regular viewers, English news channels are attempting to bring in the Hindi viewers to their fold. This is primarily due to the viewership factor. The Hindi news market is much bigger than the English news market. In order to expand their viewership among the Hindi speaking viewers , many

English news channels like *NDTV 24x7*, *Times Now*, *Mirror Now*, *CNN News18* have now included Hindi and Hinglish (English Hindi mix) bulletin in their news cycle. In accordance with the business logic of news channels, many news viewers state that the difference between English and Hindi news channels is thinning. They feel that barring a few, the rest of the news channels in both languages, English and Hindi, are essentially following the format of shrill and noisy debates which are intended to push a particular agenda and fetch high ratings.

Along with changing content policy, the study highlights how regulation of news media assumes utmost significance in the rapidly altering social, political, technological and economic changes in the country. This study has made a case for regulation of news media at three levels- content, revenue and ownership. News viewers suggest that television news media should refocus its attention towards a citizen centric model of journalism. This means that news media should shift away from infotainment and focus on civic and social issues like health, education, environment, gender etc. These issues are related to the day-to-day affairs of viewers and there is a demand that information that addresses such concerns must be made available. However, in practice, such issues get reported only when some incident related to such issue occurs.

There is also a need for television news media to develop robust mechanisms to filter fake news and paid news. Currently, it appears that large section of news media resorts to peddling lies to promote political agendas. There is also a guarded acceptance by many journalists that a section of media is being used by the current dispensation to further its political agendas. This is done by systematically targeting all dissenting voices both within and outside media. This blatant display of political biasness goes against the spirit of independent media. Moreover, the ownership structure of most news channels also raise question over their credibility. The study shows, a large number of news channels, especially in the vernacular segment, are owned by political parties, corporate houses and other dubious entities. Media investment has become an attractive option for political propaganda and routing black money. It is crucial to regulate the channels of revenue generation by media houses. One of the significant ways through which investment in private media can be checked is the creating a subscription based model where users pay for the kind of news they consume. At present, a large chunk of revenue is generated from advertising and minimal amount from subscription. A viable subscription based model (like digital news websites) would go in a long way to free media from

market based revenue. This would imply generating content which is geared towards a citizen centric journalism and not market centric journalism. Along with new business model, the need of an independent regulatory body with statutory laws, to regulate news content, seems to be more appropriate to fix the anomalies plaguing the broadcast industry.

The study also showcases how communication technologies are playing a major role in reorienting news production, representation and consumption. Players like digital news websites, mojo (mobile journalism) and social media are making significant impact in the way television news media is functioning in contemporary times. Digital news websites are the news players in the media business. Armed with cutting end technology, subscription based revenue model and spread of internet, these ventures are giving strong competition to mainstream/legacy media. These websites also cater to readers/viewers who have divergent ideas, values and beliefs. To counter these outlets, news channels also have re-strategized their online forums. Every news channel has its own website which is synchronised with its television programming. Mobile journalism is reinventing the way news is gathered. The replacement of cameras with mobile phones has necessarily brought down reportage costs by shunting out cameraman and photographer. It has also led to fast transfer of news from the field to the studio. The impact of social media on traditional media has been at four levels. First, social media has become a major source of news breaks. It is providing cues of events and incidents happenings across the world. News channels are often picking up stories from social media and then developing it further. Second, besides borrowing information, news channels are also circulating their content to the wider audience through social media platforms especially twitter and facebook. Hashtag journalism features exclusively on news programming. These hashtags set the tone of the discussion that is carried out in respective news channels. Third, the overflow of online information has necessitated the journalists to act as gatekeepers. This is deemed important to check the onslaught of fake news and misinformation that circulate fast on social media platform. Fourth, social media platforms are also widely used to target all dissenting voices, especially journalists. Journalists are subjected to abuses, sexist comment, hate speech and death threat. This appears to be the major challenge that journalists have to deal with.

