

**Media and the Peoples' Movements:
A study on the 'Free' Press in the Liberalized India, 1991-2012**

A Thesis Submitted
To
Sikkim University



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Deep Moni Gogoi
Department of History
School of Social Sciences

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6 माइल, सामदुर, तादोंग -737102
गंगटोक, सिक्किम, भारत
फोन-03592-251212, 251415, 251656
टेलीफैक्स -251067
वेबसाइट - www.cus.ac.in



6th Mile, Samdur, Tadong -737102
Gangtok, Sikkim, India
Ph. 03592-251212, 251415, 251656
Telefax: 251067
Website: www.cus.ac.in

सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय SIKKIM UNIVERSITY

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(A central university established by an Act of Parliament of India in 2007 and accredited by NAAC in 2015)

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I, **Deep Moni Gogoi**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute.

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This is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History, School of Social Sciences.

Deep Moni Gogoi
12/02/2018

Deep Moni Gogoi

Registration No.: 15/Ph.D/HIS/01

6 माइल, सामदुर, तादोंग -737102
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“Media and the Peoples’ Movements:

A study on the ‘Free’ Press in the Liberalized India, 1991-2012”

Submitted by **Deep Moni Gogoi** under the supervision of **Dr. V. Krishna Ananth** of Department of History, School of Social Sciences, Sikkim University.

Deep Moni Gogoi

Signature of the Candidate

Dr. V. Krishna Ananth
12/2/18

Signature of the Supervisor

6 माइल, सामदुर, तादोंग -737102
गंगटोक, सिक्किम, भारत
फोन-03592-251212, 251415, 251656
टेलीफैक्स -251067
वेबसाइट - www.cus.ac.in



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled “Media and the Peoples’ Movements: A study on the ‘Free’ Press in the Liberalized India, 1991-2012” submitted to Sikkim University in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in the **Department of History**, embodies the result of bonafide research work carried out by **Deep Moni Gogoi** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association and fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

We recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Dr. V. Krishna Ananth
Associate Professor & Supervisor
Department of History
Sikkim University

12/02/2018

Dr. Vijay Kumar Thangellapali
Associate Professor & Head,
Department of History,
Sikkim University

अध्यक्ष
Head
इतिहास विभाग
Department of History
सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय
Sikkim University

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Introduction

The Media, being the fourth pillar of democracy, have a crucial role to perform, including in the making of public opinion and also in the political education of the masses, in a democracy. It is expected to act as a platform for exchange of a wide range of informed positions on important issues, especially against the establishment and voice them fearlessly. That is why democratic societies often postulate journalism as a rigorous watchdog of the system. We have examples, of the 'Watergate Scandal' and many such other exposures, where the media performed its watchdog role and in turn it strengthened the democratic polity.

However, in the era of transnational finance, this role of the media has undergone drastic changes and due to the very characteristics of global finance capital, this change is a universal phenomenon. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, in the early 1990s, accelerated this process. This is not to say that the Soviet Union and the Eastern European system were marked by a free media. Evidence, indeed, is to the contrary. The point, however, is that the capitalist societies, that claim to have nourished a free media and the prevalent discourse where they seem to be the guarantor of political freedom, have, in fact, regressed on this front substantially in the period after the collapse of the socialist block.

Even while capitalism held out the precept of a free media and held the private enterprise in the media industry as a structural guarantee against state control of information and opinion, the fact is that there has not been such freedom in practice in direct proportion to private enterprise in the sector. The state, in both the systems, has acted with zeal to control the media.

Yet another fact is that the neo-liberal order, which is characterized by privatization of the economy, withdrawal of the state from the welfare measures for the poor and the downtrodden and withdrawal of subsidies and such other measures, has built a wall between the people (the masses) and ‘the people’ (other than the masses). These ‘global’ arrangements, borrowing the words of James Curran, are ‘imperfectly accountable’ through any democratic process and mostly non transparent.

Marxists and political economy theorists, particularly in the post-war period, had offered an understanding of the established mainstream media, in the context of modernity; that they were inevitably on the side of the unjust social order. One of the basis of their critique of the media is that the structures of ownership patterns of the media and its contents are interlinked. Theorists like Noam Chomsky, Edward S. Herman, Ben Bagdikian and Robert W. McChesney have established, in their incisive studies on the media in the Western societies, that the media in a capitalist system are controlled and it even aided in the establishment of the essential link between the monopolization of the media industry by a handful of corporations (that are also involved in the production of other commodities) and the control of information flow in this context.

These studies have focused essentially on the US media. They also explain the nexus between the immense resources and power these corporates possess and the manner in which they manage to filter news and in process, marginalizing dissent and allowing the government and private players to get their messages across to the public. In other words, notwithstanding the precept of freedom and democracy, the media, in the

capitalist world lends itself to the ideology¹ of the system and moulds public opinion in its favour.

It must be stated, at the outset, that the short history of the media in India cannot be bracketed with either the US experience or with the Soviet-Socialist experience. The press in India, which emerged during the freedom struggle, played a crucial role in propagating the nationalist ideology. The leaders of the freedom struggle had to fight against the colonial rulers for a free press and in many ways the freedom of the press was an integral part of the freedom movement. In the initial years of their existence in India, the newspapers were organs of propaganda for social reforms and also a platform for religious and philosophical discussions. The press, however, began to exert its nationalistic fervor with the awakening and growth of national consciousness. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a believer in press freedom, along with other like-minded Indians, had protested against regulations restricting press freedom as early as in 1824 and submitted a petition to the Supreme Court declaring the regulations as undemocratic, inexpedient and reactionary.

The revolt of 1857, meanwhile, made the Colonial rulers realize the need for alterations in their approaches towards their Indian 'subjects'. Therefore, at one level, the Indian Councils Act of 1861, for the first time associated Indians in the legislature, even while co-opting a section of the Indians into the structure, also paved the way for the growth of nationalistic sentiments among the Indians. The period that followed saw a substantial growth of both the English and the language press in India. At another level, because the nationalist press was also emerging during this time, the colonial rulers felt it

¹ I am using 'Ideology' here in the sense in which Karl Marx described it as false consciousness. See Karl Marx, Thesis on Feuerback, 1845: The German Ideology in Karl Marx and F. Engels Collected Works, Volume 5, (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1976).

necessary to bring in new regulations curbing press freedom; these included the Press Act, 1857, which provided for control over the establishment of printing presses and the Registration of Books Act 1867, imposing restrictions on printing.

The growing hostility of the nationalist press towards the ruling dispensation can be summed up through whatever Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy in 1886, wrote about the press at that time: “There can be no doubt that there is generated in the minds of those who read these papers... a sincere conviction that we are all of us the enemies of mankind in general and of India in particular.”²

The proliferation of the Indian language newspapers, which were more effective in proliferating nationalistic ideas in comparison to English language newspapers, prompted the government to pass the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, which allowed for confiscation of any printing press, paper and other materials of a newspaper if the government had any suspicion of it publishing ‘seditious’ materials. In response to this, which was directed against the regional language newspapers, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (which used to be published in Bengali), overnight, switched over to become an English newspaper; this was done to evade the provisions of the Act, which was directed only against the Indian language press. The Act was repealed in 1882 and the Indian press enjoyed considerable freedom till 1908.

But the Colonial Government continued to bring in new regulations to control the media like The Newspaper (Incitement to Offences) Act, 1908 and the Indian Press Act, 1910. The Indian Press Act of 1910, in particular, was one of the most severe measures adopted by the British. It enabled the government to demand heavy securities, which

² Chandra, Bipan.*et. al*, India’s Struggle for Independence(New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989), pp. 103-104

could be forfeited at will, from newspaper establishments and also the power to confiscate the printing equipment of any paper that were considered offending the colonial administration's interests. It may be stressed here that these were the colonial government's response to the rising tide of nationalist agitations and unlike in the past, the agitations taking shape as mass movements and not mere prayers, petitions and pleadings. It was only natural that the legislations, by this time, provoked countrywide agitations. This, then, prompted the colonial rulers to repeal both the regulations together with Press and Registration of books Act and the Post Office Act, in 1922 through the Press Law Repeal and Amendment Act.

However, with yet another new surge in the Indian Freedom struggle, since the late 1920's, the government re-enacted the Press Acts in 1931 which armed the Executive to demand securities and forfeit them at will. The wide-ranging nature of the Act even engulfed the moderate or the liberal newspapers of that time. The excessive regulation, restricting press freedom, during the British rule highlights the revolutionary role the media played for the liberation from the foreign rule. The story of resistance by the Indian press also shows how freedom of the press was intrinsically linked to the freedom struggle itself.

The ideal of a free press was also reflected in the making of our constitution. The constituent assembly debates also reflected the concerns of many of its members on the issue of separate press laws for its freedom. However, it was considered that freedom of the press will flow from the Fundamental Right to Speech and Expression itself and this turned out to be a fair enough presumption when the Supreme Court, in various judgments, elongated the scope of Article 19 of the Constitution to ensure a free press in

independent India. The notion of press freedom flowing through the Freedom of Speech and Expression was actually proposed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who stated that “The press is merely another way of stating an individual or a citizen. The press has no special rights which are not to be given or which are not to be exercised by the citizen in his individual capacity. The editors of a press or a manager, are all citizens and therefore when they choose to write in newspapers, they are merely exercising their right of expression and in my judgment, therefore no special mention is necessary”³ in the constituent assembly.

Thus, freedom of the press flows from Article 19(1) (a) of the constitution. Independent India’s commitment to the idea of a free press was also expressed when the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, said, “I would rather have a completely free press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom, than a suppressed or regulated Press.”⁴

The commitment to the idea of a free press and the need for measures to ensure it were the concerns of the first press commission. The Commission, in real earnest, went into identifying what could cause erosion of this and in its report, the commission recommended that the central government should set up a Press Council of India with the objective to “safeguard the freedom of press and to ensure on the part of the press the maintenance of High standards of public taste and foster responsibility and public service among all those engage in the profession of journalism.”⁵ It also suggested that the Central Government conduct a study to analyze the developments which may tend

³ Constituent Assembly of India Debates(Proceedings)Volume VII, :Dr. B.R. Ambedkar spoke on the 2nd December 1948. Extracted from: <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol7p18b.htm> on 25/06/2017

⁴ Kanungo, Chitra. Freedom Under Assault, (New Delhi: APH publication,2001), p.8

⁵ The Press Commission Report, 1954, Government of India, New Delhi, p.2

towards monopoly or concentration of ownership of newspapers, and if necessary suggest remedies.

Alongside, the Supreme Court, in its judgments, argued in favour of press freedom, taking a view different from that of the Press Commission, particularly insofar as the concerns on monopoly in the media. This happened in the *Sakal Paper* case in 1961 wherein the Supreme Court struck down the Newspaper (price and pages) Act 1956, on the grounds that it violated the freedom guaranteed under Article 19 1(a).

The 1956 Act, which was essentially drawn out of the recommendation of the Press Commission to curb monopoly in the media business, empowered the Central Government to regulate the prices of newspapers in relation to their pages and size and also had the power to regulate the space allocation for advertising. The court, in this case, went to state that the aim of Government to safeguard small newspapers and to prevent monopoly is “desirable” but at the same time made it clear that “for attaining such objective the state cannot make inroads on the rights of other newspapers which Article 19(1)(a) guarantees them.”⁶

The next landmark in this trajectory was the Supreme Court judgment in the *Indian Express Vs the Union of India* case in 1985. This involved a challenge by the management of the Indian Express newspaper as to whether restrictions imposed by the government on grounds other than that provided for by Article 19 (2) of the Constitution and merely in the name of public interest were unconstitutional. The specific instance involved the Customs Act of 1962 by which newsprint import was severely restricted and thus construed as contravening the fundamental rights in the context of press. Here, the

⁶ *Sakal Papers (P) Ltd., And Others vs The Union Of India* on 25 September, 1961 1962 AIR 305, 1962 SCR (3) 842

Court held that it is not necessary for the press to remain subservient to the government merely because it has the power to levy taxes.

The apex court conveyed that the newspaper industry enjoys two rights, i.e. Article 19(1) (a) as well as the freedom of occupation trade or business under Article 19 (1) (g). From this premise, the court held that while any such taxation measures on a profession, trade and industry are valid, it will not be allowed to transgress into the Fundamental Right to freedom of expression. This judgment held that the newspapers being the purveyors of news might carry information unpleasant to the ruling government; in such circumstances, the Supreme Court will intervene and uphold the freedom of press invalidating all other laws.

In yet another case between the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India and the Cricket Association of Bengal, in 1995, and the Supreme Court favoured the press freedom until and unless it infringes laws under Article 19(2). The Supreme Court interpreted the idea of a free press from the standpoint of Article 19(1) (a) and argued that the rights of the viewers and listeners are of paramount importance and not the right of the broadcaster. The monopoly over broadcasting, either by the state, government and the private broadcaster was seen as inconsistent with the right of the viewer. The judgment also spelt out that airwaves, which are used to transmit images and audio messages, being public property, it was imperative for the state to use them to advance public good. This judgment, however, ended up facilitating privatization of the broadcasting space, rather than ensuring that the airwaves remained public property!

The most striking intervention by the judiciary, in this series, is the judgment in the Bennet Coleman and Co. Vs Union of India case in 1972, where the publisher of *The Times of India* group of newspapers challenged the validity of the Newsprint Control Order⁷ fixing the maximum number of pages. The order was struck down on the grounds of violating the Art. 19(1)(a) and the apex court held that the prohibition imposed on an existing paper from starting a new edition is also a violation of the Constitutional guarantee of free speech and expression. The court, thus, elongated the right without considering the challenges posed to the freedom by the rise of monopoly in the media, as was considered by the Press Commission in its report.

In these judgments, the Supreme Court stood for the freedom of press and argued against state control. Such a position held by the highest court can be understood in the context of the times when the judgments were delivered; the context was limited to restricting the state, through laws, imposing its control over the free press.

The reason behind such decisions by judiciary for a free press was on the grounds that the media has various responsibilities towards the society. The experiences during the emergency bare out the extent to which the state can control a free press; and similarly, the media's record during the 1980s, showcase how the press, if it intends, can function for welfare of society. The state policy of pre-publication censorship, imposed

⁷ The Newsprint Control Order came under the Newsprint Policy for 1972-73. Some of important features of the order are: (a) No new paper or new edition could be started by a common ownership unit (i.e., a newspaper establishment or concern owning two or more news interest newspapers including at least one daily) even within the authorised quota of newsprint; (b) there was a limitation on the maximum number of pages to 10, no adjustment being permitted between circulation and the pages so as to increase the pages; (c) no interchangeability was permitted between different papers of common ownership unit or different editions of the same paper; (d) allowance of 20 per cent increase in page level up to a maximum of 10 had been given to newspapers with less than 10 pages; (e) a big newspaper was prohibited and prevented from increasing the number of pages, page areas, and periodicity by reducing circulation to meet its requirement even within its admissible quota; (f) there was discrimination in entitlement between newspapers with an average of more than 10 pages as compared with newspapers of 10 or less than 10 pages.

by the Indira Gandhi government during emergency was perhaps a vindication of the court's approach hitherto; it is also important to note that this bad experience led the media practitioners to realise the need for a constant battle for freedom and also a redefinition of freedom by themselves by involving the concerns of the people as necessary to preserve and elongate the rights guaranteed by Article 19 1 (a).

The realization that the press had to enlist the support of the people took journalism to perform the watchdog role, something that was overlooked during the era of nation building. The 1980s saw the rise and growth of an adversarial press in India as much in the same way it was in the years before independence. This was the time when the press played a pro-active role in disclosing the wrong-doings of the authority.

Beginning with the scandal in allocation of cement, exposed in 1981 and until the Bofors scandal in 1987, the press in India turned into a watchdog of democracy. So much so, the journalists of this time were also in the forefront fighting against the social evils that even the law could not stop. An example, par excellence, of this was Ashwini Sarin, in *The Indian Express*. He exposed human trafficking by breaking the law himself when he bought a tribal girl named "Kamala" (in 1981), to put out a news story titled 'I Bought Kamala for Rs. 5000', to show how easy it was to buy humans in India. Though his methods may be debated, his work indeed was an example of the press re-engaging itself with the society on the issue of human trafficking.

All these point to a pattern and we may argue that in the four decades after India turned into a Republic, the media in India had not only resisted attempts by the state for control but had also emerged into a watchdog against the state. It may be stressed here that the exception to this was the state controlled media – radio and television – while the

print media, essentially a private enterprise, established itself as adversarial and free. It is hence, we should note, that the history of our media is *sui generis*. It may thus be argued that democracy in India was indeed turned richer by the media under private ownership while the state owned media's role in this regard was to the contrary.

This, however, was short lived; and true only as long as the Nehruvian consensus prevailed in the economic realm as well as in the political domain. The shift away from this, pronounced in July 1991 and the preference for market-determinism and the apparent retreat of the state from the economy, must have led to a freer media. As elsewhere, the media industry too was opened up and the decade after 1991 witnessed exponential rise in the flow of capital into the industry. While the most visible sign was the opening up of the television media, hitherto a government monopoly, to private players, the period also witnessed expansion of the print media in a big way.

The trajectory of growth of the print and the online world is different in the developed countries where there is decline in the market of the former. However, in India, the print media is growing at an exponential way even while the electronic and online media is emerging. Presently, the revenues of the Indian print industry, at a margin upward of 25% (a figure that the American newspapers achieved during their peak), with over 38 % of reach, indicates the scope for further growth. The opening up of the print media for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) saw a huge growth in the sector bringing in scores of print publication, magazine and has brought in mergers and acquisitions with an investment of over a billion dollars.

All these must have, in a sense, led to more freedom and a more democratic media if the experience of the pre-1991 history of our own press is taken into account.

Prominently, because of an adversarial role that the press, being a private enterprise, played against the state in comparison with the state owned media before the economic transition.

However, history does not progress in a linear path. In other words, more privatization need not necessarily lead to more democracy as it may appear. This indeed is what seemed to have happened with the media ecology in India too. With the changes in the policies which have led to multiplication (and not just addition) in the number of media channels, it ought to be seen if the media is really plural and diversified. This thesis is an attempt in this.

Arundhati Roy, while commenting on the changes in the economy, notes that in the post-independence period, right up to the 1980s, the media seemed to hold peoples' movements, ranging from the Naxalites to Jayprakash Narayan's Sampoorna Kranti, the struggles for land reforms, for the redistribution of lands from feudal landlords to landless peasants as movements and treated them so. But during the present time, any talk of redistribution of land, would be considered *antique*.