The above discussions provide insights into the transformations which impact the way television news media is structured and operates in contemporary India. This contextual

understanding anchors the second aspect of the current study. As stated before, the focus of the study is to understand how media discourses are shaped/formed/framed by news channels through an analysis of their current affairs format of programming in. The study scans through the different genres of programming in news channels and finds that the current affairs genre of programming is increasingly dominating the 24x7 news cycle. Consisting of studio debates, panel discussions, documentaries and interviews, this apparently dialogical mode of communication has become a pervasive feature across news channels. The news cycle has made a radical shift from the predominantly one way dissemination of information to an interactive format where the focus is to analyse, investigate and explore the *why*, *how* and *what* of such everyday events and occurrences. Journalists associated with such shows say that due to the availability of internet and mobile technology, viewers get their daily quota of news. The studio debates and discussions help viewers, to build an opinion or gain knowledge, on that piece of news, by bringing together diverse perspectives. By engaging experts and domain specialists, news channels are seen as facilitating the formation of reasoned and informed opinion. Further, they also believe that many shows, allow audience to participate by posing questions or airing views, thus encouraging participatory conversations on television. From the consumption point of view, television news is seen as a major source of getting information. Viewers feel that despite the prevalence of internet and newspapers, television is still a primary source of accessing information on issues of politics, economy, sports, entertainment etc. Such information plays a crucial role in framing opinion on issues that are prevalent in the public domain. The study showcases that a large proportion of viewers like to watch television debates. The two primary reasons that drive viewership for this format of programming are- gain more knowledge and awareness regarding the issue being discussed on the screens. Viewers feel that news debates bring in different voices on the issue that is being debated. This results in getting aware about the ideas and perspectives of different individual, groups and communities. Moreover, by inviting domain experts on issues like Foreign Affairs, Economy, Environment, Defence etc. news channels provide scope for a more robust understanding of the issue at hand. It can be stated that there is ready acceptance of content segmentation in news channels, among news viewers. News channels are also seen as addressing a much larger and diverse segment of audience, primarily due to its audio and visual technology primacy vis-a vis print media.

Viewers' engagement with news debates also highlights that, they critically interpret these discussions and deliberations. The findings of the study corroborate the active viewer theorization. The study showcases that the interpretations of viewers are drawn from their beliefs and experiences towards such issues in their everyday life. For instance, one viewer spoke about his school experiences, while discussing the education scam in Bihar. Similarly, another viewer spoke about how she could relate to the discussion on women and violence in Bastar, as she belonged to Chhattisgarh and had grown up, hearing about such incidents in the region. Such responses also showcased that the discourse framed on issues debated in the news channels were either accepted, negotiated or opposed/rejected. These interpretations were based on how the audience perceived the issue in hand. For instance, on the issue of farmer protest, the viewers agreed with the *NDTV's* stance that such protests highlighted the systemic misgovernance of government policies. Likewise, the responses of many viewers on topics, like Indian Army, politicization of CBI and Ram temple, was seen in opposition, to the discourse, aired by *Aaj Tak*. Besides, issue specific understanding, viewers understanding of how news channels are functioning in general, also came to the fore. A large percentage of viewers felt that ideological leanings of news channels are clearly exposed through their programming. News channels are seen as openly promoting those views which match with their editorial positions. Dissenting voices are shouted down. By engaging in biased practices, most news channels are seen as misguiding viewers. Some viewers felt that cosy linkup of a certain section of media and the government does not bode well, for the need of a democratic and pluralistic media in India.

This study has focussed exclusively on the current affairs format of news making. Through an in-depth examination of the three stages of production, representation and consumption of current affairs texts (chapters five, six, seven and eight), it highlights how the form of journalism in the two news channels is at many times in stark contrast to each other, often giving rise to multiple media discourse(s) on various social, cultural, political and economic issues. The study has identified some key internal (ownership of the institution, its editorial policies, the organizational structuring, work ethics, revenue model) and external factors (social media, market, state policies, media regulations) which influence the discourse (s) in news channels.

II

NDTV 24x7 and Aaj Tak: Two ‘Discourses’ of Journalism

The historical journey of the two news channels from their foundational years to contemporary times, help in understanding why the two news organizations have differing styles or model of journalism, at many times in variance with the other. Both the channels went on air at a time when the private news media space was still in its infancy with fewer players like *Zee*, *STAR* and *Doordarshan*. Further, both the channels were initially production houses which produced content for *Doordarshan*. Two famous shows namely, *The World This Week* produced by *NDTV* and *Neswtrack* produced by Living Media (owner of India Today Group) which aired on *Doordarshan* garnered much attention in the television world due to their fast coverage, live camera reporting and high production quality. This visibility provided the much needed impetus to both the production houses to raise their stakes and venture into the 24x7 news cycle. By entering into the newsrooms of the two channels, the study has addressed how issues of editorial independence, organizational policies, production processes, viewership etc. influence the framing of discourse in both the news channels.

Promoted by Radhika Roy and Prannoy Roy, *NDTV* was deeply influenced by the *BBC* and *CNN* model of journalism, where the focus was on the relevance and importance of an issue rather than its saleability. The channel also had a liberal editorial positioning imbibing the ideological orientation of its promoters. Along with the editorial stance, the channel focussed extensively in its designing and presentation, production layouts to provide an international look and feel to its image. A highly personalized recruitment pattern based on personal relations, social ties and network was an integral part of this process. The focus was to get in the right kind of people who could be trained and moulded into the channel's philosophy. The channel also positioned itself as a responsible news channel, whose primary job was to provide fair and objective news, influence and direct the course of policy making and mould public opinion. These objectives were met, first, with getting the right news and not necessarily the first news in a competitive market and second, doing news stories on issues like pollution, health, covering rural India, which were often sidelined by the mainstream media.

Another important aspect of *NDTV's* organizational structure is the presence of an Audience Research Cell that acts as a conduit between the journalists and their audience. The cell acts as a bridge in seeking opinion and getting feedback from its viewers. The channel believes that it is important to engage with their audiences and know about their viewing preferences and tastes. The organizational policies of the channel are clearly reflected in the kind of discourse that it presents on the television screens. The viewership base of the channel feels that *NDTV* is the only channel that gives voices to all sides in a debate. This exposes the viewers to a plurality of views which may help them in understanding an issue on their basis of their mental capacity. This strategy does gel with the attempt of the channel to aid in the formation of public opinion on issues that are being debated and discussed in the larger society. Viewers also claim that the channel steers away from the noise and hysteria that has become a benchmark in contemporary times. This is largely possible due to their fairly less reliance on TRPs as a key factor in producing news content. The programming strategy of the channel gives rise to the perception of the channel catering to a select audience and not having a mass appeal.

On the other hand, *Aaj Tak* belongs to the TV Today Network which has been in the media business for over 40 years. From the beginning, it has positioned itself as a common man's news channel. Its viewership primarily consists of the news viewing population in small cities and towns and middle and lower middle class strata. Moreover as it is a Hindi news channel, its geographical spread was largely restricted to the Hindi heartland. The content policy of the news channel was fine tuned to address this constituency of viewership. It must be kept in mind that *Aaj Tak* operated in a hugely competitive and overcrowded Hindi news market. The study highlights how the compulsions of commerce have impacted the content policy of the channel. First, the channel's foundational philosophy is based on the idea of 'sabse tez' (delivering 'fastest' news). The channel has worked with the motto till date. It is worth mentioning that the vis-a-vis other news channels, *Aaj Tak* invested heavily in technology in its initial years. Besides newsroom automation, it was the first channel which bought in mobile outside broadcast (OB) vans technology to news production. These vans could produce live broadcasts outside the studio on short notice. This helped in procuring live images from the site of an event. For the first time, viewers experienced instant news. Second, the content policy of the channel was designed as a mix of news and entertainment. The channel worked with the