This thesis is an attempt to explore this aspect of the media. It delves into the question as to how the media represented/misrepresented and under represented the peoples' movements in the country in the context of the neo liberal policies. This was carried out in the milieu of the structural changes in the Media, i.e. corporatization of the media—one of impact of the liberalization and globalization. This work also looks into the fact that how did the media manufacture consent and silenced and distorted dissent. It is specifically an attempt to analyze the presentation by the media of the peoples'

movements on issues of land, livelihood and environment, and also the activities of the Trade Unions and Industrial strikes.

Few case studies that have been analyzed in the thesis are the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the Nandigram and the Singur protests, The Pricol Workers strike in 2009, the Maruti Workers Strike in the Manesar plant in 2012, the people's protest against the Koodankulam Nuclear Plant in Tamil Nadu. All these are movements after the New Economic Policy was adopted in July 1991; in other words in the aftermath of the adoption of the neo-liberal economic agenda. The thesis also takes up, for detailed analysis, the Textile workers strike of Bombay in 1982-83, the Railway general strike of 1974 and Mine Workers Movement led by Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha, all of them happening before the liberalization phase in the economy, in order to understand the media representation of these movements in the pre-liberalized era.

The research is mainly based on analyzing the reportage of these people's movements in some major English language newspapers, published from the Northern, the Southern and Eastern India; another factor in the categorisation of the newspapers taken up for the study is The Economic Times, on the basis that it reports on business exclusively.

A note on the use of the phrase 'peoples' movements' in this thesis, meanwhile, will be in order. The point is the study has taken up a wide range of struggles involving the tribal people against displacement, strikes by industrial workers – both organised behind the established trade unions as well as led by newly emerging unions such as the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha or the collectives involved in the Pricol factory and the Maruti factory – as well as the spontaneously organised struggles in Nandigram and Singur; the

study also deals with the Railway general strike, perhaps the largest trade union action in India hitherto. Placing all these under the rubric of ‘peoples’ movements’ may not be consistent with the definition of this in social sciences. I plead guilty on this; but end up using this phrase only to mean a set of actions that are anti-establishment in a generic sense of the term.

Literature review:

The political economy of the media has been dealt by a many writers. Some of the important books have been taken which are relevant to the proposed research are Charles S. Maier’s *In Search of Stability: Exploration in Historical Political Economy*,⁸ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*,⁹ Robert W. McChesney’s two books, *The Political Economy of Media*¹⁰ and *Rich Media Poor Democracy*,¹¹ Robin Jeffrey’s *India’s Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-language Press*.¹² Apart from these books academic articles by Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, Prabhat Patnaik, and N. Ram are available for reference.

A number of approaches were presented by these authors. For instance, the concept of political economy refers to two related but opposed approaches of study. For

⁸ Maier, S. Charles. *In Search of Stability: Exploration in Historical Political Economy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁹ Herman, Edward S., Chomsky, Noam. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (London: Vintage Books, London, 1994).

¹⁰ McChesney, W. Robert. *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008).

¹¹ McChesney, W. Robert, *Rich Media Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*, (New York: The New Press, 2000).

¹² Jeffrey, Robin, *India’s Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-language Press*, (Ranikhet: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000)

one group of theorists, political economy is the analysis of political choices according to the criteria of economic maximization. The theorists of this group is of the view that voters are seduced by illusory economic expansion, leaders select policies solely to perpetuate their tenure in office, bureaucrats work to expand their programs, state interventions in the economy has perverse results, and collective associations can be created only to achieve private payoffs. The other group of theorists apply political economy to analyze economic choices in terms of political forces. This approach to political economy does not take economic theory merely quasi-mathematically in deductive premises. This approach interrogates economic doctrines to disclose their sociological and political context. The political economy approach characteristically seeks to probe the connections between categories of social interactions.¹³

The political economy of communication to the study of media seeks to critically analyze media. This approach seeks to explain the history, domain and media's relationship with popular politics. Most studies on media assumes a certain type of media system and also take the nature of the system as inviolable and also assume certain type of economic structures as inalterable. The political economy approach of the media in McChesney's opinion does not believe the media system to be natural or inevitable or impervious to change. This approach believes that the media system is the result of policies made in public's name but often without their informed consent of the public.

This approach to study media is complicated and makes connections of how media and communication systems and its contents are shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labour practices and policies of the government. It links how political and economic systems works and the social power is

¹³ Maier, *Op. Cit.*

exercised in society. It also questions if media is a force for social justice or for oligarchy. The political economy approach is often associated with the political left because of its stance towards market but it grows directly out of the mainstream liberal democratic political theory. The U.S. constitutional system rests on viable and healthy press systems and therefore the approach of political economy arises out of it.¹⁴

The media, among other functions, serve and propagandize on behalf of the powerful sections that owns, controls and finance them. The institutional structures and the relationship within which the media operates explains how the media functions in the United States Structural factors such as ownership and control and advertiser funding along with mutual interest and relationship between the makers of news and have an influence over news and also explain what it means. The media plays an important role in mending the basic principles and dominant ideologies.

The 'Propaganda Model' developed by Edward Herman and Noam consist of five filters, namely:

1. Size, Ownership, and Profit orientation of the Mass Media,
2. The Advertising License to do business,
3. Sourcing Mass Media News,
4. Flak and the Enforcers and
5. Anti-communism as a control mechanism.

Since the early 1990s a wave of massive deals and globalization in rapid scale of globalization have made media houses centralized even more into nine transnational conglomerates. Then, it is not surprising that nine giant conglomerates own all the world's major film studios, TV networks and music companies and a sizeable part of

¹⁴ McChesney, *Op.Cit.*

some of the most important cable channels, cable systems, major market TV stations and book publishing.

Globalization, along with deregulation and national budgetary has also helped reduce the importance of non-commercial media in many countries. Newsrooms have been appropriated by transnational corporate empires and competition for advertising have become more intense which is further diluting the boundaries between editorial and advertising departments. The fifth filter in the propaganda model have weakened with collapse of the Soviet Union and the virtual disappearance of socialist movements but this has been balanced by the greater ideological force of the belief in the ‘miracle of the market.’¹⁵ The US corporate media also indulge in dichotomous treatment of ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ victims. A bias is seen in U.S. media where policy makers of the United States for focusing on victims of enemy states to be wicked and deserving of hostility while ignoring or showing indifference of concern over politically inconvenient victims.¹⁶

The corporate media explosion benefits the wealthy investors, advertisers and a handful of media and telecommunication corporations. The present situation of the US corporate media can be analyzed historically to evaluate the media situation and also points out the possible future democratic change. Conservatism blurs the possibility of social change and media plays an important role in it. The use of the term democracy in the classical sense as the rule of the many also gets diluted in the neo liberal order and it gets equated with the needs of a handful of investors. The needs of the citizenry are almost ignored. The importance of media and communication in our society make it

¹⁵ Herman, Chomsky, *Op.Cit*, p. XVII

¹⁶ Ibid

important to study how media is controlled, structured and subsidized and it should also be at the centre of the democratic discourse.¹⁷

In the Indian context, the revolution in the Indian language newspapers, in terms of its tremendous increase in circulation began in late 1970s. Newspapers had also undergone a transformation in its design and in writing style. This exponential growth of the newspaper industry had ‘possible negative as well as positive consequences’¹⁸ and yet it opened up ‘the potential new forms of political... democracy.’¹⁹ Newspapers were owned by people who were well honed with the ideas about India and the nature of news. For such an owner, a policeman beating villagers was reprehensible and also a good story.

However the relationship between capitalism and governments had changed before the condition were suitable for the printing press to enable people to conceive themselves as ‘citizens’ of ‘nations’. The economic circumstances of all in India capitalism had a paradoxical effect. As newspapers seek national advertisements, they also had to seek readers, as advertisers demand evidence of the value for money which also lead to the production of control (Jeffrey, 2000).²⁰

Articles:

There are two major media traditions of India. The older tradition is of a diverse, pluralistic and relatively independent press and the other one is the younger tradition of manipulated and misused broadcasting media, state controlled radio and television. The

¹⁷ McChesney, *Op.Cit.*

¹⁸ Jeffrey, *Op.Cit*, p.1

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.1

²⁰ *Ibid*

role of both the tradition of media as discrepant and their role in society and politics is radically different. The Indian press has its strengths and advantages in the present India owing to its strong history in the freedom movement. The history of the nationalistic press form its origin in 1868 with the publication of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and its struggle during the colonial times have paved way through national emancipation and also fought battles for social reforms.

The press also had serious role in agenda building which it did with its public spirited orientation. The press however during the emergency in the post-independence period could not sustain the onslaught of the oppressive measures of the government. The press learnt its lesson during the emergency and in 1988 when a crisis ridden Rajiv Gandhi introduced a draconian 'Anti-Defamation Bill' to intimidate journalist who opts for investigative reporting. The protest that followed gave the bill a shrift. The historical legacy is an 'impressive range of diverse opinion, interests and even ideology'²¹ competing for 'space in the public discourse of the times'.²² The diversity of the press can be said to reflect the vast regional, linguistic, socio economic and cultural heterogeneity of the country.

The economic liberalization and the politics that was shaped by the communal mobilization made significant effect to the polity of the country. However in the 1990's there was an interesting debate on the state control and manipulation of Doordarshan and

²¹ Ram, N. The Great Indian Media Bazar, In Thapar. Romila (ed), India Another Millennium, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000) p.243.

²² *Ibid.*

this was in response to the coming of the private satellite televisions from other countries and also to the manipulative use of the Doordarshan .²³

The power of the media as an institution has gone down greatly after the 1990's gradually. Many examples can be presented when the media's had played its role of a fierce watchdog. One of such example is the media's role highlighting the Gujarat carnage of 2002 and the Tehelka tapes where powerful political figures and functionaries of the state were caught accepting and negotiating in defense deals. The tapes were taken seriously by the armed forces and several of its officers had to face disciplinary actions. But the view that the power of the media has declined and as seen in the subsequent exposes made by the media on several occasions, had failed to arouse any accountability on the part of the political class as well as the society as a whole.

There were even collective groan that the media have tarnished the image of the nation by exposing wrongdoing. Even the notions of 'what is right' and 'what is wrong' have different meaning in the post 1990s. This fall of moral standing may be to the collapse of the Socialist vision along with which the idea of just and equity have vanished. The collapse of socialism has aggrandized the monopolistic tendencies of capitalism and the media also is influenced by it.²⁴

The consultation papers, prepared by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, makes a strong case of how there are dominant groups over different sections of the media, including the print, radio and television and how it is unhealthy for media plurality in particular and democracy in general. At present, restrictions on cross media holdings are imposed only on DTH services and for the private FM companies in India.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Patnaik, Prabhat. Market, Morals and The Media, Frontline, Volume 19 - Issue 15, July 20 - August 02, 2002, Accessed from: <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1915/19151280.htm> Date: 12/11/2017

The media houses have opposed this move of TRAI looking into the activities of the print companies venturing into television. Regulation might not solve all the problems that the media faces but media just can be seen as a profit making entity.

The Supreme Court's observation in February 1995 (in the Union of India vs Cricket Association of Bengal) that the 'airwaves are public property'²⁵ while holding that "the right to participate in the affairs of the country is meaningless unless the citizens are well informed on all sides of the issues in respect of which they are called upon to express their views"²⁶ is a crutch for those in favour of cross-media restrictions.²⁷

A nexus exist between the business and politics in India which is being facilitated by many journalists. There emerges the separation of the editorial section and the business section of a newspaper is taking place. A series of incidents like the leaking of the Radia Tapes and subsequently the email trail from the ESSAR group points out the unholy nexus between the corporate world and the media.²⁸

Objectives of the study

- This thesis analyses the historical trajectory through which media went through and entered the liberalized era in India.
- It examines the fact as to why the favourable result of privatization of press during the pre-liberalized era did not continue after 1991.

²⁵ Guha Thakurta, Paranjy. Curbing Media Monopolies, Economic & Political Weekly, vol: xlviII no 16, April 20, 2013, p.10

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Thakurta, Paranjy Guha and Jyotirmoy, Chaudhury. Trading Places: A Brief History of Journalists as Power Brokers and Corporate Agents in India, Economic & Political Weekly, MARCH 28, 2015 vol: l no 13, p.33

- The study makes an analysis of the media representation of peoples' movements in order to understand how it was employed for the distortion of dissents.
- The corporatization of media in the context of neo-liberalism and its impact on content and editorial control is also looked into.

Rationale of the study:

Unlike the American Constitution, the Indian Constitution does not speak about the freedom of the press separately. However, in the Indian case, press freedom emanates from article 19 (1) (a) of the constitution of India, i.e. the right to freedom of speech and expression. The Supreme Court of India in many of its pronouncements have expanded the scope of the freedom of speech and expression and thereby the scope of the press freedom in the country. In the *Sakal Paper Vs. Union of India* the Supreme Court of India among other things observed that the free circulation of ideas and information was a component of freedom of expression. In order to propagate ideas, all citizens had the right to publish them, to disseminate them and to circulate them either by word of mouth or in writing. There may be reasonable restrictions but it should be made on case to case basis. The experience of the British rule and the nationalistic press was bludgeoned by sedition trial and other penalties to curb press freedom led to serious discussion even during the framing of the constitution.

The media's role in journalism, entertainment, culture and in shaping the world we live in can hardly be underestimated. But media also plays an important role in the capitalist economy as an agent of marketing system and also as a profit making venture. In a liberalized economy when majority of media is owned by corporate, it is important to

analyze if media is acting as a democratic tool serving the majority, i.e. the masses, or an influential few, i.e. the oligarchy. Marx and Engels argued that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas”²⁹ which means that the class which is ruling the material forces in the society are also ruling the intellectual force. The same classes which have the means to the material production also has in its control the means of mental production. Noam Chomsky’s concept of ‘manufacturing consent’ also points towards a similar notion of the media. In this light, this work focused on India’s entry into the neo liberal world order and its possible implications in the media’s role in a democracy.

Methodology:

The research is qualitative in nature. Since it is a work on the media, primary sources are newspapers and secondary sources such as books and articles are used for reference. Interviews with academics working in this area along with journalists are yet another method adopted for the study. Reading of theoretical works on political economy Noam Chomsky, Robert W. McChesney and Marx and Engels’s framework of ruling class and ruling ideas has also done for theoretical clarity.

The ‘political economy’ approach to the study of media is used as a theoretical framework for the study.

²⁹ Marx, Karl, Engels Friedrich. The German Ideology,(ed) C.J Arthur, (New York: International Publishers,2004) p.64

Chapterization:

Chapter 1: A brief History of the Media in India:

This chapter discusses the history of the Media in India. It historically analyses the adversarial role of media during the freedom struggle and in the post-independence period. Also an attempt is made to understand how economic transitions in 1990s had its impact on the media.

Chapter 2: Peoples' Movements and Media in post-independence era.

This chapter analyses the people's movements during the post-independence period and its representation in the media. The case studies taken for study are the Railway Strike of 1974, the textile workers strike of 1982-83 and the Mine Workers Strike.

Chapter 3: People's Movement in the liberalized era.

Continuing the analysis from the second chapter, this chapter analyses the peoples' movements after the economic transition in the 1991. The case studies taken for analysis are the Narmada Bachao Andolan, The Movements in Nandigram and Singur, Koodankulam Anti nuclear movement, the Pricol Workers strike of 2009 and the workers strike at Maruti plant in Manesar in 2012. This helps in understanding the change in state's response and media's representation towards these movements since the economic transition.

Chapter 4: Distorting Dissent

This Chapter is more of a comment on the distortion of dissent by the media. It is analyzed in the context of liberalization, if the media conforms to the interest of the corporate system that sustains it by providing it with revenues. It will largely draw from

the movements discussed in the previous chapter to explain the context in which media distorts dissent.

Conclusion: In conclusion, attempt has been made to summarize the evidence and place them in the perspective of media in the wake of India's foray into economic liberalization.

Chapter I

A brief History of the Media in India

Free media or a free press is integral to democracy. The roots of this idea of a free press and democracy can be traced to the Enlightenment era in Western Europe in general and to John Milton, whose *Areopagitica* (the speech in English Parliament in 1644) can be held its bible. Milton held: “Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.”¹ Milton’s passionate address was in the wake of proposals in England, then, to impose pre-publication censorship by law. The concept of a free press is one of the most jealously guarded freedoms in modern democratic societies. It is an indisputable fact that the press has played a vital role in building consciousness on natural justice (as distinct from natural law) which is integral to democracy. It will be appropriate to hold that the nexus between the press and democracy is deep and grew in stages.

For instance, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the United Kingdom witnessed the emergence of a press which was effective in reinforcing the class consciousness, thus uniting the workers by fostering an alternative value system. In other words, this radical press provided a framework for looking at the world, “emphasizing the potential power of working people to effect social change through the force of ‘combination’ and organized action.”²

¹ Milton, John, *Areopagitica* page.26.: <http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/ENGL402-Milton-Aeropagitica.pdf> accessed on 17/04/2017

² Herman, Edward S. Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent* (Vintage Books, U.K. 1995), p.3

Meanwhile, the media played an important role in exposing corruption in the highest echelons of power across the free world. The Watergate scandal remains the benchmark for such journalism and in many other ways the media has played a central role strengthening a value oriented democratic polity. However, the advent of the neo-liberal capitalism has brought about drastic changes in the ways of the media; this, in many ways, has to do with the nature of the ownership and control in the hands of a few powerful individuals or corporations and the implications of this were far reaching in the context of the neo-liberal shift than in the earlier stage of centralized planning and state control of the economy in India. This transition will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter.

This chapter has four sections. The first section provides a historical background of the Indian press. It is a fact that, in India, the freedom struggle had drawn a distinct path of constructive journalistic tradition. This indigenous or homegrown press was shaped by the experiences that emerged from the resistance to the oppressive colonial rule. The second section deals with the post-independence experience of the press in India. It is pertinent to mention here that the journalistic tradition that emerged during the anti-colonial struggle was also able to sustain in the post-independence period. Then, the privately owned press in India, played a role of constructive opposition as there was hardly any opposition to the Indian National Congress in the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. This, however, was disrupted during the Emergency when most sections of the media simply caved in and turned the propaganda machine of the Government thanks to the pre-publication censorship, there was a resurgence of the free media in the decade since the Emergency was withdrawn and the media blazed a trail

investigating corruption, political abuse of power and wrong doings to strengthen democracy. This phase of a free press, did not sustain for long and since the 1990s, the pressures of the market driven economy with the advent of neo-liberal capitalism in the Indian economy impacted this shift. The third section of this chapter deals with the press in the era of neoliberalism since 1991. Even though, most of the media studies were conducted with the media systems in the United States, with the shift in India from a welfare economics model to the neo-liberal principles and free-market economy, many of those factors presented in the writings of Noam Chomsky and Robert W. McChesney have become relevant to the Indian situation also. The final section of this chapter explains the approaches to study media by Noam Chomsky and Robert W. McChesney which will constitute the larger framework of this thesis.