infotainment model of news framing where the focus was to provide news on a range of genres, like cinema, cricket, tourism, astrology, mythology, travel, business, lifestyle which caters to the taste and preferences of its viewers. Third, the channel worked extensively on its programming language (which is deeply inspired by the Bollywood cinema) to attract maximum eyeballs. The focus was to present news in a language that would be similar to the language spoken by such audience so that they could comprehend it. Thus the language policy of *Aaj Tak* comprised of phonetics, sound impact, imagery which framed its news content. The journalists working in the channel are categorical about their content policy being determined by TRP ratings. The study showcases that the channel often picks up topics related to religion, culture, politics, cricket, national security. The discussion on these topics is framed within the national vs anti-national binary to attract eyeballs and fetch ratings. Similarly, the selection of guests or Panelists for such shows also rests on how much on screen drama can be created. There is also a candid acceptance by the channel that one of the primary motives of such discussions is to create on air drama. The anchors deliberately encourage, usage of aggressive words, to create conflict which turns debates into mudslinging matches. Many times the mikes of the dissenting voices are also lowered to block their views. The audiences of the channel also feel that the loud, noisy and jingoistic tone of framing television discourse helps the channel to draw huge TRP. The audiences also call out the non-seriousness and tardy journalism of the channel as evident in a host of it's on air discussions on trivial issues like tweets, videos and sound bites of political leaders.

The understanding of the *NDTV* and *Aaj Tak* model of journalism has been further concretized by analysing the nature of discourses that air on both the news channels. A certain understanding of framing discourse has been achieved by doing a textual analysis of select current affairs shows that were televised on the news channels. The study has showcased that the current affairs format of news programming has played a central role in shaping and moulding opinions on issues which make it to headlines in the news channels. The current affairs format has led to the empowerment of the studio at the cost of field reportage. The current affairs format is not a new programming genre on television news media. The state broadcaster *Doordarshan* was the pioneer in hosting highly acclaimed shows like *Janvaani*, *Newsline*, *Parakh* during the eighties. These shows were often commissioned to private producers. Such shows would be allotted slots after the prime time news bulletins. However, in contemporary times, such shows

have got center-staged. News channels are no longer just disseminating news but they are dishing out opinion based news. Every event that makes it to the headlines is being debated and discussed on television studios. Such programming has given rise to new newsroom practices. New teams like guest coordination, research, graphics, tickers, assignment, social media etc. have been created to cater to this kind of programming. Current affairs shows have replaced news bulletins to a large extent. Such shows have brought in their new techniques of news production, namely, spokespersons, guest Panelists, social media posts, blogs, twitter hashtags, videos, graphics and slugs, live interviews. It can be stated that such factors are playing an important role in determining the kind of narratives that play out in news channels.

The textual analysis of current affairs shows on both the news channels revealed two themes, namely, cultural nationalism and mis-governance. These two themes became the overarching frames for debate and deliberation on the news stories that made it to the headlines during the period of study. Challenging the perception that both news channels have different styles of journalism resulting in different media narratives on every single issue, the study found out that the narratives on both channels were *not* different on all occasions. For instance, on the issue of mis-governance, both the news channels appeared to be framing a similar narrative. In both the news channel, the issue of mis-governance was seen as failure of government policies. Both the channels contended that elections are fought on the promise of better governance on issues like infrastructure, agricultural, education, health, environment etc. However, they are conveniently sidelined by all political parties after attaining power. Both the news channels were univocal on their stand of calling out systemic inefficiency of the political system which was paralyzing the governance structure of the country.

However, the divide between both the news channels media was clearly visible on the issues debated within the overarching theme cultural nationalism. The ascendancy of the right-wing politics in India has resulted in the center-staging of the idea of cultural nationalism into the mainstream discourse. Some media groups have been important constituents in constructing and legitimizing this discourse. In contemporary times, one finds that while one section of media accepts the government ideology and propagates its majoritarian views, the other section is critical of the current dispensation. This division was clearly visible in the manner in which the two news channels framed their discourse on social, cultural and political issues. *NDTV 24x7*

spoke about upholding the rule of law. Through its discussions, it highlighted how the government was trying to promote its divisive agenda by resorting to tactics like censorship of free speech, advocating Hindutva and upper caste supremacy. The channel stated that such exclusionary politics ran counter to the ethos of plurality and diversity as espoused by the Indian constitution. The channel was also critical of the jingoistic nationalism which has been ably supported and promoted by the government. It targeted the government of shooting down criticism by hiding behind the façade of nationalism. On the other hand, *Aaj Tak* called for upholding the rule of the majority. The majoritarian agenda was promoted as being nationalistic. All critical and dissenting voices were termed as anti-national, who were conspiring to destroy the unity of the nation. The shrill discourse on cultural nationalism by the channel was reflective of the current political climate of the country. The ascendancy of the right-wing government has mainstreamed the majoritarian agenda. It would be incorrect to say that such a stream of thought was not present in the public consciousness prior to the BJP-led government at the center. The current government has not only succeeded in bringing the majoritarian agenda to mainstream but also normalizing it. Thus, parroting the government stance on Hindutva issues like Ram temple, abrogation of Article 370, cow protection, love jihad, triple talaq is the new normal. Voices critical of the government's stance are rejected. It appears that *Aaj Tak* taps into this popular sentiment to touch cord with the constituency of mass viewership. Also promoting a shrill and noisy nationalistic agenda, helps the channel to carve its space in an overcrowded market. The channel's discourse on cultural nationalism echoes the hyper-nationalist, majoritarian and divisive campaign of the BJP. The discourse of the channel is guided by popular opinion, rather than influencing public opinion in a constructive way. Viewers response to the functioning of the two channels, also highlights the clear divide in their manner of framing media discourses. *NDTV 24x7* is seen as having a liberal editorial positioning whereas *Aaj Tak* is considered to be taking a populist editorial positioning. *NDTV 24x7* is seen as providing platform for articulation of diverse views in its programming. Its programming is considered well researched and informative. On the other hand, *Aaj Tak* is seen as promoting sensational and divisive discourse for capturing higher ratings. This divergence highlights the active role of news channels in signifying events differently.

The divergent discourse between both the news channels is also reflective of the current *split* that persists in the Indian media. Talking specifically about television news media, it can be said that news channels are neatly segregated into two camps. The first camp consists of a majority of news channels who have become government mouthpieces, and the second, although miniscule, consists of those who are critical of the current dispensation. The pro government media houses always tries to either spin a pro government narrative or whip up a nationalistic frenzy on every issue. They viciously target other media houses, activists, individuals by labeling them an ‘ani-national’, ‘urban naxal’, ‘tukde tudke gang’ etc. It appears the government has been successful in creating division among media houses for furthering its political agendas.

In continuation with its historical role of mirroring the socio-political realities, a major section of the Indian media no longer functions as a watchdog, in the contemporary scenario. It has become a part of the government machinery, trying to silence critical voices. Although the Indian media does meet its expected role as subscribed in the liberal theory of media, the manner in which it is achieved leaves much too to be desired. This is especially true in the case of news channels that have emerged as significant players in the formation of public opinion in contemporary times. A majority of television debates and discussions, on issues in the public domain, are laced with majoritarian ideas and beliefs. The right wing shift in the political discourse is getting reflected in the media. The dominant trend, to debate and deliberate every issue, through the lens of hyper nationalism, seems to override the formation of any informed and reasoned public discourse. Their deliberate endorsement and promotion of a majoritarian discourse threatens to disrupt the diversity and plurality of the Indian democracy. Further, it also raises questions on the role of media as the fourth pillar of democracy. News channels reach a vast population of the country. As key influencers they need to put out facts and viewpoints with more diligence and care and uphold the values and norms of responsible journalism.