Section 1

The Freedom Struggle and the Emergence of the Press in India: A Historical Background

Journalism in India had begun under initiatives of Englishmen in India. The embryo being the establishment of printing presses in Bombay in 1674 (since the Portuguese who first brought the printing press to India in 1557), Madras in 1772 and Kolkata in 1772. The first newspaper, a weekly called the *Bengal Gazette* was started by James Augustus Hicky,³ an Englishman, in January 1780. Hickey, interestingly was an employee of the East India Company and dismissed from his services, ostensibly on grounds of misconduct (but because he raised questions over financial embezzlement by the

³ He was an employee of the East India Company who had been fired by the authorities. His anti-establishment and scandalous stories irked Warren Hastings the then Governor General. The Press was seized and the first newspaper met with an inglorious end in March 1782.

Directors according to him) and his stated objectives behind starting the Bengal Gazette was to expose such wrong doings. Hickey did what he stated and put the company Directors in a spot and he was sought to be dealt with by the rulers. This, along with the anticipation of a French invasion, had led to the first ever regulations on the press known as Censorship of Press Act, 1799, during the reign of Lord Wellesley.⁴ Lord Hastings, who succeeded Wellesley, abolished this Act in 1818. In the same year, a bi-weekly newspaper, *Calcutta Journal*, was founded by James Silk Buckingham. Subsequently, many other newspapers, started by Europeans, surfaced during the time. However, these newspapers were primarily concerned with the activities of the Europeans in India.

Even though journalism was spearheaded by the Europeans, Indians began to see the potential of journalism as a tool for proliferating their ideas, particularly in the social and cultural domains and least of all, at that stage, on political and economic issues. It may be stressed here that such concepts as capitalism and colonialism were yet to be considered and formulated then. This was the beginning of Indian journalism managed by the Indian editors. The progressive administrative reforms⁵ by Lord William Bentinck, from 1828-35, also provided a favourable climate for Indian journalism to grow. The major concerns, understandably, were social and religious reforms and this reflected in the contents of the Indian run newspapers of that period. Raja Rammohan Roy, the great social reformer, was the first one to set the trend. He launched three journals - *Sambad*

⁴ Before this Censorship was passed, there were a number of Newspapers such as the Bengal Journal (1785), The Oriental Magazine of Calcutta (1785), the Calcutta Chronicle (1786), The Madras Courier (1788) and the Bombay Herald (1789) were in circulation.

⁵ Bentinck appointed Indians in government service. Now the educated Indians were also appointed to the post of Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector. Thus Bentinck took a remarkable step towards the Indianization of the government service. William Bentinck is famous for his social reforms in India. By the abolition of the systems of 'Sati' and human sacrifice he freed the society from two of the worst superstitions.

Kaumadi in Bengali and *The Brahmanical Magazine* in English in 1821 and *Mirat ul Akhbar* in Bengali in 1882, through which he tried to educate the Indian masses on social issues. These newspapers also stirred up critical discussions on religious and philosophical issues of the time. Apart from the social issues, the *Mirat Ul Akhbar* indulged in constructive criticism of the government and critically examined the British policies, both in India and in Ireland.⁶ It should be mentioned here that Raja Rammohan Roy used journalism to create public opinion against the custom of *sati* successfully and subsequently William Bentinck made the epochal move to abolish the specious custom of *sati* through legislation. It was indeed a beginning and many of the leading figures of the freedom struggle used newspapers as a medium to reach the masses. As a result, a large number of Newspapers sprung up at the national and regional level. It is noteworthy here that Dadabhai Naoroji, an early freedom fighter, also well-known for his Drain Theory, edited a newspaper in Gujarati called *Rast Goftar*.

It was not an easy road for the pioneers. The Indian press had to face hardships from the beginning itself. And this, perhaps, drew them to appreciate the idea of a free press and also fight for that consistently and at every stage. As for instance, with the enactment of the repressive Licensing Act of 1823⁷, Raja Rammohan Roy declared stoppage of the publication of *Mirat ul-Akbar* due to the implications of this Act. This move provoked protest. Roy and also many other Indians like Harchandra Tagore, Dwarkanath Tagore, wrote a petition to the Supreme Court of Calcutta, declaring this

⁶ Chaudbury, Reba. *The Story of the Indian Press*, Economic and Political Weekly, March 22, 1955.p.291

⁷ The Press Regulation Act of 1823, made licensing compulsory for periodicals and their printers. It also provided for penalty for infringement of a fine of Rs.1000 commutable to imprisonment without labour for a period of six months. cited from Natrajan,J, Part II History of Indian Journalism, Report of The Press Commission, 1954, p. 21

attack on the press as undemocratic, inexpedient and reactionary.⁸ Roy argued that a free press was necessary and without it 'natives' would no longer be able to inform the government of the errors and injustices committed by the executive officers across India. Roy also mentioned as example the First Amendment of the American Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and the press next to the right of the people to petition the government for grievance redressal in this regard.⁹

This petition, in fact, is regarded as the 'areopagitica' of Press Freedom in Indian history and also as the beginning of "that system of constitutional agitation for political rights which their countrymen have learnt to value so much in the present time."¹⁰ Even though the petition was rejected by the Supreme Court the fight for a free press emanated in the process. This was followed by the Press Act (Metcalf) of 1835 by which the repressive laws enacted hitherto were repealed.¹¹

However, the Press in India came under the scanner once again after the revolt of 1857, when Lord Canning passed the Press Act of 1857. This was also known as the Gagging Act due to the nature of the Act that allowed the government to have complete control over the establishment of the press and had the power to prevent publication and even sale of already published materials. The Act, though, remained in force for just one year.

⁸ Desai, A.R., *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 2014), p.215

⁹ Bhatia, Gautam, *Shock, Offend or Disturb: Free Speech under the Indian Constitution* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), P. 15.

¹⁰ Desai, *Op.cit*, p. 216

¹¹ The Press Act of 1835 repealed earlier press regulations, making it no longer necessary to obtain a license for printing books and newspapers. It however provided for a declaration by the printer and publisher of any newspaper or periodical, giving a true and precise account of the premises of publication. The penalty for non declaration was a fine not exceeding Rs.5000 and imprisonment for a term not more than two years. cited from Natrajan,J, Part II History of Indian Journalism, Report of The Press Commission, 1954, p.38

Newspapers saw a growth after the Indian Councils Act of 1861, which gave an opportunity for the Indians to be associated with the colonial government in legislative work. This Act led to some political awakening among the educated sections of the society, who incidentally happened to belong to the upper echelons of the society. It was during this time that newspapers like *The Times of India* (founded in Bombay in 1861), *The Pioneer* (founded in Allahabad in 1865), *The Madras Mail* (in Madras in 1868), *The Statesman* (in Calcutta in 1875), *The Civil and Military Gazette* (in Lahore in 1876) and *The Hindu* (in Madras, 1878) were founded.¹² The medium of these newspapers was English language and many of them continue to be published even now. It should not be mistaken that all these newspapers necessarily articulated the nationalist sentiments that was still in its incipient form then; their contents, most often, were couched in cultural and other denominational terms. It must also be stressed here that some of them were big time supporters of the British policies and administration in India. For instance, newspapers like *The Statesman* and *The Times of India*, owned by Englishmen, held unmistakably pro-British views. However, one of the most prominent English daily newspapers of the present time, *The Hindu*, founded in the 1878, was fiercely nationalist and its founders stated this forthright; *The Hindu* also came out in support of the Indian National Congress since 1885 and its founders played an active role in the session of the INC in 1887, held in Madras.

However, the nationalist press -- which is the prime concern of this section -- had grown considerably during this period along with others. And in this regard, the contribution of the nationalist press, especially the Indian language newspapers, were

¹² Desai, *Op.cit.* p. 209

immense in articulating the nationalist sentiments. It contributed to the political awareness and also played a positive role in gathering the masses in a united front of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle. In a divergent country like India, with limited communication and transportation, it was a massive effort. One of the most prominent nationalist voices, as a newspaper, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, was founded as a bi-lingual newspaper in English and in Bengali, by Hemendra Kumar Ghosh and Shishirkumar Ghosh (known in history as the Ghosh brothers), in 1868. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* was known for its fiercely nationalist views among the other nationalist newspapers. The newspaper did not mince words while criticizing the government and hence faced repression in the hands of the authorities.¹³ Mention may also be made of the publication of what was purported to be confidential Foreign Office Document concerning Kashmir in *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*.¹⁴ This led to the passing of an Act, called the Indian Officials Secrets Act, in October 1889, in order to prevent the disclosure of official documents and information.¹⁵ There were other newspapers like *The Bengali*, edited and owned by Surendranath Banerjee. Banerjee was convicted for contempt of court for an article published in his newspaper and was imprisoned. Bipin Chandra puts the mood of the Indian newspapers of the time in perspective:

¹³ The Amrita Bazar Patrika started its publications in the year 1868, published by Sisir Kumar Ghosh and his brothers from the village of Amrita Bazar is Jessore (presently in Bangladesh). The newspaper was involved in a libel case for an article written by Raja Krishna Mitra, the Head Clerk of the Joint Magistrate, following which an prosecution was launched against Sisir Kumar Ghosh and his Uncle, Motilal Ghosh, and Chandranath Roy, Printer of the paper and Raja Krishna Mitra. After rigorous cross examination of Motilal Ghosh, the identity of the editor could not be ascertained and after court proceedings, the Printer was sentenced to six months and Raja Krishna Mitra to a year's simple imprisonment. Sisir Kumar Ghosh was prosecuted again for withholding evidence in the case (the original manuscript of Raja Krishna Mitra's article) but the prosecution failed. (cited from Part II: History of Indian Journalism, from the First Press Commission Report, p. 72, 73)

¹⁴ The Press Laws Enquiry Committee Report, 1948, p.10 writes about the Amrita Bazar Patrika, "In 1889, the same newspaper published what purported to be a confidential Foreign Office Document concerning Kashmir. This Led to the passing, in October 1889, of an Act, The Indian Official Secrets Act, to prevent the disclosure of Official documents and information.

¹⁵ The Press Laws Enquiry Committee Report, 1948, p.10.

Oppose, oppose, oppose' was the motto of the Indian press. Regarding the role of the nationalist press, Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, wrote as early as March 1886: 'Day after day, hundreds of sharp-witted babus pour forth their indignation against their English oppressors in very pungent and effective diatribe'. And again in May: 'In this way, there can be no doubt there is generated in the minds of those who read these papers... a sincere conviction that we are all of us the enemies of mankind in general and of India in particular.'¹⁶

The colonial administration's response to this rising tide of nationalism in the press was by way of the insertion of Section 124 A in the Indian Penal Code in 1870.¹⁷

The *provocative* role of the Indian language newspapers in proliferating the nationalist ideas prompted the government to enact another repressive Act, the Vernacular Press Act of 1878. This allowed the administration to confiscate any printing press, paper and other materials of a newspaper, if the government was convinced that the newspaper was publishing any 'seditious' materials. The Act was directed against regional language newspapers like *Amrita Bazar Patrika*; and interestingly to escape the Act, it switched overnight into an English only newspaper. The colonial rulers, interestingly, had explained why the English language newspapers were spared from such measures. Sir Ashley Eden, who brought in the Vernacular Press Bill to the Council, justified the non-inclusion of the English language newspapers in its purview. To quote from his speech in the Legislative Council:

The Press must be treated with its own merits. Had the English Press of India been in style and tone what it was 20 years ago, I for my part should have no hesitation in voting for its inclusion in the present Bill. But I know nothing that has improved more of late years than the tone of the Anglo-Indian Press. It no doubt attacks Government measures and Government officials, and often very undeservedly; but as I have said before, it is not this sort of criticism to which Government objects or desires to control. On the whole the English Press of India, whether conducted by Europeans or Natives, bears evidence of being influenced by proper sense of responsibility and by a general desire to discuss public events in a moderate and a reasonable

¹⁶ Chandra, Bipin, Et al., *India Since Independence*(New Delhi: Penguin Books,1989), p.104

¹⁷ Sedition in India is defined by section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code. Section 124A was introduced by the British colonial government in 1870. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was arrested and charged under Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code On 27th July 1897. Prior to that Surendranath Banerjea, the editor of the regional newspaper *Bengalee* was dragged for contempt of court for writing an editorial, on 2 April 1883. Tilak was arrested for the second time under 124 A on 24th June 1908.

spirit. There is no occasion to subject that press to restrain, and therefore, naturally enough, it is exempted. It would be a sign of great weakness on the part of the Government to bring it within the scope of this measure merely to meet a possible charge of partiality. If it should ever happen that the Anglo Indian Press should adopt a tone calculated to excite feelings of disaffection to the British rule, I shall be amongst the first to ask for its inclusion in a law of this sort.¹⁸

The Act was repealed in 1882 and the Indian press enjoyed considerable freedom till 1908 when the Newspaper (Incitement to Offences) Act was enacted in that year.¹⁹

Among the freedom fighters of that time, Bal Gangadhar Tilak's name deserves special mention for his journalistic ingenuities which irked the colonial authorities endlessly. Under his editorship, *Kesari*, a Marathi newspaper, echoed the sentiments of the nationalist feeling of the Indian people. Tilak, in fact, was the first journalist to be charged, tried and sentenced to imprisonment (in 1898) under the provisions of Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code for sedition. Tilak and the Ghosh brothers used journalism to instill militant nationalism among the people and also spread the message of freedom. For instance, the partition of Bengal in 1905 by Curzon witnessed a surge of protests by the nationalists and the newspapers too vehemently opposed the Partition of Bengal and propagated in favour of the Swadeshi Movement and boycott of foreign goods.

Subsequently and in its wake, came the Press Act of 1910, which indeed was by far the most stringent of the measures against the Indian press. It enabled the Government to demand heavy securities which could be confiscated as a punishment against newspapers that offended British colonial interests. A.R. Desai cites Sir. Jenkins, an English judge in Indian court, in this regard:

¹⁸Natarajan, J., The Report of the Press Commission, 1954, Part II. History of Indian Journalism, P. 84

¹⁹ Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act VII was passed in 1908. This Act empowered the authorities to take judicial action against the editor of any newspaper which published matter which in the view of the government, amounted to incitement to rebellion. Cited from Natarajan, J., The Report of the Press Commission, Part II. History of Indian Journalism, p.125

The Provisions of section 4 [of the 1910 act] are very comprehensive, and its language is as wide as human ingenuity could make it. It is difficult to see what lengths the operation of this section might not plausibly be extended by an ingenious mind. They would certainly extend to writings that may even command approval. ...An attack on that degraded section of the public which lives in the misery and shame of others would come within this widespread net; the praise of a class might not be free from risk. Much that is regarded as standard literature might undoubtedly be caught.²⁰

From the judge's observation, the repressiveness of the Act can be easily gauged.

The Act was resisted by the Indian nationalists. The Act was only repealed during the tenure of Lord Reading as the Governor General of India (1921-26).

Mahatma Gandhi's emergence in the political scene in India, after his return from South Africa, also marks another epoch in the history of journalism in India. Gandhi, was also a quintessential journalist and he used journalism – *Young India* and *Harijan*²¹ - to spread his message throughout the freedom struggle, whether it was his call for civil disobedience, non-co-operation and Salt Satyagraha and others.²² After Gandhi started the Salt Satyagraha, in March 1930, the colonial administration made stringent provisions and brought back the Press Act of 1910 into force again. Mahatma Gandhi, in defiance of the Press Act, had launched a newspaper called *Satyagrahi*, a newspaper not registered with the government (defying the existing laws), just ahead of his campaign against the Rowlatt Act, even earlier in 1919, as an act of protest. Nirmala Lakshman, in the introduction to her book, *Writing a nation: Anthology of Indian Journalism* reproduces what Gandhi wrote in the newspaper's issues:

The editor (Gandhi) is liable at any moment to be arrested by the government and it is impossible to ensure continuity of publication until India is in the happy position of supplying editors enough to take the place of those arrested. We shall leave no stone unturned to secure a ceaseless

²⁰ Desai, *Op.cit.* p. 217

²¹ Like *Satyagrahi*, his tryst with journalism began in South Africa. There he edited a newspaper called *Indian Opinion* and it was in this paper he wrote the famous *Hind Swaraj* as a series.