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Annexure I

**Centre for the Study of Social System
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi**

Interview Guide-Media Experts

Media Discourse in Contemporary India: A Study of Select News Channels

Name of Researcher: Sudeshna Devi

Date:

History of Indian Media

1. What is your view on the significance of media in a democratic society?
2. What was the nature of Indian media (print and electronic) before the economic reforms in 1991?
3. What explains the growth of Indian news channels at both national and regional level?

Production, Representation, Reception of Media texts

4. What are the reasons for the growth of debates and discussions in news channels?
5. How do you view the nature of debates between public and private and English and Hindi news channels?
6. More news channels offer diverse content for viewing. What are your views?
7. What is the type of viewership for English and Hindi and public and private news channel?
8. How do debates and discussions on news channels frame opinion amongst their viewers?

General

9. How is social media influencing the coverage of news channels?
10. What are your views on the issue of citizen journalism?
11. How do you view the issue of media (self) regulation?
12. How does the ownership of a news channel impact its editorial independence?
13. What are your views on the role of public broadcasting?
14. What are your views on the relationship between government and media in current times?
15. How do you view the future of electronic media?

Annexure II

**Centre for the Study of Social System
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi**

Interview Guide-Media Professionals (*NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*)

Media Discourse in Contemporary India: A Study of Select News Channels

Name of Researcher: Sudeshna Devi

Date:

Section I

Background/History

1. Kindly give a brief overview of the kind of current affairs programming in your channel.
2. When and why did your channel start the programming for debates and discussions?
3. What are the reasons for the growth of debates and discussions in news channels?

Production and Representation

4. How do you view the nature of debates between English and Hindi news channels?
5. How do debates and discussions on news channels frame opinion among viewers?
6. How do television ratings influence content of programming?
7. How is social media influencing the news content?
8. How does the ownership of the channel influence the news content?
9. Hindi and English newsrooms are differently organized. What are your views?
10. How does the research team work?

Reception

11. What type of audience does your channel cater to?
12. How is the audience feedback measured?

13. Do you incorporate audience feedback into your programming? How?

General

14. What are your views on the role of public broadcasting?

15. What are your views on the relationship between government and media in current times?

16. How do you view the future of electronic media?

Annexure III

**Centre for the Study of Social System
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi**

Interview Schedule -Audience

Media Discourse in Contemporary India: A Study of Select News Channels

Name of Researcher: Sudeshna Devi

Date:

Respondent No. :

Section I

Personal Details

1. Name:
2. Sex:
3. Age:
4. Educational Qualification:
5. Occupation:
6. Monthly Income:
7. Religion:
8. Marital Status:
9. Caste:
10. Address:

Section II

News channel Viewership

1. Which news channels do you watch- *NDTV 24x7/Aaj Tak/DD News*?
2. How often do you watch these channels (frequency and duration)?
3. Which programmes do you watch in these channels?
4. Do you participate in these programmes through twitter, facebook, sms poll? If yes, why? If no, why not?

5. What issues get more coverage in news channels?
6. Do you think news channels are biased towards political parties? Why?
7. Do you think the coverage of news channels is more metro-centric? Why?
8. What is the nature of coverage in news channels vis-a-vis newspapers and other social media?
9. What are your views regarding government vs. private news channels?
10. What suggestion would you like to give to news channels?

Programme Viewership-Reception

1. What is the relevance of the issue being discussed? How does it impact everyday life?
2. What are your views on the selection of guests for the show?
3. What are your views regarding the host of the show-their presentation, moderation of the debate?
4. What are your views on the nature of presentation of the show-studio setup, graphics on screen (tickers, tweets) etc.?
5. How do you view the nature of debate in the programme?
6. Do you think news channels can generate awareness by discussing such issues? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
7. Do you think news channels can influence the opinion of the viewers by discussing such issues? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
8. What suggestion would you like to give to news channels on such discussions?