²² Like Tilak, Gandhi was also tried for sedition under 124 (A) in 1922.

succession of editors. It is not our intention to break for all time the law governing publication of newspapers. This paper will, therefore, exist so long only as the Rowlatt legislation is not withdrawn.²³

The period following the Rowlatt Act (1919) (especially after the Jalianwala Bagh massacre) had witnessed stricter control over the press that allowed for arresting journalists without a warrant and their indefinite detention without a trial. The Indian press was very critical of the Jalianwala Bagh massacre and their writings against the British administration irked the colonial masters. Mention may be made of *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, which after its protests against the Jalianwala Bagh Massacre, led to the confiscation of the security deposit of Rs. 5000 made earlier (in the year 1913) along with a fresh demand of Rs. 10,000 security deposit if it wished to continue publishing. Also the paper's entry into the Punjab was banned.²⁴ The Newspaper *Punjabee* suspended its publication and the editor of the *Tribune* was sentenced to imprisonment following their reportage on the massacre.²⁵

Mahatma Gandhi wrote a series of three articles²⁶ in his newspaper *Young India* between September 29, 1921 and February 23, 1922 for which he was prosecuted. He

²³ Lakshman, Nirmala, *Writing a Nation: An Anthology of Indian Journalism*, (New Delhi: Rupa & co., 2007), p.xix

²⁴ Menon, Geeta E.(ed.) *Our Leaders* (New Delhi: CBT Publications,2004),P.24

²⁵ Kaur Raminder, William Mazarella (ed.). *Censorship in South Asia: Cultural Regulation from sedition to seduction* (Bloomington USA :Indiana University Press,2009), p.47

²⁶ Cited in Ed. Nirmala Lakshman, *Writing a Nation*, (New Delhi:Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2007) p.: xxi. The three articles of Gandhi includes, "Tampering with Loyalty", "A Puzzle and its Solution", "Shaking the Manes". In the first article, Gandhi defended Ali Brothers who were accused of sedition. He also wrote, "... we must reiterate from a thousand platforms the formula of the Ali Brothers regarding the sepoys, and we must spread disaffection openly and systematically till it please the Government to arrest us." In the second article, he was responding to Lord Reading's accusation that Satyagrahis were deliberately breaching law to court arrest. Gandhi wrote that, "we seek arrest because the so called freedom is slavery. We are challenging the might of the Government because we consider its activity to be wholly evil. We want to overthrow the Government." In the third article, he writes about the uncompromising nature of Swaraj. He wrote, "The Rice eating puny millions of India seem to have resolved upon achieving their own destiny without any further tutelage and without any arms... no empire intoxicated with the red wine of power and plunder of weaker races has yet lived long... and this 'British Empire', which is based upon

was prosecuted under section 124 A²⁷ of the Indian Penal Code on charges of sedition. It must be mentioned here that the articles were written during the Non-Co-operation movement, which was withdrawn after the violence in the Chauri Chaura incident in February 1922. Gandhi was arrested on 10th March 1922 and on the 18th of March, 1922, he was presented before the District and Sessions Judge, Mr. C. N. Broomfield. The Advocate General pressed for charges that Gandhi's articles preached disaffection and also should be seen in the context of the violence in places such as Chauri Chaura, Madras and Bombay. Gandhi, in the trial, pleaded guilty of bringing or attempting to bring into hatred or contempt or exciting or attempting to excite disaffection towards the British Government. In his statement to the court, Gandhi said:

I would like to state that I entirely endorse the learned Advocate-General's remarks in connection with my humble self. I think that he was entirely fair to me in all the statements that he has made, because it is very true, and I have, no desire whatsoever to conceal from this Court the fact that to preach disaffection towards the existing system of Government has become almost a passion with me, and the learned Advocate-General is also entirely in the right when he says that my preaching of disaffection did not commence with my connection with Young India, but that it commenced much earlier; and in the statement that I am about to read, it will be my painful duty to admit before this Court that it commenced much earlier than the period stated by the Advocate-General. It is the most painful duty with me, but I have to discharge that duty knowing the responsibility that rests upon my shoulders, and I wish to endorse all the blame that the learned Advocate-General has thrown on my shoulders in connection with the Bombay occurrences, Madras occurrences and the Chauri Chaura occurrences. Thinking over these deeply and sleeping over them night after night, it is impossible for me to dissociate myself from the diabolical crimes of Chauri Chaura or the mad outrages of Bombay. He is quite right when he says that as a man of responsibility, a man having received a fair share of education, having had a fair share of experience of this world, I should have known the consequences of every one of my acts. I knew that I was playing with fire. I ran the risk, and if I was set free, I would still do the same. I have felt it this morning that I would have failed in my duty, if I did not say what I said here just now. I wanted to avoid violence, I want to avoid violence. Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed. But I had to make my choice. I had either to submit to a system which I considered had done an irreparable harm to my country, or incur the risk of the mad fury

organized exploitation of physically weaker races of the earth and upon continuous exhibition of brute force cannot live.

²⁷ Section 124 A deals with Sedition. It explains sedition in wide and magnanimous terms. It says "Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India" shall be punished with life imprisonment. The British administration passed a legislation, namely, The Indian Penal Code (Amendment) Act 1870(XXVII of 1870) and incorporating in the code, a section on sedition, namely 124 A.

of my people bursting forth when they understood the truth from my lips. I know that my people have sometimes gone mad. I am deeply sorry for it and I am therefore here to submit not to a light penalty but to the highest penalty. I do not ask for mercy. I do not plead any extenuating act. I am here, therefore, to invite and cheerfully submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen.²⁸

Mahatma Gandhi's statement in the court provides us with a rare glimpse of journalistic courage. It remains a benchmark for Indian journalism. Gandhi used journalism as a tool to challenge the establishment and used it for the Indian independence movement. Even though, the Press in India enjoyed some freedom for a brief period of time till 1930, as the nationalist struggle gained momentum, the colonial administration again brought in more legislations to hamper the free functioning of the press. The Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act, 1931, was enacted and that reversed the brief spell of freedom that was being enjoyed by the Indian press. The Act was amended in 1932 to equip the colonial administration with more claws. Like the Press Act of 1910, this Act too had provisions for forfeiture of security deposits and demand for securities. The arms of the Act extended in such a way that it could even attack liberal or moderate newspapers if they published anything contemptuous (as perceived by the authorities) of the British Government. Interestingly, under the amended Act of 1932, certain news items were disallowed in one province but may be allowed in another province. It empowered the government to decide the headlines and even positions for placing of the news items in the paper.²⁹

To conclude this section, the Indian press, throughout the epochal era of freedom struggle, acted as a communicator between the leaders and the masses and a vehicle to the spread of nationalist ideas. The British were well aware of the potential of the Indian

²⁸ Cited in, Nair, Shankaran C., Gandhi and Anarchy, (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2010), p.212

²⁹ Desai, *Op.Cit.* p.218

press invoking nationalist feelings among the people and as a result, a series of authoritarian and repressive laws were passed to curb press freedom. The press in regional languages played an important role in proliferating nationalist feelings in the early stages of the freedom struggle. It was a formidable force in propagating the ideas of freedom and against attempts to muzzle free expression of ideas in the press. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was a specific instance of this being realised by the colonial administrators and hence deciding to clamp down. Gandhi's arrival on the scene, since 1916, and the launch of the Rowlatt Satyagraha in 1919, saw a new phase in the history of the press in India and when the freedom movement gained momentum, new repressive laws were enacted to curb press freedom. These are strong evidences that the British were well aware of the scope of the Indian press and the impending danger of it being used as a tool for uniting the people against the British rule.

Of importance here is the characteristic of the press in India during this phase, particularly from the concerns of this thesis. It was not looked upon just as a profession or business proposition but treated more as public service. Secondly, the Indian press was pluralistic and the diversity was guarded. There were newspapers run by socialists or communists, the Justice Party run newspaper *Justice* and the Muslim League associated paper *Dawn* which were basically anti-Indian National Congress.

With this background, the next section deals with the role of media in the post-independence period, especially from 1947 to 1991; from independence and an economic policy that fell under a shade of socialism to the adoption of the liberalization programme, leaning on free-market principles.

Section 2

The Post-Independence Period (1947- 1991) and the Press

One of the challenges that the nation, just independent from the colonial yoke, was confronted with was to draft a constitution consistent with the legacy of the freedom struggle. The colonial rule, marked as it was with a series of repressive actions against the right to free expression of ideas and its dissemination, also witnessed resistance to such repression. Hence, internalizing the spirit of the Karachi Resolution of the Indian National Congress in 1931, where the Indian National Congress had committed to the idea of freedom of speech/expression among the ‘fundamental rights’, the Constituent Assembly resolved, at the very outset, to place civil liberties on a high pedestal and a free press in India was one of their main concerns. Two distinct opinions were expressed by the Assembly members. While some of them were in a favour of a separate set of laws for the press that guaranteed its freedom, others argued that freedom of the press will flow from the Fundamental Right of Freedom of Speech and Expression and hence the need for a separate law did not arise.³⁰ The second argument prevailed which was subsequently interpreted by the Supreme Court in various cases brought before it.

³⁰During the course of Constituent Assembly debates Somnath Lahiri, a leader of the Communist Party of India and also a member of the constituent Assembly pressed for separate laws safeguarding the right of the press. On 29th April 1947, during the proceedings he said, “Apart from the knowledge that we can gather from the experience of other countries, there is also the knowledge born out of our own experience, that is, there are certain rights which we have been denied in the past by an alien and autocratic government. We have come up against those difficulties. We want to incorporate every one of those rights which our people want to get. One vital thing which our people have been suffering from in the past has been the curtailment of the liberty of the press by means of securities and by other methods. The press has been crushed completely. This is a thing against which every patriotic Indian is up in arms, including every congressman, and, therefore, in his heart of hearts every Indian feels that in a free India in order that people may feel freedom and act up to it, there should not be such drastic curtailment of liberties of the press. But what do we find? There is not even a mention of the liberty of the press in this whole list of fundamental rights submitted by the Committee, except a solitary mention made at one place that there will be liberty of expression.” Similar arguments were also made by Prof N.G Ranga, another member of the Constituent Assembly Debates where he also expressed the need to mention “freedom of press” Cited from Constituent

The notion of press freedom flowing from the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression was actually proposed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. While arguing his case in the constituent assembly, he stated:

The press is merely another way of stating an individual or a citizen. The press has no special rights which are not to be given or which are not to be exercised by the citizen in his individual capacity. The editors of a press or a manager are all citizens and therefore when they choose to write in newspapers, they are merely exercising their right of expression and in my judgment, therefore no special mention is necessary.³¹

Soon after independence, the press was faced with a dichotomous situation on its role in the newly independent country. After the end of the colonial repressive regime, what role do the media need to play, as the people who came to power were the partners of the press in their struggle for freedom? Lakshman cites Frank Moraes, then editor of *The Times of India*, highlighting the dilemma of the journalists and his conclusion that, “after some reflection and consultation that since Nehru was faced virtually with no opposition in Parliament and since a democratic government could not effectively express itself in the absence of an opposition, the press should take itself to function as an unofficial opposition outside parliament, exercising that role with responsibility and circumspection.”³²

During the early years after independence, the newspapers played an important role in highlighting the challenges that lay ahead of the newly independent nation.³³ A section of the press criticized the government’s policies towards Kashmir and China soon after Independence. G.N.S. Raghavan in his book, *The Press In India*, quotes from an English weekly *Swatantrata* of 10th September 1949:

Assembly of India, Volume III. Accessed from: <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol3p2.htm> on 25/06/2017

³¹ Constituent Assembly of India Debates (Proceedings) Volume VII, extracted from: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar spoke on the 2nd December 1948. Accessed from: <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol7p18b.htm> on 25/06/2017

³² Lakshman, *Op.cit.* P.xxiv

³³ *ibid*, p.xxiii

The folly of the rash rush to the United Nations over the Kashmir issue will be apparent if it is studied in the light of the entirely different attitude adopted by the government of India over the Hyderabad issue. The Government of India never swerved from the view that the settlement of the Hyderabad dispute was their own domestic concern in which outside powers would not be allowed to interfere... Pandit Nehru is now surprised at the letter to himself and the Premier to Pakistan written about Kashmir by President Truman and Mr. Altee, which he has rightly characterized as intervention. But what is surprising is that he should be so surprised. Pandit Nehru invited the intervention which he now resents.³⁴

Raghavan mentions one of the weekly newspapers critical of Jawaharlal Nehru's China policy, named, *Thought*.³⁵ The critical voices in the press points that the Indian press had played the role of an opposition and it began soon after the independence.

As has already been discussed, journalism during the freedom struggle was not just looked upon as a lucrative profession but mostly remained in the domain of political activism and social service. Most of the newspapers were not earning any profits during the time. Of course, there were exceptions; the Anglo Indian newspapers like *The Times Of India* and *The Statesman* were run on commercial lines with robust management systems. These newspapers enjoyed patronage of the colonial government in the form of increased advertisements, assistance in adequate newsprint supplies and protection from competition. In the post-independence period, owners of these newspapers decided to quit India and the newspapers were acquired by Indian business firms. *The Times of Indian* changed hands to the Dalmia-Jain family, *The Statesman* changed hands to the Tatas. The nationalist newspapers like *The Hindu* remained a family owned concern since

³⁴ Raghavan, G.N.S, *The Press in India, A new History*, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House,1994),p.129

³⁵ The newsweekly *Thought* was one of the prominent critic of Jawaharlal Nehru's China Policy, and also his policy towards the USSR. India was among the first nations to recognize China following the 1949 revolution but Nehru was unhappy with Chinese troops invading Tibet in 1954. During the crisis of war between North and South Korea, India voted in favour of UN action against North Korea but resisted the condemnation of China as an aggressor. A journalist from the *Thought*,M.Sivaram visited China and reported secretly which was not published by the Press Trust of India after consultation with Indian Government. A year and a half later, the report was discovered and published with an editorial saying: The press Trust of India, losing its nerve at an Indian Journalists' daring to paint a picture different from that officially prescribed by Mr. Nehru and Mr. N.G Ayengar... Nehru engaged with press press and denied any censorship but told it was a bureaucratic decision. Cited from GNS Raghavan, *The Press in India, A New History*,(New Delhi:Gyan Publishing House, 1994), p.131

1905, managed to earn marginal profits; but others such *The Hindustan Times*, founded in 1924, and *The Indian Express* founded in 1932, were hardly making any profits. But after independence, these newspapers also began to pick up in sales and readership.

The newly independent government, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, known for his liberal views and conviction, set up a Press Laws and Enquiry Committee in 1947, under the chairmanship of Shri Ganga Nath, and it submitted its report in 1948. The Press Laws and Enquiry Committee was set up to enquire the following terms of reference: (I) To examine and report to the government on the laws regulating the press in principal countries of the world including India. (II) To review the press laws of India with a view to examine if they were in accord with the fundamental rights formulated by the Constituent Assembly of India and (III) To recommend to the Government any measures of reform in the Press laws considered expedient upon such review.³⁶ The Committee reviewed the following Laws imposed on the press during the British rule in India.

1. Press and Registration of Books Act, 1967.
2. Indian States (Protection against Disaffection) Act, 1922.
3. Officials Secrets Act, 1923.
4. Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act, 1931.
5. Foreign Relation Act, 1932.
6. Indian States (Protection) Act, 1934.
7. Sections 124 A, 153 A and 505 of the Indian Penal Act Code, 1860.
8. Section 99 A to 99 G of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898.

³⁶ Report of the Press Law Enquiry Committee, 1948, p.1

9. Sections 19 and 181 A to 181 C of the Sea Customs Act, 1978.
10. Section 5 of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885.
11. Sections 25, 26 and 27 A to 27D of the Indian Post office Act, 1898
12. Provisions of Public Safety Acts etc relating to censorship of control of publication.³⁷

The committee examined the press laws of certain foreign countries like the United States of America, England, France, Switzerland, USSR, China, Norway, Sweden and Egypt. The review of the press laws in India was done with a view to examine if they are in accordance with the Fundamental Rights formulated by the Constituent Assembly³⁸. The Committee made several recommendations which include the retention of Acts such as The Press and Registration of Books Act 1867 and the Official Secrets Acts. However on the Official Secrets Act of 1923, it held that the popular democratic governments can be trusted but also holding the view that “popular elected governments in India would utilize the provisions of the act only in case of genuine necessity and in larger interest of the state and the public”.³⁹ It recommended laws such as the Foreign Relations Act of 1932, Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act, 1931 and certain sections in the Post Office Act to be repealed.⁴⁰ In case of the Emergency Powers, the Committee was of the opinion that, “the executive and the legislature must be the sole judge of determining when an emergency exists, we do not feel called upon to offer comments on emergency legislations. We would however, recommend strongly that in order to avoid discontent and harmful effects of prosecution or other executive action under emergency

³⁷ *ibid*, p.1.S

³⁸ *ibid*, p.16

³⁹ *ibid*, p.30

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p.49

legislation on the press, the provisional governments should make the widest possible use of press consultative machinery and should avoid taking action against any newspaper.”⁴¹

In case of Section 124 A of the IPC, it recommended that “publishers of newspaper charged under this section should be triable only by a jury.”⁴² The Committee’s recommendations, indeed, had a significant impact on the Constitution as adopted on November 26, 1949, especially in the provisions involving free speech and a far greater impact on the expansion of this right with specific reference to the press through judicial pronouncements in the years ahead.⁴³

This, however, was tangential. The government sat on the report for three years. The country was facing subsequent crises owing to the partition, communal violence and the issue of rehabilitation of refugees and this may have been the reason. The impact, however, was, as G.S. Bhargava argues, the non-implementation of the recommendation of the enquiry committee soured the relations between the press and the Government. The Constitution of India, after its adoption on January 26, 1950, guaranteed the fundamental rights that included Article 19 (1) (a) from which press freedom flows. However, the press in India felt that Article 19(2) of the Constitution⁴⁴ was curbing the press freedom and the press in general was not very pleased with such restrictions. Bhargava cites Home Minister C Rajagopalachari’s stand in the matter expressing willingness to refer all questions affecting the press to a jury composed of editors. Rajaji, in fact, had assured against imposition of pre-censorship and argued for a comprehensive law specific to the

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.38

⁴² *ibid*, p.45

⁴³ Iyenger, A.S, *Role of Press and Indian Freedom Struggle: All Through the Gandhian Era* (New Delhi: APH Publishing, 2001), p.xxii

⁴⁴ Bhargava, G.S., *The Press in India: An overview* (New Delhi: National Book Trust), p.36

press within the ambit of the constitution.⁴⁵ This, indeed, was Rajagopalachari's position in the Constituent Assembly itself. This was the context in which Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru had proposed the Press Commission of India and in response to a demand by the Indian Federation of Working Journalists.

First Press Commission, 1952

Accordingly, the first ever Press Commission was set up in the year 1952 under the chairmanship of Justice G.S. Rajadhakya. The brief before the commission was to enquire into 'the state of the press in India, its present and future lines of development'⁴⁶ and particularly examine the "control, management and ownership and financial structure of the newspaper, large and small, the periodical press and the news agencies and feature syndicates."⁴⁷ It was also to examine the "working of monopolies and chains and their effect on the accurate news and fair views."⁴⁸ The other issues before the Press Commission included examining ways in which journalism can attain high professional standards and "the effect of the holding companies, the distribution of advertisement and other external influence which may have a bearing on the development of healthy journalism."⁴⁹ The Commission was also left to study and recommend on such matters as the adequacy of newsprint, methods of recruitment and scales of remunerations to journalists and machinery for high standards for journalism and liaison between the government and the Press, etc. In totality, it is not difficult to see that the basic purpose of the Press Commission was to safeguard press freedom and to ensure maintenance of high

⁴⁵ *ibid*,p.36

⁴⁶ The Press Commission Report, 1954, p.2

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.2

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.2

⁴⁹ *ibid.*,p.2

professional standards. Therefore, it is pertinent to discuss the report of the commission in some detail.