Representation

9. What is the general approach of the news channel to issues of this kind?
10. How is this approach different from other channels?
11. Do you think English and Hindi news channels differ in their approach to this issue? How?
12. Do you think public and private news channels differ in their approach to this issue? How?

Annexure IV

Media Discourse in Contemporary India: A Study of Select News Channels

Sudeshna Devi
PhD Candidate
Center for the Study of Social Systems
Jawaharlal Nehru University
Delhi

Cover Note- Questionnaire -Audience

Dear Respondent,

Let me first say thank you for agreeing to be a part of this survey. Your response is very valuable and it will be used for this study only. None of your personal information will be disclosed elsewhere. I would request you to read this note before you start the survey, as it will give you an idea regarding the intended research.

I will just provide a brief overview of myself and my PhD research.

My name is Sudeshna Devi and I am a third year PhD student in Center for the Study of Social Systems (Sociology) from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. My research topic is ' Media Discourse in Contemporary India: A Study of Select News Channels'. The study attempts to look at first the nature and significance of debates and discussions in news channels on a wide range of social, political and cultural issues; and second how the audience responds to such media constructions/representations. This will be done by looking into the nature and significance of current affairs programming like studio debates, audience talk shows, interviews and documentaries in two select national news channels -*NDTV 24x7* and *Aaj Tak*. Further, the reception of such programmes by the audience will also be undertaken. By juxtaposing, the production and reception of media texts, an attempt will be made to understand the nature of media discourse in contemporary India.

For this audience survey, I have framed a questionnaire (list of questions) consisting of 5 pages. This questionnaire is for all those viewers who regularly watch news channels. It has two sections. Section I (page 1) and Section II (page 2 to 5). Section I consists of questions on

personal detail. If you do not want to disclose your name, you may omit the first question. From question 2 to 8, kindly put a tick on the most relevant option according to you.

Section II consists of questions on news viewership. There are a total of 31 questions and you have to put a tick on the most relevant option provided with each question. There are some questions, where you have to rate your options on a scale of 1 to 3 (like-1,2,3) or 1 to 4 (like-1,2,3,4) or 1 to 6 (like-1,2,3,4,5,6). Kindly see the instructions given along with such questions.

If you have any query, kindly contact me through the below mentioned email or phone number. I do look forward to receiving your response.

Thanks and Regards

Sudeshna Devi (email- sudeshnau1@gmail.com)

**Centre for the Study of Social System
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi**

Questionnaire -Audience

Media Discourse in Contemporary India: A Study of Select News Channels

Name of Researcher: Sudeshna Devi

Date:

Section I

Personal Details: (Please () tick the appropriate option)

1. Name-

2. Age-

Less than 20	21-40	41-60	61 and above

3. Sex -

Male	Female	Others

4. Educational Qualification-

Matriculation	Higher Secondary	Graduation	Post Graduation	Others

5. Occupation

Student	Home Maker	Professional	Retired	Others

6. Monthly Income

Less than 20,000	20,000-40,000	41,000-60,000	61,000-80,000	81,000 and above
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				above

7. Religion

Hindu	Muslim	Sikh	Christian	Others	Not Applicable

8. Caste

General	OBC	SC	ST	Not Applicable

Section-II

News Viewership: (Please (✓) tick the appropriate option)

1. Which news channel do you prefer watching in English?

<i>NDTV 24x7</i>	Times Now	India Today	CNN-News18	NewsX	Republic TV	DD News	Others (Please mention)

2. Which news channel do you prefer watching in Hindi?

ABP News	Zee News	<i>Aaj Tak</i>	India TV	News 24	DD News	News Nation	Others (Please mention)