The Press Commission Report of 1954 was a comprehensive document on the state of the press at that time. The Commission looked into almost every aspect of the newspaper industry in detail; this included the inadequacy of the number of newspapers in proportion to the population of the country. It also talked about the difficulties faced by the new newspapers from heavy capital expenditure required for starting a newspaper or a periodical and the lack of adequate finances with small newspapers that were left to compete for space with the newspapers that had already established to themselves a niche in the market and with substantial financial backing as well as the poor purchasing power of the people to buy a newspaper in that context. One of the important observations of the Press Commission, in its report, was regarding the ownership pattern of the newspaper industry during that time. The forms of ownership included the following:

- i. Individual
- ii. Partnership
- iii. Joint Stock Company
- iv. Trust
- v. Society registered under various acts and
- vi. Co-operative ownership⁵⁰

The report, indeed, was a comprehensive treatise on the press and press freedom. The commission observed that there had been a tendency among the metropolitan newspapers to convert themselves into joint stock companies. This shift in the ownership pattern,

⁵⁰ The Report of the Press Commission, 1954, Page 266

according to the report, had made the “exercise of control” more complex in the newspapers as more than the editors, the control was shifting to the management in its understanding.⁵¹ The effect of such changing ownership patterns, if the newspaper happened to be owned by businessmen or industrialists, or through a joint stock company, the commission held, will inevitably lead to adopting editorial policies which advance “directly or indirectly the interest of the business community as a whole, or the particular business interest or commitment of the proprietors”.⁵² The report explains that the buyer of the newspaper is “entitled to insist that it shall be untainted, unadulterated and undiluted. The report favoured diffused forms of ownership, which meant a trust has the ownership, where shares are gradually distributed among the employees and who are in constant touch with all its activities.”⁵³

The Report, meanwhile, devoted a full chapter to explain the extent of “Competition and Monopolies” prevalent then in the newspapers industry in the year 1952. The term monopoly was used to signify sales of a particular newspaper in preponderant majority of the total sales of all papers and to the practical exclusion of other newspapers. Monopoly may also exist at a local level, where a particular newspaper holds a predominant position while all others have negligible circulations. The report was concerned with the uniformity of editorial policies in the different units of a newspaper within the same group, chain and the greatest uniformity was observed in matters which involved personal and business interest of the owners. The report, in the matter of competition and concentration of ownership, concluded that there is the existence of chains and groups but there is considerable diversity in terms of choice available to

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.266

⁵² *ibid.*, p.267

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.498

readers.⁵⁴ While drawing its conclusions, on the figures analyzed by the commission, it held: “Every metropolis is served by at least two or three big papers in each of the major languages of the area. The effect of a number of chains, combines and groups operating from different metropolitan centres has been to provide a considerable choice to the readers. These metropolitan papers compete with one another throughout the area they serve. As a result, even in the towns where no papers are published locally, wide choice is available.”⁵⁵ In terms of concentration of ownership, the report observed that there was concentration of ownership in the newspaper industry. Out of a total number of three hundred and thirty daily newspapers, it highlighted that, five owners controlled twenty nine papers and 31.2 per cent of the circulation, while fifteen owners controlled fifty four newspapers amounting to 50.1 percent of the circulations.⁵⁶

The Press Commission report also delved into the influence of the advertisers and how it can influence the content of news and concluded that there were instances found where news had been suppressed in order not to offend the advertisers. The report said: “Many instances have been reported of news items having been suppressed in order not to offend or of advertisers having complained about the publication of particular items”.⁵⁷ The report also discussed the role of the government as an advertiser and how it can influence news items. It held that the principle of the private advertisers, who can place an advertisement wherever they deemed fit, cannot be applied to the government, which is a trustee of public funds and is bound to utilize them without discrimination, to the best

⁵⁴ The Press Commission Report, Page: 303

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p.303

⁵⁶ Cited from The First Press Commission Report 1954,P: 501. It writes, “We found that out of a total of three hundred and thirty dailies, five owners control twenty nine papers and 31.2 percent of the circulation, while fifteen owners control fifty four newspapers and 50.1 percent of the circulation. There can, therefore, be no denying the fact that there already exists in the Indian Newspaper industry a considerable degree of concentration. We feel that there is a danger that this tendency might further develop.”

⁵⁷ *ibid*. p.318

interest of the public. The basis for advertising by the government, it stressed, should be based on circulation and readership rather than the attitude of the newspapers toward the government.⁵⁸

One of the important recommendations made by the Press commission was that a rule be made by the Government to effect a price-page schedule which incidentally led to one of the first ever cases involving the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression to be decided by the Supreme Court in the *Sakal Papers v. Union of India* case. The press commission recommended that in order to encourage new and small players to enter the newspaper industry, the government shall fix a minimum price at which papers of a particular size (in terms of the number of pages) can be sold.⁵⁹ The price page schedule was justified on the grounds that papers with large capital resources have advantages in terms of stable advertisements⁶⁰ revenue as compared to new and small players.⁶¹

The report also made a distinction between newspapers and other industries where such handicaps for new entrants may exist. But the newspaper industry, it stressed, cannot be compared to other industries, since, in its view, the newspapers have a vital role to play in a democracy, i.e. the articulation of public opinion and hence required

⁵⁸ The Press Commission Report, 1952, p.321, writes, “We also hold that the liberty and freedom to place advertisements wherever he likes cannot be conceded to government which is a trustee of public funds and therefore, bound to utilize them without discrimination, to best advantage of the public. Bearing this in mind and subject to what has been said above, government should place advertisements having due regard to the following consideration: 1)circulation of the paper and the rates charged by that paper; and 2)readership designed to be reached for the purpose of the particular advertisement

⁵⁹ The Press Commission Report, 1954. p.72

⁶⁰ Robin Jeffrey writes that, In the “socialist India” of the 1950’s to 1970’s, some proprietors and editors saw advertising as a gift of the government, bestowed upon the newspaper industry’s poor. Such a view accorded with the rhetoric about building self sufficient that would both industrialize and transform the lives of rural poor. Somehow, too, advertising that came from the government, as if by right, escaped the taint having to have been graciously accepted by patriots.

⁶¹ Governments made efforts to sustain smaller newspapers and allocated 20 to 30 percent of the advertising expenditures on small and medium newspapers. The English newspapers were also received a great chunk of the government advertisements.

equality of opportunity and hence economic hindrance in that path should not be a handicap.⁶²

To conclude this section, the press commission presented a grand vision in terms of restructuring the press and can be seen as a restructuring of the society and the property relationship that was very much a part of the socialist dream. Some of the observations of the Commission – such as on monopoly, ownership and advertisement and so on – seem to have anticipated the problems with the press/media in the liberalized era (post 1991, wherein the pronounced shift in the economic policy from the Planned model to market economics was effected), then a far cry though, on the newspaper industry. This will be discussed in some detail later in this chapter.

Judicial Interventions and Enlarging the Scope of Press Freedom

One of the foremost judgments of the Supreme Court in expanding and interpreting Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution in favour of press freedom was the Romesh Thapar Vs State of Madras case. In the year 1950, a magazine named *Cross Words*, edited by Romesh Thapar was banned entry into the state of Madras (consisting of present state of Tamil Nadu and many parts of other southern states) for publishing views critical of the Congress party. The Madras Maintenance of Public Order Act, 1949, was used for the ban. The act allowed the state government to regulate the entry and circulation of any “set of documents for securing public safety and maintenance of Public order”.⁶³ The court examined the relationship between the terms ‘Public Safety’ and ‘Public Order’ with ‘undermining the security of, or tending to overthrow the state’. It defined ‘Public Order’ as, “an expression of wide connotation and signifies that state of tranquility which

⁶² The Press Commission Report, 1954. p.73

⁶³Romesh Thapar Vs State of Madras, 25th May,1950, AIR 1950 124, Accessed from: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/456839/> date: 15/03/2017

prevails among the members of a political society as a result of the internal regulations enforced by the government which they have established". And according to the judgment, in the said act, public safety was intended to mean the security of the state. The court held the view that undermining the security of the state was an act which can go against public order and safety but every instance of public disorder may not qualify to reach to a level of undermining the security of the state. The judgment said:

The Constitution thus requires a line to be drawn in the field of public order or tranquility marking off, may be, roughly, the boundary between those serious and aggravated forms of public disorder which are calculated to endanger the security of the State and the relatively minor breaches of the peace of a purely local significance, treating for this purpose differences in degree as if they were differences in kind.⁶⁴

The Supreme Court quashed the order of the then Madras Government prohibiting the circulation of the *Cross Words* on the ground that, "clause (2) of article 19 having allowed the imposition of restrictions on the freedom of speech and expression only in cases where danger to the State is involved, an enactment, which is capable of being applied to cases where no such danger could arise, cannot be held to be constitutional and valid to any extent⁶⁵." The court also noted the fact that "sedition" was removed from the list of permissible restrictions during the Constituent Assembly debates and held:

... very narrow and stringent limits have been set to permissible legislative abridgement of the right of free speech and expression, and this was doubtless due to the realisation that freedom of speech and of the press lay at the foundation of all democratic organisations, for without free political discussion no public education, so essential for the proper functioning of the processes of popular government, is possible. A freedom of such amplitude might involve risks of abuse. But the framers of the Constitution may well have reflected, with Madison who was "the leading spirit in the preparation of the First Amendment of the Federal Constitution," that "it is better to leave a few of its abnoxious branches to their luxuriant growth, than, by pruning them away, to injure the vigour of those yielding the proper fruits." We are therefore of opinion that unless a law restricting freedom of speech and expression is directed solely against the undermining of the security of the State or the overthrow of it, such law cannot fall within the reservation under clause (2) of article 19.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

Meanwhile, following the recommendation of the Press Commission, the Government passed the Newspaper (Price and Page) Act, 1960 and the Daily Newspaper (Price and Page) Order 1960. This order prescribed for fixing the maximum number of pages of a newspaper according to the price charged and also prescribed the number of supplements that could be issued. The order was keeping in view that newspaper managements with a deep pocket can afford under-cutting the small publishers by both reducing the cover price and increasing the number of pages to help increase circulation and thus enhance advertisement revenue and thus edge out small players in the course. Needless to say that these regulations were not to the liking of many large newspapers.

The first petition against the order was filed by the Marathi language newspaper, *Sakal* and its shareholders, along with two readers of the paper, challenging the constitutionality of the Act. It was challenged on grounds that the order infringed upon the fundamental right guaranteed under Article 19(1) (a) of the constitution; the argument placed was that either they would have to raise their prices, if they wished to keep the number of pages high and constant, and thus loose circulation or they would have to reduce the number of pages and thus provide less news than they wished to. In the event, the petition argued, their right to freedom of speech and expression was violated.

The government's response was that the objective behind such an order was to "prevent unfair competition among newspapers as also to prevent monopolistic combines so that newspapers may have fair opportunities of freer discussion... The effect of the Act and the Order, according to the government, would be to promote further the right of news-papers in general to exercise the freedom of speech and expression..."⁶⁷ as was the

⁶⁷ Sakal Papers (P) Ltd., And Others vs The Union Of India on 25 September, 1961 1962 AIR 305, 1962 SCR (3) 842, Accessed from: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/243002/> date: 16/03/2017

considered opinion of the Press Commission. The government's argument ran that established newspapers were able to keep their prices very low due to their existing scale of economies and this proved detrimental to the growth of the smaller newspapers. This, the government argued, will force the smaller newspapers to exit the market and also would prevent the entry of new newspapers into the market. The government also argued that, "A free press, it is said, cannot mean a press composed of a few powerful combines and that in order to ensure freedom of press it is necessary to secure full scope for the full development of smaller news- papers".⁶⁸ Hence, the government argued that the sole intention behind the regulation was to promote new newspapers and thus expand the scope of the freedom of speech and expression.

The Supreme Court, however, struck down the Act and regulations and held them un-constitutional. To quote from the judgment, it said:

The right to propagate one's ideas is inherent in the conception of freedom of speech and expression. For the purpose of propagating his ideas every citizen has a right to publish them, to disseminate them and to circulate them. He is entitled to do so either by word of mouth or by writing. The right guaranteed thus extends, subject to any law competent under Art. 19(2), not merely to the matter which he is entitled to circulate, but also to the volume of circulation. In other words, the citizen is entitled to propagate his views and reach any class and number of readers as he chooses subject of course to the limitations permissible under a law competent under Art.19(2). It cannot be said that the impugned order seeks to place a restraint on the latter aspect of the right by prescribing a price page schedule.⁶⁹

The Supreme Court held that the regulations had direct implications to free speech by limiting the circulation of the newspapers and hence it infringed upon the rights guaranteed by Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution. The Supreme Court held that restrictions were permissible only under Article 19(2) by which public order, decency, or morality alone shall be considered for restrictions as reasonable and that this certainly

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

was not the argument of the government; in other words, the Supreme Court held that unfair competition or in ‘public interest’ were not covered by the scope of reasonable restrictions as elaborated in Article 19(2) of the Constitution. The Order, the judgment said, “would directly impinge on this freedom either by placing restraint upon it or by placing restraint upon something which is an essential part of that freedom. The freedom of a newspaper to publish any number of pages or to circulate it to any number of persons is each an integral part of the freedom of speech and expression.”⁷⁰

Further, on the question of curbing monopolies in the newspaper industry and on protection of small and newly started newspapers, the judgment held that “the means employed must not transgress the limits laid down by the Constitution, if they directly impinge on any of the Fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution it is no answer when the constitutionality of the measure is challenged that apart from the fundamental right infringed the provision is otherwise legal.”⁷¹ The idea of free speech cannot be overridden by the government in the name of larger common good and that this power also was capable of being used against democracy as well, in the apex court’s view.⁷²

Even though the regulations were aimed at ensuring equal access to infrastructure and redistribution of resources by making the access possible, the apex court viewed that idea to be constitutionally irrelevant and seemed to lean heavily in favour of the established newspapers and their right to free speech.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² The judgment said, “No doubt, the law in question was made upon the recommendation of the Press Commission but since its object is to affect directly the right of circulation of newspapers which would necessarily undermine their power to influence public opinion it cannot. But be regarded as a dangerous weapon which is capable of being used against democracy itself. In these circumstances the Act and the Order cannot be sustained upon the ground that it merely implements a recommendation of the Press Commission and was thus not made with an ulterior object.” Cited from 1962 AIR 305, 1962 SCR (3) 842.

The importance of this judgment, indeed, is relevant in the present times most directly than it perhaps was at the time it was delivered; creating an economic environment that would be conducive to the entry of small newspaper and their survival and the prevention of monopolistic control, certainly becomes very relevant in the liberalization⁷³ period in India. This will be discussed in detail later on, in Section 3 of this chapter.

The judgment must also be seen in the context of the larger civil rights and press freedom in India. The experience of the State controlled and regulated press during the colonial rule and a pro-active judiciary in the matters of civil rights was not in favour of regulations upon the media and the consensus then seemed to be urged by the stress upon the fundamental rights and to resist any attempt that was even seen as aimed at infringing such rights. Hence, the judges argued for a press that was free from state control rather than a regulated press. In other words, the judiciary was translating the public opinion of the era into such a judgment.

The next landmark, in the trajectory, was the case and the judgment of the Supreme Court in the Bennet Coleman and Co. Vs Union of India case.⁷⁴ This involved the Government policy of rationing newsprint, a commodity that was imported in its entirety at that time and involved foreign exchange commitments as well. The Newsprint Policy of 1972-73⁷⁵ had the following provisions:

⁷³ I must stress that I am using the phrase liberalization here and throughout this thesis to mean the period after July 1991, when Parliament approved a resolution effecting a shift towards the market principles and distinct from the Nehruvian scheme of planned economy. This clarification is necessary to clarify that the liberalisation process is still on at the time of writing this thesis and the thesis covers upto 2012.

⁷⁴ Bennett Coleman v. Union of India,(1972) 2 SCC 788[1973] 2 SCR 757, accessed from: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/125596/> date:05/07/2017

⁷⁵ The Import Control Order 1955 passed by the Central Government of India under section 3 and 4 A of the Imports and Exports Control Act 1947 laid restrictions on the import of newsprint. Newsprint also came

- a) The basic entitlement to the newsprint quota was to be calculated on the basis of circulation figures of 1970-71 and the actual number of pages in the case of newspapers whose average number of pages was ten or less; and in case of newspapers whose average number of pages was above ten, it was to be calculated on the basis of circulation figures and holding ten pages as the standard size. The newspapers whose number of pages was less than ten were further allowed to increase its allowance but within the limit of ten pages. To increase circulation, additional newsprint were allowed but here too the big newspapers with circulation of more than 100,000 were not allowed additional newsprints.
- b) The second provision of the order was that within the allotted quota, it was permissible to increase the circulation by reducing the number of pages but not vice versa. One of the caveats of the act was that subject to provision that newsprint allotted to increase the number of pages could not be diverted to increase circulation. It was also not open to newspaper establishments which owned two or more newspapers to adjust the quota of one newspaper with that of the other or adjust the quota of one edition of the newspaper with that of another edition of the same newspaper.
- c) The newspaper establishments owning two or more than two newspapers were not allowed to start a new newspaper or a new edition of an existing newspaper from even their own quota of newsprint.⁷⁶

under Essential Commodities Act 1955. The Newsprint Control Order 1962 states that no consumer of newsprint shall in any licensing period consume or use newsprint in excess of quantity authorized by the controller from time to time. The order also states that the controller shall have to regard to the principles laid down in import control policy with respect to newsprint from time to time.

⁷⁶ Rai, Udai Raj. Fundamental Rights and their Enforcements, (New Delhi: PHI learning Private Limited, 2011), p.137

The petitioners, in this case (Bennet Coleman and Co., who published *The Times of India* and a whole range of other publications then), argued that it was a violation of Article 19(1) (a) and Article 14 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court judgment held:

The machinery of the Import Control cannot be utilized to curb or control circulation of growth or freedom of newspapers in India. The pith and substance doctrine is used in ascertaining whether the Act falls under one Entry while incidentally encroaching upon another Entry. Such a question does not arise here. The Newsprint Control Policy is found to be newspaper control order in the guise of framing an Import Control Policy for newsprint.⁷⁷

Like in the *Sakal* Case, here too, the Court observed that the intention to help new and young newspapers should not be at the cost of curtailing the right to freedom of speech and expression of the big dailies. The court also did not seem to be impressed with the government's idea to help and allocate more newsprint to smaller newspapers to help them grow. It remarked that it was a straight jacketed violation of Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution. The *Sakal* Papers Case and the Bennet Coleman case placed more reliance on the free press rather than on any overt or covert restrictions on the press.

In another important judgment, in this context, the Supreme Court expanded the freedom of speech and expression over a dispute between the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) over whether or not the cricket organization had the right to grant exclusive telecast rights to a private agency rather than to Doordarshan (Public Service Broadcaster). This judgment, however, is of the time when Indian economy was liberalized. Along with other judgments, this judgment too expanded the scope of the freedom of speech and expression. The issue in this case involved as to whether or not the Government agency like the Doordarshan had the monopoly over creating terrestrial signals and telecasting them or refuse to telecast

⁷⁷ Bennett Coleman v. Union of India, (1972) 2 SCC 788 [1973] 2 SCR 757, accessed from: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/539407/> Date: 05/07/2017

them. It also involved the issue as to whether the organizer of the event (in this case, international cricket tournament) or producer of any event had a right to get the event telecast through an agency of his choice whether national or foreign. The Supreme Court held that the medium of television is different from print and what distinguishes, “the electronic media like the television from the print media or other media is that it has both audio and visual appeal and has a more pervasive presence. It has a greater impact on the minds of the viewers and is also more readily accessible to all including children at home. Unlike the print media, however, there is a built-in limitation on the use of electronic media because the airwaves are a public property and hence are owned or controlled by the Government or a central national authority or they are not available on account of the scarcity, costs and competition.”⁷⁸ The Judgment also most importantly held that, “Broadcasting is a means of communication and, therefore, a medium of speech and expression. Hence in a democratic polity, neither any private individual, institution or Organization nor any Government or Government organization can claim exclusive right over it. Our Constitution also forbids monopoly either in the print or electronic media. The monopoly permitted by our Constitution is only in respect of carrying on a trade, business, industry or service under Article 19 [6] to sub serve the interests of the general public”.⁷⁹

The judgment also argued that the unbridled discretion with the government to grant license or access to media “will enable the government to effectively suppress the freedom of speech and expression instead of protecting it and utilizing the licensing

⁷⁸ The Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting Vs. Cricket Association of Bengal & Anr. 1995 AIR 1236. accessed from: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/539407/> Date: 08/07/2017

⁷⁹ Ibid.

power strictly for the purposes for which it is conferred.”⁸⁰ The Supreme Court instructed the Central Government to set up an independent autonomous public authority representative of all sections and interests in society to control and regulate the use of airwaves. The Supreme Court said that diversity of opinions, views and ideas cannot be provided by a medium controlled by a monopoly and stressed that this was true irrespective of whether the monopoly is of the State or any other individual, group or organization. This judgment gave legitimacy to private broadcasters in India in the post-liberalization period and paved the way for private broadcasters to enter into the media scene. Television, till then, was a state monopoly.

The examples provided here is intended to indicate that the such judgments of the Supreme Court had widened the scope of Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, thus contributing to the freedom of the press extensively. This, however, seemed to serve the end given the role of the press at that point of time; the press acted as a constructive opposition (to the ruling party when the Congress, under Nehru, had emerged the most favoured party of the Indian people and in power both at the Centre and all the states); the press, moreover, had assumed to itself an important role in the nation building process alongside the Nehruvian government.

While the Government’s interventions, by way of laws and regulations, were annulled by the higher judiciary in favour of a free press or a free media, the serious infringement on the freedom of press, after independence, was during the National Emergency of 1975-76 declared by the Indira Gandhi government. On the midnight of June 25th 1975, emergency was enforced and the President of India formally signed the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

order late in the night on 25th June 1975.⁸¹ On the very first night -- 25th of June 1975-- when Internal Emergency was being enforced, the electricity supply to the buildings on the Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, where most of the newspaper offices were located, was switched off on the instructions of Kishan Chand, Lieutenant Governor of Delhi.⁸² This was done to ensure that the newspapers from the capital were not printed that day and the news of the opposition rally at Ramlila Grounds and the large scale arrests of opposition leaders during the night were not reported to the people.

Opposition leaders including Jyotirmoy Basu of the CPI (M), Charan Singh of Lok Dal, Raj Narain of Samyukta Socialist Party, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani of the Jan Sangh and Madhu Dantavate were among the leaders arrested⁸³. The newspapers located in the Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg could not bring the next day's paper. But there were papers like *The Statesman* and *The Hindustan Times* which managed to print their papers as they were located in some other part of the capital and therefore got unnoticed by the government.⁸⁴

Subsequently, in just a couple of days after June 25, 1975, pre-publication censorship was imposed under Rule 48 of Defense (and Internal Security) of India Rules. This rule gave the government the authority to impose censorship or pre-censor only in the following subjects

- i. Defence of India;
- ii. Civil Defence;

⁸¹ Vergheese, B.G. *First Draft: Witness to the making of modern India*, (New Delhi: Tranquebar Press, 2010), p.212.

⁸² Ananth, Krishna, *India Since Independence-Making sense of Indian Politics*, (New Delhi: Pearson,2011),p.156

⁸³ *ibid*, p.155

⁸⁴ *ibid*, p.156

- iii. Public Safety;
- iv. Maintenance of Public Order; and
- v. Efficient conduct of Military Operations.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, on 26th of June 1975, the government issued guidelines expanding the scope of pre-censorship. The detailed guidelines issued for pre-censorship was issued as an advisory for the press which prohibited news such as the following:

- Reproduction of any objectionable matter already published;
- News relating to agitation and violent incidents;
- No reference be made of places of detention and names of political personalities detained;
- There should be no indication in the published material that it has been censored;
- Nothing should be published which is likely to bring disaffection towards government established by law in India.⁸⁶

During the period, Acts such as the Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act of 1976⁸⁷ was one such act which prohibited any criticism of the government, ministers and officials; and this act was rendered immune from being challenged in

⁸⁵ Ed. Seziyan, Era, Shah Commission Report, (Aazhi Publications, 2010),p.34

⁸⁶ Ibid,p.156

⁸⁷ The Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matters Act 1976, provided for the control of the press against publishing objectionable matters by empowering the government to demand security or to order forfeiture and by laying down statutory penalties. It also protects the order from being challenged of being unconstitutional on the ground of contravention of any fundamental rights by including it in the Ninth Schedule of the Indian constitution by the constitution 40th Amendment in 1976. The term “Objectionable Matter” was also interpreted to include incitement of disaffection towards the government, or to commit any offence or to commodities or seduction of any member of the armed forces; defamation of the President, Vice President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, or the Governor of a state. Cited from, Ghosh, Srikanta. Indian Democracy Derailed Politics and Politicians,(New Delhi:APH Publications,1997), p.2

court.⁸⁸ Even Parliamentary and court proceedings were barred from being reported in the press.⁸⁹ A large section of the Press succumbed to the pressure of the government not only to censorship but to the rewards that came with supporting the government. It has been discussed in the Justice Shah Commission Report that those media houses supporting the activities of the government were rewarded with more government advertisements through the Directorate of Audio Visual Publicity, (DAVP), even though their circulations were dwindling in due course of time.⁹⁰

A few newspapers, however, decided to resist the emergency and played, what can be called, the adversarial role, facing the ire of the government. *The Indian Express*, *The Statesman* and several regional newspapers also refused to toe the line of the government; this, however, was not easy and sustainable given the business model of the press industry in India and its dependence on revenue from government advertisements. Many of these newspapers, while resisting censorship, left blank spaces as a form of protest leaving it to the imagination of the readers about censorship, at least in the week immediately after the Emergency was declared and until this strategy was banned by the censor authorities.

An array of journalists was arrested for dissent and prominent among them were Kuldip Nayar, A.D Gorwala, Nikhil Chakravarty and Romesh Thapar. Mention may be made of B.G. Verghese, critical of the Emergency, who was the editor of *The Hindustan Times*, and was sacked as an effort by K.K. Birla (proprietor of The Hindustan Times) to

⁸⁸ Chandra, Bipin, *In the Name of Democracy*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003), p.158

⁸⁹ Sezhyan, Era, (Ed.). *Shah Commission Report: Lost, and Regained* (Chennai: Aazhi Publication, 2010) p.35

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p.39

please the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.⁹¹ B.G. Varghese, in his memoir, cites L.K. Advani's observation, the Janata Government's Information and Broadcasting Minister, on the role of the press during the Emergency. Advani had observed: "The press was asked to bend; but it crawled."⁹² The Emergency brought out the vulnerability of the media freedom in a big way. It is also a fact that the press gained a new momentum after the emergency. In the words of Praful Bidwai:

The end of Emergency rule saw the birth of investigative reporting and the media's espousal of "new social movements" and concerns such as environmental protection, human rights, feminism, emancipation of dalits(former untouchables), and indigenous people's struggles for their right to survival with dignity.⁹³

The next blow on the media freedom was the Defamation Bill introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1988.⁹⁴ The Bill was introduced, in August 1988, and was passed in the Lok Sabha. The Bill sought to curb tendentious writing and placed the onus of proof on the offending papers.⁹⁵ Verghese writes: "The deteriorating political conditions and mounting discord, aggravated by drought, had led to increasing media criticism that chafed Rajiv. The unremitting pursuit of the Bofors scandal, was possibly the last straw. In August 1988, he introduced a Defamation Bill curbing tendentious writing and placing the onus of proof on offending papers."⁹⁶

However, unlike the Emergency era, when the fundamental rights were curtailed and people were sent to jail without trial for any dissent against the government, this time

⁹¹ Guha, Ramachandra. India After Gandhi, (New Delhi:Picador India, 2007), p.502

⁹² Verghese, B.G. First Draft: Witness to the making of modern India (New Delhi: Tranquebar Press, 2010), p.222.

⁹³ Bidwai, Praful, The Indian Media:A grave crisis of credibility, (IPS, Asia Pacific, 2006), p.3

⁹⁴ The Defamation Bill, 1988 was introduced and passed in the Lok Sabha. The Bill however lapsed and was not passed in the Rajya Sabha. The Government introduced the Bill titled "The Defamation Bill, 1988" on 30th August, 1988 and was passed on the same day. cited from the Parliamentary Bills Information system from the Loksabha Website

⁹⁵ Verghese, *Op.cit.*, p.348

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.348

thousands of journalists were out on the streets protesting against the bill. The long tradition of protest against legislations muzzling free press was re-established.

Emergency was indeed a big learning process for the press in India. The realization among the journalists that the free press can be held hostage even by a democratically elected government made them conscious of their duties. This could be described as period of pro-active and investigative journalism. Mention may be made of Arun Shourie, of *The Indian Express*, who pioneered investigative journalism in India. He exposed the then Maharashtra Chief Minister, A.R. Antulay, for collecting huge sums in the name of a Trust from the sugar crushers; it came to be known as India's Watergate or Antulay's Trustgate Scandal.⁹⁷ Antulay had to resign as Chief Minister following his conviction by the Bombay High Court subsequently on 13th January, 1982.⁹⁸

Yet another instance of such investigative journalism was by Ashwini Sarin, in *The Indian Express*. Sarin exposed human trafficking in the Agra-Morena-Mainpuri-Etah area by demonstrating an act of trafficking as evidence: Sarin 'bought' a girl named "Kamala" for Rs.5000 and exposed the rampant human trafficking in that tribal belt. The news-report titled 'I bought Kamala for Rs. 5000'⁹⁹ sent shivers across the society and made people who matter sit up and act. It is not necessary here to debate his methods; this is not the central concerns of this chapter or this thesis. The crux of the matter was that

⁹⁷ Abdul Rahman Antulay was the Chief Minister of Maharashtra who had to resign after the Bombay High Court convicted him of extortion on January 13, 1982. He had garnered Rs 30 crore from businesses dependent on state resources like cement, and kept the money in a private trust. It was the era of the 'Licence Raj' and Antulay was found to have favoured the donors by allotting cement quotas, which were under government control. When the scandal was exposed by media, Antulay was cornered and he had no option but to resign and went into oblivion.

⁹⁸ Swarup, Harihar. *Power Profiles*, (New Delhi: Har Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2010), p.30

⁹⁹ Maitra, Kiranshankar. *The Twilight Zone: Ladies of the Night*, (New Delhi: Sterling Paperbacks, 1997), p.111

his work, indeed, re-engaged the Indian society on the issue of human trafficking and a space was created for an open debate on the issue.

The Bofors scandal was yet another huge expose, in the 1980s. In the year 1987, allegations of bribery in the purchase of Bofors Field Guns by the Indian Army were investigated and brought in to the public realm by Chitra Subramaniam and N Ram of *The Hindu* newspaper. The Bofors scandal remains, till date, a landmark in the history of investigative journalism in India.¹⁰⁰ In the 1980s, the media not only informed people about affairs of the government and the state but also lent its voice to the voiceless.

Meanwhile, there was a surge in the circulation figures of newspapers as well as the arrival of a number of new ones post-emergency. One of the important reasons for the increase in the newspaper circulation and readership during the period was due to the increase in the literacy rates. Table 1.1 indicates a steady rise in the literacy rates in the states. With more literate people increasing, the circulation figures of the newspapers also increased.

Table 1.1:

State wise literacy rate in India from 1961-1981(in percentage)

<u>State</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1981</u>
Jammu & Kashmir	12.95	21.71	30.64
Punjab	NA	34.12	43.37
Chandigarh	NA	70.43	74.80

¹⁰⁰ The Bofors scandal was a major political scandal that occurred between Sweden and India during the 1980s and 1990s, initiated by Indian National Congress (Congress party) politicians and implicating the Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and several other members of the Swedish and Indian governments who were accused of receiving kickbacks from Bofors AB for winning a bid to supply India's 155 mm field howitzer. It was revealed through investigative journalism tipped off by a Reuters news revelation on Swedish radio, followed up by a team led by N. Ram of the newspaper *The Hindu*. The journalist who secured the over 350 documents that detailed the payoffs was Chitra Subramaniam reporting for *The Hindu*.

Uttrakhand	18.93	33.26	46.06
Haryana	NA	25.71	37.19
Delhi	61.95	65.05	71.94
Rajasthan	18.12	22.57	30.11
Uttar Pradesh	20.87	23.99	32.65
Bihar	21.95	23.17	32.32
Sikkim	NA	17.74	34.05
Arunachal Pradesh	7.13	11.29	25.55
Nagaland	21.95	33.78	50.28
Manipur	36.04	38.47	49.66
Mizoram	44.01	53.80	59.88
Tripura	20.24	30.98	50.10
Meghalaya	26.92	29.49	42.05
Assam	32.95	33.94	NA
West Bengal	34.46	38.86	48.65
Odisha	21.66	26.18	32.62
Madhya Pradesh	21.41	27.27	38.63
Gujarat	31.47	36.95	44.92
Maharashtra	35.08	45.77	57.24
Andhra Pradesh	21.19	24.57	35.66
Karnataka	29.80	36.83	46.21
Kerala	55.08	69.75	78.85
Tamil Nadu	36.39	45.40	54.39

Source: Office of the Registrar General, accessed from: indiabudget.nic.in (Ministry of Finance)

Note: Numbers are in percentage

The lifting of the emergency and the ending of pre-publication censorship led to the coming up of a number of newspapers. Robin Jeffrey explains the increase of newspapers and their sales in the post emergency period. To quote Jeffrey:

In three years- between the depths of the “emergency” in 1976 and 1979, the year before Mrs. Gandhi returned to power- newspaper circulation rose 40 per cent for daily newspapers and 34 %

for periodicals. The sales of Hindi dailies surpassed those of English for the first time in 1979... Such increases were notable, but they only hinted at the profound changes in within the newspaper industry. The immense curiosity created by the “emergency” generated a market for anyone with a story to tell and a press to print in it.” Many of these newspapers were owned by the Indian capitalists. The growth of these newspapers also implies the rising literacy levels.¹⁰¹

He also calls this period as the “revolution of Indian language newspaper”.¹⁰²

Jeffrey explains this increase in readership in the year 1976, where according to the size of the population (755 million) and number of newspapers would have 80 people clustered around a single newspaper copy.¹⁰³ But after the gradual opening up of the economy in the 1980s and then with the economic liberalization since 1991, the number of people who would cluster around a single newspaper in the year, 1996 would fall to just twenty. It means that the width of readership of newspapers is increasing and the ratio of a newspaper in terms of its readership increased from 1: 80 to 1:20. And in general, the decades of 1970’s and 1980s saw high growth of the newspapers industry. This period also saw the rise of literacy which is an important factor for people to be able to read a newspaper.

Along with the increase in literacy another important factor that have allowed the newspapers to grow include the use of technology. Technology includes Offset and Photocomposing which allowed the newspapers to become attractive and news dissemination became more convenient. The office of the RNI (Registrar of Newspapers for India) approved import of equipment worth Rs. 20 million in the ten years following the internal emergency.¹⁰⁴ The second Press Commission mentions the Press Registrars Report of 1979, according to which only one newspaper was using photo composing and

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey, Robin. India’s Newspaper Revolution, (New Delhi:Oxford University Press,2010), pp.38,39

¹⁰² *ibid*, p. 1

¹⁰³ *ibid*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*,pp.42,43

only less than ten newspapers were using offset printing presses.¹⁰⁵ And this clearly establishes the use of technology and a major boost in bringing the offset technology. The Indian language newspapers, before the coming of photo composing, faced difficulties because of the nature of scripts, in which newspapers were printed. A mechanical casting of type was used to print Indian languages and a linotype hot metal machine was used to print English newspapers. This made the printing process of regional language newspapers slower and the process more cumbersome.

Even though Offset printing and photo-composing was available even in the 1960's, the regional newspapers were unable to use them because of high cost and also because softwares were developed to produce programmes in Devanagiri only in 1979 and in other Indian scripts by the early 1980s.¹⁰⁶ The computer technology made printing easier and almost 15 times faster than the earlier metal type machines.¹⁰⁷ The entry of computer technology in the regional newspapers must also be seen with the interest of the advertisers, who saw potential in them. The offset technology, along with the advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) during this period, helped in the growth of satellite editions of newspapers easy to operate. By 1987, more than 100 newspapers began using the photocomposing, which helped the regional languages to publish newspapers with computers in their regional languages.¹⁰⁸

Along with the technological advancement in printing, the period also saw a vast increase in advertisement expenditure by companies. Between 1976 and 1981,

¹⁰⁵ The Second Press Commission Report, 1988, Controller of Publications, Government of India, New Delhi, p.131

¹⁰⁶ Jeffrey, Robin, Media and Modernity: communications , women and the state in India (Ranikhet:Permanent Black,2012),p.170

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*,p.171

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey, Robin. India's Newspaper Revolution, *Op.cit.* p.42

expenditure on press advertising increased from Rs. 60 crores a year to Rs. 205 crore a year and between 1981 to 1989 the press advertising increased from Rs. 205 crore to Rs.900 crore.¹⁰⁹

So, the growth of newspapers can be attributed to a number of factors which include the rise of literacy creating new readers, the interest of advertisers in the potential of regional newspapers and one of the other important factors being the use of modern printing technology.

The growth of newspapers in the 1970's and in 1980's can be gauged from the table produced below. The table 1.2 seeks to interpret the impact of newspapers' circulation with the number of daily newspapers available for every thousand people.