3. Which news channel do you prefer watching in regional language ?(Kindly write down the name)-.....

4. Which programmes do you prefer to watch in your preferred news channel? (Kindly name the show and the channel on which it is aired)

News Bulletin	Debate Shows	Documentaries/ Investigation Reports	Soap-Operas, Satire, Astrology, Film Reviews

5. Do you like to watch debates in news channels?

Yes	No

6. If yes, then why do you like to watch debates? If no, then ignore this question.

Helps in framing instant opinion on an issue	Helps in acquiring in-depth knowledge on an issue	Helps in creating awareness on an issue	Helps in knowing the political position of a news channel on an issue

7. Do you participate in these programmes through twitter, facebook or sms?

Yes	No

8. If your answer to 7 is yes, then how often do you participate? If no, kindly ignore.

Everyday	Twice a week	Four times a week	Six times a week

9. On a scale of 1 to 6, kindly rate the amount of coverage given to the following issues. 1 to the most covered issue to 6 to the least covered issue.

Politics	Social Issues (Religion, Gender, Caste,)	Economy	Entertainment	Sports	Foreign Affairs

10. Do you think news channels are biased towards political parties?

Yes	No	Can't Say

11. If your answer to 10 is yes, mention the channel and the political party. If your answer is no or can't say, kindly ignore this question,-.....

.....

12. Do you think coverage of news channels is more urban-centric?

Yes	No	Can't Say

13. Do you think debates in news channels help you in forming opinion on contemporary issues?

Yes	No	Can't Say

14. Do you think there is a difference in the approach of English and Hindi news channels to debates and discussions?

Yes	No	Can't Say

15. Do you think media should be regulated?

Yes	No	Can't Say

16. If your answer to question no. 15 is yes, then who should regulate media? If answer is no or can't say, kindly ignore this question.

Government	Self-regulation	Corporate Body	Non-Governmental Organizations(NGOs)

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17. Do you think the television rating points (TRPs) influence content of news channels?

Yes	No	Can't Say

18. Do you think news channels indulge in sensationalism for higher ratings?

Yes	No	Can't Say

19. Do you think news channels have made politicians accountable?

Yes	No	Can't Say

20. Do you think there is a difference in the approach of public and private news channels to debates and discussions?

Yes	No	Can't say

21. Do you think social media (twitter, facebook etc.) is influencing the content of news channels?

Yes	No	Can't Say

22. How have news channels evolved since the time you have been watching them?
Kindly rate on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 indicating the most visible change to 4 indicating the least visible change. If you observe any other changes, kindly mention it.

More Objective	More Biased	More Sensational	More Participatory	Any Other Changes

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23. What is your preferred option for accessing news? Kindly rate on a scale of 1 to 3, 1 indicating most preferred to 3 indicating least preferred.

Television	Newspaper	Internet

24. Do you watch government owned news channels?

Never	Some time	Always

25. What is the reason for your response to question no.24?

Government mouthpiece	Reliable News	Unbiased News	Less commercial breaks	Low production quality

26. According to you, which issues should be debated more often in news channels? Kindly rate on a scale of 1 to 6, 1 for most important issue to 6 for least important issue.

Employment	Health	Politics	National Security	Crime	Entertainment

27. What should be the role of news channels? Kindly rate on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 for most important role to 4 for least important role.

To provide information	To help in formation of opinion on issues	To make government accountable	To act as a mediator between government and citizens

28. Do you think corporate owned news channels meet the above requirements?

Yes	No	Can't Say

29. Do you think corporate owned news channels are biased towards the government in contemporary times?

Yes	No	Can't Say

30. If your answer to question no. 29 is yes, then kindly rate the reasons on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 for the most relevant to 4 for the least relevant option. If your answer is no or can't say, ignore this question.

To gain power and influence	To popularise their political agenda	To gain higher ratings	To be ahead in the competition

31. Do you think debates and discussions in news channels have any relevance in your everyday life?

Yes	No	Can't Say

-----Thank You-----