Table 1.2:
Daily Newspaper per 1,000 people, 1951-1996

Years	1951	1956	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996
Population (Millions)	359	400	439	493	548	617	683	754	846	932
Daily Circulation of newspaper (Millions)	2.5	2.9	5.3	6.8	9.0	9.3	15.2	21.5	24.3	40.2
Dailies (Millions)	7	7	12	14	16	15	22	29	28	43

Note: Table reproduced from: India's Newspaper Revolution, Robin Jeffrey, (New Delhi:Oxford University Press), p.47

It is evident from the figures above that in the year 1976, 9.3 million newspapers were produced for the population of 617 million, indicating fifteen dailies for every 1,000 people as against the 2.5 in 1951.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*,p.176

To conclude this section, the role of the press in the post-independence period was a constructive one and it also resisted the attempts of state coercion and in the process it also emerged as a fierce watchdog against the state. In other words, the media was partnering to a political change inheriting the legacy of the freedom struggle. The notable point was that the press, though it was owned by the private players, played an important role in the deepening of the democratic institutions in India. Meanwhile, there was the government owned Radio and Television, which remained state controlled during the pre-liberalized period, thereby becoming the mouthpiece of the governments of the day. Advertisements continued to remain the sole source of income and the newspapers depended on government advertisements to a large extent during this period. The Emergency was a big blow to the Indian journalism. The press regained its power after the emergency and the 1980s was a period of investigative journalism, which was also adversarial and this certainly enhanced the role of the press in the cause of deepening of Democracy.

The gradual opening up of the economy by the government in the late 1980's also made the Indian capitalist class see prospects of making and selling consumer goods and it also led to the increase in the advertisement revenue of newspapers. The press, in this phase was no longer dependent, entirely, on government advertisements and hence was freed from the clutches of the party in power. The scene of the media underwent drastic change in terms of its growth and its ideological positioning with the India opening itself to the free market economy. The press or the media after liberalization became prone to the pressures of the market driven economy. While liberalization of the economy led to an exponential growth of the newspaper industry in terms of size and revenue, it also

leads to several other changes. The effects and changes in the media is discussed the next section.

Liberalization and the Free Press:

To place the implications of the liberalization process on the media, it is important to understand the political economy of liberalization; in other words, it is necessary to dig into the “ideology” of neo-liberalism which was celebrated (especially after the disintegration of Soviet Union and East European Blocs as the future by default) and presented as the most powerful and prominent philosophies of the present. Capitalism was scaled up to such an extent that it escaped none and it impacted upon every aspect of life. When it comes to defining neoliberalism, one is confronted by a plethora of definitions; mainly expressed in terms of the interests one represents (which side you are on, in simple words). But broadly, looking into the distinct nature of neoliberalism, it can be defined as a political ideology that adopts a free market in a deregulated political system.¹¹⁰ The emergence of neoliberal capitalism can be understood as a continuation of

¹¹⁰ A number of definitions are available for reference. “Neoliberalism” term appeared for the first time in 1925 in the writings of Han Honnegger and in many of the writings of Walter Lippman. (The Origins of Neoliberalism: Insights from economics and philosophy. Economist Fredrich Hayek wrote *The Road To Serfdom*, in which he advocates for less intervention of the government in the business and markets to remain unregulated. Hayek’s work had influenced politicians like Margaret Thatcher, who as an Oxford undergraduate student read Hayek and was influenced by his ideas and proclaimed that Hayakean ideas were what a right wing conservative party should believe in.(Unholy Trinity, p.14) Hayek also mentored a group of scholars in a society called the Mont Pelerin Society, where scholars contributed to the neoliberal thought. Here scholars exchanged their ideas and they attempted to reconstruct the theory of liberalism. Alexander Rustow, a member of this society, suggested the term ‘neoliberalism’ define their approach, which was accepted by the society. The term neoliberal was used by the group in the subsequent times in their discussion and in their writings. The emphasis was to develop an approach suggesting that the *laissez fraire* economics of the time was not sufficient to deal with the economic problems of the time. The group opposed many of the economic measures of Keynesian approach, adopted in the Post World War II period. John Maynard Keynes was a major proponent of the liberal capitalism and was critical of the neoclassical approach. Keynesian economists held the view that the capitalist economies have a fundamental flaw at the level of economy as a whole. It argues that there is no automatic mechanism in the economy to assure full employment of labour or to avoid occasional fluctuations and prolonged depressions. State intervention in the form of state spending when private investment declines to maintain full employment plays an important role in the Keynesian economics. The post World War II period Keynesianism became a dominant ideology in the United States. The role of the state became important in the economy whose

the development of capitalism after the dual revolution, a term coined by Eric Hobsbawm, referring to the period between 1789 and 1848, the Age of Capital. This period is characterized by the Industrial revolution in Britain and the French revolution which changed the political economy of the globe.

The Bretton Woods Institutions - IMF and the World Bank – both created in response to the crisis thrown up by capitalism and to itself in the inter-War years and after the end of the World War II, were supposedly to stand for international co-operation and equitable growth after the World War II, in reality, institutionalized the hegemonic position of the West, especially the United States and the UK. This system enabled the ex-colonizers to colonize despite decolonization of the newly independent countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America without physically colonizing them as in the previous instances.

As Nkwame Nkruma, the first Prime Minister of Ghana and the author of the book *Neo-Colonialism: The last stage of Imperialism* pointed out, the end of colonialism was not necessarily an end of economic colonialism.¹¹¹

The so-called Trade Negotiations were yet another weapon used by the West to retain control over the economy of the newly independent nations. The negotiations on

responsibility lies in providing an expanding supply of public good such as education and infrastructure. The role of the state also seen in correcting market failures and also reducing income inequality. This approach however was opposed mainly by thinkers like Milton Friedman and Frederick Hayek. Their approach of neoliberalism began to emerge in the 1970s, where they transformed the institutions of regulated capitalism into the institutions of neoliberal capitalism. One of the mentionable works in this area is Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat*, in which he tries to explain the emergence of the new economic order. For him the world has been leveled by globalization in the new form in the 21st century. He uses the metaphor of the world turning flat, meaning, in this new economic system of commerce, wherein all competitors have equal opportunities. He discusses what has led to the new system and mentions them as ten flatteners

¹¹¹ Smith, Brian. *Understanding Third World Politics: Theories of Political Change and Development*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) p. 54.

General Agreements on Trade and Tariffs (GATT)¹¹² began in 1947 and it ended with the Uruguay Round of negotiations (8th *round* of multilateral trade negotiations (MTN) in 1994, with the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on 1 January 1995. The culmination of the Uruguay Round of negotiations also increased the scope for trade and the neoliberal policies and played a significant role in furthering the agenda of neoliberal capitalism. The WTO further intensified the economic and thus social inequalities among the States and people in the countries that existed in the peripheries.

The oil crisis of the 1970s and implications on the West and elsewhere led to raging debates about the causes of the problems that afflict the economy. David M.Kotz writes about the situation thus:

Various business groups argued for a variety of solutions, as did representatives of other segments of society. One prominent investment banker, Felix Rohatyn of Lazard Freres and Company, advocated a still more regulated form of capitalism based on tripartite deals among representatives of business, labour and government. However, that direction never gained traction among big business which, in content of the economic crisis of the 1970's, gradually coalesced around a different solution. That solution is what we know today as neoliberalism.¹¹³

Privatization and the contraction of public sectors were replaced by relatively well paid public sector jobs with low paid private sector jobs. On the one side, jobs in the informal and thus unorganized sector, increased considerably; on the other side the State withdrew from the services (a condition prescribed by the World Bank) and other mechanisms of welfarism. To rely on Kotz again, the withdrawal of the social welfare

¹¹² The written objectives of the GATT are that it operated with the prime assumption of 'non-discrimination' in international trade among the member nations. It regulated trades in goods (physical commodities) upon the principles of liberalization, equal market access, reciprocity, non-discrimination, and transparency. The principle of transparency implied the governments need to clearly specify its policies of protectionism and stating them clearly. One of the concepts emerged in the GATT was MFN or Most Preferred Nation which meant formal agreements between two countries between any two member countries had to apply to all member countries and also members of GATT had to treat foreign firms in the same manner as domestic firms with regard to trade. The GATT was supposedly aimed at achieving economic growth everywhere.

¹¹³ David M. Kotz. *The Rise and Fall of the neoliberal Capitalism*,(USA: Harvard University Press, 2015)(Kindle version).

schemes of the government and its impact, “cutbacks and elimination of social welfare programs directly increased household income inequality, while also reduced the bargaining power of workers as a whole, since the fall back position of employment grew worse. Of particular importance has been the big decline in the real value of minimum wage, which effects, which effects is the pay rate for a broad swatch of low wage jobs.”¹¹⁴

The neoliberal order brought in an era where transnational companies have managed to secure enormous power. Today, 38,000 transnational companies and their branches conduct nearly two thirds of the world’s trade. ‘Out of the 38,000, there are eighty six most powerful enterprises whose combined sales are larger than the exports of nearly all the nation states in the present time.’¹¹⁵ The international trade in the present context, is in many ways about investments, alliances and agreements among transnational corporations. These corporations are interested in nations where profits can be maximized and are attracted to technological capabilities, high productivity together with low wages. The Uruguay Round of negotiations and the creation of the WTO has greatly helped these corporations to gain access to nearly all nations and their markets. The international financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank have managed to emerge more powerful with authority to monitor and supervise economic policies in its member countries. They have become the face of the neoliberal hegemony.

This is the historical context of neoliberalism in which India broke with its Nehruvian ‘protection’ economy and the implications were found in every walk of life-

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Rivero, De Oswaldo, *The Myth of Development*, (London: Zed Books,2010), p.28

economy, polity, culture and so on. Robert W. McChesney, one of the prominent critics of neoliberalism, discusses how the neoliberal democracy produces consumers in the place of citizens; in his words:

Neoliberal democracy. Instead of citizens, it produces consumers. Instead of communities, it produces shopping malls. The net result is an atomized society of disengaged individuals who feel demoralized and socially powerless... In sum, neoliberalism is the immediate and foremost enemy of genuine participatory democracy, not just in the United States but across the planet, and will be for the foreseeable future.¹¹⁶

Prabhat Patnaik, presents the fact on how far a neoliberal state needs a restructuring of its polity to suit the needs of the global finance capital. According to him:

Neoliberal measures include, above all, an opening of the economy to free cross-border movements of capital, including, in particular, finance capital. In a country that is open to such free movements of finance capital, if the state pursued measures that are disliked by finance, then finance would pull out of the country and move elsewhere; and, since such movements can be quite large, the economy would find itself in an acute crisis. In a neoliberal economy, therefore, the state is forever caught in the attempt to retain “the confidence of the investors” in the economy (a euphemism for keeping finance capital happy). For this it has to bow to the caprices of globalised finance capital (with which domestic big capital is closely integrated) and adopt only such measures as finance likes, that is, measures that promote its interests.¹¹⁷

The democracies, therefore, suffer in a system where a democratically elected government becomes a custodian to ensure a free market, rather than the interests of the people who elected them. Free market capitalism means less intervention by the government in the market. But it does not mean the government has no role to play in the economy. The role of the state gets altered where it facilitates the processes in the economy and maintains market relations and market exchange.

If we try to understand neoliberalism in the Indian context, the GDP numbers have increased and are often treated as barometers of progress. Amartya Sen and Jean

¹¹⁶ Chomsky, Noam, Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999), p.6 (Kindle version)

¹¹⁷ Patnaik, Prabhat, Ways of neoliberalism, Frontline, 25-28 December, 2012 Accessed from: <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2925/stories/20121228292501000.htm> on date: 09/07/2017

Dreze in their book examine the nature of India's growth story. They argue that the per capita expenditure in rural areas rose at an exceedingly low rate of 1 percent per year between 1993-94 and 2009-2010 and even in urban areas the average per capita expenditure grew at only 2 percent.¹¹⁸ They also delve into how the real wages¹¹⁹ in the agriculture sector have seen a major slowdown in the post reform period. The growth in real wages which was about 5 percent in the year 1980's have gradually come down to 2 percent in the 1990's and virtually zero in early 2000s.

Table 1. 3:

Data showing Real Wages in the Rural Sector 1983-84 to 2010-11

Estimated growth Rate of real agricultural wages

Reference period	Men	Women
1983-84 to 1987-88	5.1	-
1987-88-1993-94	2.7	-
1993-94 to 1999-2000	1.3	-
2000-1 to 2005-6	0.1	-0.05
2005-6 to 2010-11	2.7	3.7

Reproduced from: Sen, Amartya, Dreze, Jean, An Uncertain Glory: India and its contradictions, Penguin Books, New Delhi, Kindle version, p.16

The growth in the GDP numbers often conceal many of the other factors necessary for the overall development of the nation. For example, the health sector: To borrow from Sen and Dreze, public expenditure on health in India is around 1 percent of

¹¹⁸ Sen, Amartya, Dreze, Jean. An Uncertain Glory: India and its contradictions,(New Delhi: Penguin Books) Kindle version, p.16

¹¹⁹ The value of money earned by workers in an economy at a particular time, after taking into account the effect of inflation on what can be bought with that money.

the GDP in the last two decades. They compare health expenditure in other countries such as China, Latin America and in countries in European Union where they spend 2.7, 3.8 and 8 percent respectively.¹²⁰

As for the impact of this on the behaviour of the media in India, which is the concern of this research, one finds that it has had far reaching implications. It has been seen, in the previous section, that the newspaper industry saw tremendous growth during the 1980s. And it was further accelerated by the changes in the economic policy since 1991. The medium of television, which had remained a state monopoly in the form of Doordarshan until then, saw a change with the advent and growth of private television channels coming after the economic liberalization. Even though cable television started in India in the 1980's one of the important events that propelled satellite broadcasting in India was the broadcasting of CNN through cable TV in India in the early 1990s.¹²¹ Cable operators started satellite broadcasting, which they telecast with the help of wires to households. Star TV was launched in India in the year 1991 and it started with Prime Sports channel and then added the MTV channel. It was in this period that Subhash Chandra launched ZEE TV (in October 1992) and became the first privately owned satellite broadcasting company.¹²²

Indian television began to grow and by 1995, Hindustan Times, Sony Entertainment Television, Eenadu TV had entered the scene.¹²³ The total number of television channels was 623 in the year 2011 and the television industry was estimated to

¹²⁰ *ibid.* p.142

¹²¹ The Gulf War that broke in the year 1991, was broadcasted live in many five star hotels with the help of a dish antennae.

¹²² Khandekar, Vanita Kohli. *The Indian Media Business*, (New Delhi: Response Books,2011), p.78

¹²³ *ibid.*,p.79

be at Rs 329 billion. The number of Television sets, which was just 41 in the year 1962, with only one channel now covered more than 146 million households with satellite and terrestrial broadcast.¹²⁴ In the year 2016, the overall size of the industry is estimated to be Rs. 588 billion, which is clearly a sign of growth.¹²⁵ The clear growth of the television industry (See Table 1.6) indicates that the rise in the television sector has not deterred the growth of the print media in India. While in the print media, which is the concern of the thesis, one of the notable features was the decline in the circulation of newspapers in the Western countries, the scene in this regard in India seems to be the opposite (See Table 1.6). Out of the top 100 paid-for dailies in the world, 19 are from India; this is second only to China and also India is the second largest newspaper market in the world.¹²⁶

Table 1.4 shows the growth in paid circulation in some of the Western countries of the world along with India, showing positive signs of growth of the paid dailies. The table clearly shows growth of Indian daily newspapers in the years 2013, 2014 and in the year 2015. Whereas in many of the western countries, there is a decline in circulation over these period. The KMPG projections for advertising revenue in the print is shown positively increasing for the years of 2017, 2018 , 2019, 2020 which is Rupees (billion) 215.0, 233.3,254.9,276.2 respectively¹²⁷.

¹²⁴ KMPG, Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report, 2017,p.9


¹²⁵ *ibid*

¹²⁶ Khandekar, *Op.cit.*, p.1

¹²⁷ Audit Bureau of Circulations Press release dated: 8th May, 2017

Table no: 1.4

Circulation of Paid for Dailies in the world.

Countries	2013	2014	2015
Australia	2,281(-10%)	2,008(-12%)	1,879(-6%)
France	6,537(-4%)	6,324(-3%)	6,163(-3%)
Germany	17,242(-4%)	16,307(-5%)	15,786(-3%)
India	224,338(14%)	264,290(18%)	296,303(12%) 
Japan	46,999(-2)	45,363(-3)	44,247(-2)
UK	9,852 (-8)	9,820 (0%)	8,628(12%)
USA	40,712 (-6%)	40,420(-1%)	39,527(-2%)

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations Press release dated: 8th May, 2017.

Khandekar stresses that there is fascination for the written word and advertising is still high for print even when TV or radio seems to dominate the media scenario. The Indian Readership Survey of 2014 (Table 1.6) shows growth of the readership of regional newspapers and also of the English language readers when compared to the survey of 2013.¹²⁸ The Table 1.5 shows an upward trend in the readership of newspapers in India. It also evident that the regional language newspapers of Hindi, Malayalam and Tamil newspapers have, among them, the highest readership among other regional language newspapers.

¹²⁸ The Indian Readership Survey,2014 Accessed from:
<http://www.mruc.net/sites/default/files/IRS%202014%20Topline%20Findings0.pdf> Date: 2/05/2017

Table 1.5

Top Newspapers in India and their readership* in 2013-14

Publication	Language	Periodicity	2013	2014
Dainik Jagaran	Hindi	Daily	15,527	16,627
Hidustan	Hindi	Daily	14,246	14,746
Dainik Bhaskar	Hindi	Daily	12,857	13,830`
Malaya Manorama	Malayalam	Daily	8,565	8,803
Daily Thanthi	Tamil	Daily	8,156	8,283
Rajasthan Patrika	Hindi	Daily	7,665	7,905
Amar Ujala	Hindi	Daily	7,071	7,808
The Times of India	English	Daily	7,254	7,590
Matrubhumi	Malayalam	Daily	6,136	6,020
Lokmat	Marathi	Daily	5,601	5,887

*The Figures in 000s(which means the figure 15,527 will mean 15,527,000) Source: Indian Readership Survey, 2014

The following table shows the growth of different media from 2005 to 2008 in India.

Table 1.6
Comparative data on Growth of different media during 2005 and 2008 in India
(Figures in lakhs)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	Change% (2005-2008)
12+ population	7,780	8,040	8,243	8,429	8.3
Literates	5,087	5,235	5,513	5,723	12.5
Any media	5,257	5,441	5,614	5,745	9.3
Any Publication	2,913	3,102	3,155	3,234	11.1
TV (Any TV)	4,277	4,378	4,538	4,674	9.3
TV (C&S)	2,102	2,308	2,553	2,873	36.7
Any Radio	1,609	1,699	1,788	1,804	12.1
FM radio	716	852	969	1,120	6.3

Cinema	889	868	837	833	-6.2
Internet	111	122	143	173	55.9

Source: FICCI Report, The Indian Media and Entertainment Business, March, 2009

The table shows growth of all media except cinema. The highest growth can be seen in the FM radio followed by internet, television (cable and satellite channels) and publications.

The trajectory of growth of the print and the online world is different in the developed countries where there is either decline or stagnation in the market for the print. However, in India, the print media has shown growth during the same period. This is evident in the data presented in Table 1.5.

The print media is presently growing at 4.87% increase in CAGR over the period of last 10 years (2006-2016) and 2.37 crore copies of newspapers were added in these period which was accompanied by 251 news publishing centers.¹²⁹ Meanwhile, the government's decision in 2002¹³⁰ and also in 2006 to open print media for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) saw a huge growth in the sector bringing in scores of print publication, magazines and has also brought in investments of over a billion dollars. One of such first

¹²⁹ ABC Press Release, 8th May, 2017.

¹³⁰ The Cabinet Resolution of June 2002 superseded the 1955 cabinet resolution prohibiting foreign investment in any print publication. According to the resolution in 2002, the FDI inflows into print publications will be subject to the following:

- Indian shareholding should not be dispersed and the largest Indian shareholder's stake should be significantly higher than the foreign shareholder.
- Prior approval would be required from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting ministry before any change in shareholding pattern
- Government would not allow post-facto information or disclosure.
- Three fourth of the board of directors of a company that has got FDI will have to comprise Indian residents.
- Key editorial posts in the company where FDI comes in will have to be held by resident Indians. (Cited from Report by Crisil, Titled: FDI in print media: The Harbinger of intense competition.2002)

major investments, in the print sector, after the opening up of FDI in print, was when Handerson Asia Pacific Equity Partners bought stakes of over 19% in HT Media (see Table 1.5) for about 1 billion INR. There were other newspaper houses like *Business Standard - Financial Times* and *Jagaran Prakashan* – where independent investments happened.

The Economist, in an article titled, “Why India’s newspaper business is booming” also points out that the regional press in India is growing. It also mentions that in the year 2015, the Indian newspaper industry saw a growth of as much as 8%, which is rare in comparison to many Western countries where the revenues in the print are in decline.

The most important factor to be noted here is that between 2010 and 2014, the advertising revenues of the newspapers rose by 40%. An explanation to this increase may be found in the new phenomena where many English dailies tended to slip in supplements which are, in fact, nothing but advertorials. It may be pointed out here that this was also accompanied by the ‘low cover price of such newspapers and this was done to the ridiculously low levels as the annual subscription of a few papers in India cost only Rs 399 (\$5.80), roughly the cost of a Sunday edition of the New York Times.’¹³¹ Yet another development, a direct implication of liberalisation on media, was that the changes in the policies on Foreign Direct Investment between 2002 and 2005. One of the notable relaxations offered in the year 2005 was that the Foreign Investment including FDI by foreign entities, NRIs, PIOs, etc., and portfolio investments by recognized FIIs, being allowed up to a maximum of 26% of paid-up equity of the new entity in the news and

¹³¹ The Economist, Why India’s newspaper business is booming, Feb 22nd 2016, Accessed from: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2016/02/economist-explains-13>

current affairs section.¹³² A large number of print publications started after 2005 with more than 200 known publications, mostly in the form of magazines.¹³³

It must be mentioned here that FDI in print is now permitted to the tune of 100% except in the news and current affairs category, mostly newspapers, and the FDI cap has been kept at 26% only for the news and current affairs category. In this category certain restrictions still exist which includes a). The largest shareholders must hold at least 51 % equity. b). Three fourths of directors and all executive and editorial staff must be Indians.¹³⁴ In the news and current affairs, print alone attracted investments of over Rs 10 billion between 2006 and 2008.¹³⁵

Table 1. 7.
An illustration of foreign investments in Indian Entertainment and Media industry in 2006.

<u>Foreign Investor</u>	<u>Indian Entity</u>	<u>Segment</u>	<u>Nature of Investment</u>	<u>Reason</u>
Virgin Radio Asia	HT media	Radio	Equity Stake	Entry into FM radio segment
Financial Times (Pearson Group)	Business Standard	Newspaper Publishing and print media	Equity Stake	Expansion and strengthening of Operation
Independent News & Media(UK)	Jagaran Prakashan	Newspaper Publishing and print media	Equity Stake	Expansion and strengthening of Operation
T Rowe Price International	Mid Day Multimedia	Newspaper Publishing and print media	Equity Stake	Expansion and strengthening of Operation

¹³² Guidelines for (i) PUBLICATION OF NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS DEALING WITH NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS. (ii) PUBLICATION OF FACSIMILE EDITIONS OF FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, July 2005, p.2

¹³³ Khandekar, *Op.cit.*, page:7

¹³⁴ Reserve Bank of India, Foreign Exchange Department Notification, Dated: 15/02/2016

¹³⁵ Khandekar, *Op.cit.*, p.7

AMP Handerson, UK	HT media	Newspaper Publishing and print media	Equity Stake	Expansion and strengthening of Operation
Reuters , UK	Times Global Broadcasting	Television Production Broadcasting	Equity Stake	Expansion and strengthening of Operation
Americorp Ventures, Mauritius	Asianet communications	Television Broadcasting	Equity Stake	Expansion and strengthening of Operation
Bear Stearns	Adlabs Films	Film Production and Exhibition	Equity Stake	Expansion and strengthening of Operation
3i(UK based private equity FTSE 100 company)	Nimbus communications	Television and Films	Equity stake	Expansion and strengthening of Operation

Source: FICCI Report, The Indian Media and Entertainment Business, March, 2006

Newspapers, in this new set up, after the economic liberalization, entered into new kinds of deals. Many newspapers launched their business newspapers like *The Hindustan Times* launched its business newspaper *Mint*, while *The Business Standard* began publishing in Hindi and Gujarati and in several editions, *Dainik Bhaskar* launched *Business Bhaskar*. The India Today group or the Living Media Group, tied up with *Daily Mail* from UK to start *Mail Today* and *The Hindu's* publisher Kasturi and Sons, started a free tabloid named *Ergo*.¹³⁶

Along with liberalization, the period also saw a new generation entering into the “business” of newspapers. Mention maybe made of the entry of Samir Jain into the Bennet Coleman and Co. (BCCL) in the 1990s and the use of marketing principles to turn

¹³⁶ Khandekar, *Op.cit*, p.7

newspapers into profit making business. Madhu Trehan, editor of the website newslaundry, in an interview for this study explains how *The Times of India* started the concept of 'paid news'. She mentions how the newspaper began to charge celebrities for coverage in their newspaper which slowly crept into the business pages of the newspaper. In the business pages, the corporates would write their own copy and this would be published as news. She also mentions of Vineet Jain, managing director of BCCL, the company owning *The Times of India*, as saying, "I am not in the business of journalism, I am in the business of advertising". She says that by being in the business of advertisement, they are fooling people into believing that they are in journalism. Journalism, according to her, is a public service profession just like a doctor, where a doctor cannot conduct a surgery just for money, when it is not required.

Similar arguments were made by Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, who also writes about the "paid news". Thakurta elaborates this tendency and in his own words:

The private treaties was "pioneered by BCCL, which involves giving advertising space to corporate entities in exchange for equity shares. The success of this scheme turned BCCL into one of the largest private equity investors in India. Although BCCL spokespersons argue that editorial content is not influenced by advertisers and companies in which BCCL has investments, the potential for conflict of interest is obvious given the porous nature of the marketing-editorial wall. If favourable news is published about a client and adverse news is not reported, both the publishing company and the advertising company stand to gain.¹³⁷

The opening up of the economy and the lure of advertising revenues ensure competitive advantage over rivals to ensure profitability. The earlier restrictions like import of newsprint were relaxed as newsprint import was placed under general license. The growth of newspapers, as it has been discussed earlier, which started in the 1980s, reached new heights after the liberalization. As advertising is the main source of revenue

¹³⁷ Paranjoy Guha Thakurta , 'Murdochisation' of the Indian media, Frontline, Volume 28 - Issue 16 :: Jul. 30-Aug. 12, 2011, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2816/stories/20110812281601900.htm> accessed on date

for the media in India, the figures indicated in the Table 1.9 shows an upward shift in almost all the media. Print and television remains the media where the highest amount of advertising is spent. We also notice that the online media also picking up gradually in terms of advertising spending in the sector.

Table 1.8

Advertising revenues from 2011 to 2016.

Overall industry Size(INR Billion) For Calendar years	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Growth in 2016 over 2015
TV	116.0	124.8	135.9	154.9	181.3	201.2	11.0%
Print	139.4	149.6	162.6	176.4	189.3	201.3	6.3%
Digital advertising	15.4	21.7	30.1	43.5	60.1	76.9	28.0%
OOH(Out of Home Media)	17.8	18.2	19.3	22.0	24.4	26.1	7.0%
Radio	11.5	12.7	14.6	17.2	19.8	22.7	14.6%
Total	300.1	237.0	362.5	414.0	474.9	528.2	11.2%

Source: KPMG in India analysis and estimates, 2016-17.

So, we see that that media as a business proposition had clearly indicated growth in the market. With profit being the main motto of the newspaper industry in the present form, does it represent the multitude of voices and thus strengthen democracy. This, indeed, was one of the major concerns of the First Press Commission and the consequent Newspapers (Price and Pages) Order, 1960, which was found to infringe press freedom by the Supreme Court in the Sakal case, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The media, as it has been seen, has become rich but is it making democracy rich by being the voice of the voiceless and providing a platform for diverse opinions? A few other questions need scrutiny here:

- a) how the press handles questions of social inequalities,

- b) how does the press fare when the stories involve the interest of its advertisers.

Amartya Sen argues that even though in India there are some 86,000 newspapers and periodicals with a circulation of more than 370 million, along with the electronic medium and with the trend only rising, as different from many western countries where this has registered a decline, the media however has its own biases. He writes:

The weakness- and often failure- of the Indian media to rise to the challenge of India's problems, including the disparities and inequalities that characterize Indian society, arises mostly from media's own bias and selective focus-playing up some issues and events while ignoring others, including some very important and neglected subjects.¹³⁸

Sen and Dreze explain the crux of this bias: It is, according to them, where the media is an advertisement driven business. The economic dependence of the media on advertisement envisages their special focus on the potential consumers and what kind of news they desire on their breakfast table; accordingly, they manufacture the news for the bent and the beautiful. The excessive dependence on corporate advertisements also leads to a tendency to promote corporate culture and values that suit their needs. Journalists and editors are constantly under pressure and therefore seldom write on issues that involve the bread and butter of the common man. They turn their face away from issues such as the plundering of nature by the multinational and national corporations, or issues such as land grabbing, displacing and peoples' protests against such acts.

Yet another implication of the liberalization was the entry of the corporates into the business of news; this turned ownership patterns on its head. Media organizations now are owned and controlled by a wide variety of entities which include corporate

¹³⁸ Sen, Amartya, Jean Dreze. *India's Uncertain Glory: India and its contradictions*, (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 2013)(Kindle version).

bodies, societies and trusts, and individuals. Vinod Mehta, former editor of the Outlook magazine, in his memoir, mentions how the Administrative Staff College of India in a 200 page report mentions of ‘ample market dominance in specific markets does exist’ and argues for a regulatory framework restricting cross media ownership. Citing the enormous power of these corporates who own the media houses, Mehta also argues that even none of the Prime Ministers would wish to annoy the powerful media barons like the “Samir Jains and Mukesh Ambanis of our industrialist friendly republic”.¹³⁹ The following table shows the major media houses in India and their ownership pattern

Table 1.9
Shareholding pattern of some of the major media houses in India.

Media group	Media outlets	Promoter Groups ownership	Corporate ownership and Public ownership
Dainik Bhaskar Group	<u>Newspapers & Magazines:</u> DNA, Dainik Bhaskar, DB Star, Saurashtra Samachar, Business Bhaskar, Dainik Dibya Marathi, Aha! Zindagi, Bal Bhaskar	<u>Individual ownership</u> stake at: 52.29% <u>Corporate Ownership</u> Stake: 22.68	<u>Mutual Fund:</u> 4% <u>FII:</u> 16.46% <u>Corporate bodies:</u> 3.17 <u>Individual with Share Capital up to 1 lac:</u> .89% <u>Individual share with capital above 1 lac:</u> .38% <u>NRI:</u> 0.11%
	<u>FM Radio Channels:</u> 94.3 My	Promoters group includes: (With share of more than 10%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramesh Chandra Agarwal 	

¹³⁹ Mehta, Vinod, Editor Unplugged: Media, Magnates, Netas and Me (New Delhi:Penguin Viking,2014) p.83

	FM	(Chairman) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pawan Agarwal • Sudhir Agarwal • Girish Agarwal 	Corporate share holding includes the following: Bhaskar Infrastructure PVT ltd, Govt. of Singapore, Bhaskar Publications and allied services, Amansa Capital Pvt Ltd,Chambal Trading Pvt Ltd, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, Bhopal Financial Services, Nalanda India Equity Pvt Ltd., Peacock Trading Investment Pvt Ltd.
	<u>Subsidiaries:</u> DB powers, DB Malls, Amansa Capital		
Hindustan Times Group	<u>Newspapers:</u> Hindustan Times, Mint, Dainik Bhaskar, Hindustan, <u>Radio Channel:</u> Fever 104	<u>Individual ownership</u> stake at: 68.83%	<u>Corporate Ownership</u> Stake: 22.31
	<u>Subsidiaries:</u> HT syndication, HT Burda Media LTD, Desimartini, Firefly eventures.	<u>Promoters:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shobana Bhartia(Chairperson and Editorial Director) (Daughter of industrialist KK. Birla) • Priyavat Bhartia(Son of Shobana Bhartia) • Shamit Bhartia (Son of Shobhana Bhartia) 	Corporate shareholding of the following companies: (Shareholding less than 5%) SBI life, Reliance life insurance, HDFC mutual Fund, HPC Mauritius, Samllcap World fund Inc., HDFC standard life,

			ABP, Bajaj Allianz
Bennet Coleman and Company	<p>Newspapers & Magazines: The Times of India, Pune Mirror, Navbharat Times, Economic Times, Bangalore Times, Ahmedabad Mirror, Mumbai Mirror, Maharashtra Times, The Times of India(Crest Edition), Economic Times(Hindi), The Economic Times Wealth.</p> <p>Magazines: Filmfare, Femina, Lonely Planet, Grazia, iDiva, TopGear, Zigwheelz, Home Trends, Time& Style, BBC Knowledge, Amar Samay(Bengali)</p> <p>Websites: The Speaking Tree(English and in Hindi), Education Times.com, Timesjob.com, Techgig.com, Yolist.com, Timepluses.com, Artha, Times Foundation, Gaana, Times Music, indiatimes, 360 expericence, etc.</p>	<p>Promoters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samir Jain, Managing Director • Vineet Jain(Brother of Samir Jain) • Meera Jain(Wife of Samir Jain) • Trishla Jain 	<p>Company Shareholding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bharat Nidhi, Distribution of Newspaper and Magazines in India Ltd. Owns :24.41% (Director: Vineet Jain) • Ashok Viniyoga Limited, Owns: 18.02% • Arth Udyog Limited, Owns:: 9.31% • Sanmati Properties, Owns:9.75% • Jacaranda Corporate Services Owns: 8.93% • Camac Commercial Company ltd, Owns: 13.3% <p>Note: All The companies are registered at the</p>

	Books: Times Group Books		same address: 10, Daryaganj, Ground floor, New Delhi-110002
	Radio: Radio Mirchi		
Network 18Group	Television Channels: CNBC-TV18, CNBC Awaaz, CNBC-TV18 Prime HD, CNN-News18, IBN7 and IBN-Lokmat, Colors, Colors HD, Colors Infinity, Rishtey, MTV, MTV Indies, SONIC, Comedy Central, VH1, Nick, Nick Jr. and Nick Teen - and Viacom18 Motion Pictures, the group's film entertainment business. 10 regional news channels; ETV Urdu , ETV Rajasthan , ETV Bihar Jharkhand ,ETV MP Chattisgarh ,ETV UP Uttarakhand ,ETV Haryana Himachal Pradesh	Promoters share:75% of total shareholding RB Mediasoft Private Limited, RB Media Holdings Private Limited, Adventure Marketing Private Limited, Colorful Media Private Limited, Watermark Infratech Private Limited, RRB Mediasoft Private Limited, ¹⁴¹ (These companies own 60% from the Promoters Share) Teesta Retail Private Limited, Reliance Industries Limited, Independent Media Trust (held in the name of its Trustee Sanchar Content Private Limited Private Limited)	Public Shareholding : 25%(Includes : Mutual funds, Financial institutions, Insurance companies.)

¹⁴¹ IMT or Independent Media Trust is a trust set up by Reliance Industries to fund the promoters of Network18 and TV18 group. The IMT subscribed to Zero Coupon Optionally Convertible Debentures (ZOCB) in RB Mediasoft Pvt Ltd, RRB Mediasoft Pvt Ltd, RB Media Holdings Pvt Ltd, Adventure Marketing Pvt Ltd, Watermark Infratech Pvt Ltd, Colorful Media Pvt Ltd, all owned and controlled by Raghav Bahl. Before the subscription, Raghav Bahl and his affiliates controlled 40% in Network18. IMT had an option to convert the debentures into equity shares before 10 years. As a part of the terms of subscribing to the debentures, RIL subsidiary Infotel Broadband got preferential access to Network18's content from all its media and web properties and TV18's programming and digital content of all its broadcasting channels. Upon conversion, IMT would own 99.9% in the above-mentioned target companies. (Cited from Medianama accessed from: <https://www.medianama.com/2014/05/223-how-reliance-industries-acquired-network18-a-detailed-timeline-of-events/>)

	,ETV (Bangla, Karnataka, Gujarati, Odiya, Marathi, Kannada, Bangla, Gujarati and Oriya) These Channels were renamed to Colors Marathi, Colors Kannada, Colors Gujarati, Colors Bangla and Colors Odiya. ¹⁴⁰		
	Websites: Web18, newswire18, moneycontrol.com, firstpost.com, Cricketnext.com, ibnlive.com Magazines: forbes India, Overdrive, Better Photography, Better Interiors		
New Delhi Television(NDTV)	News Channels: NDTV 24x7 , NDTV India , NDTV Profit, NDTV Good Times, ATN NDTV 24x7	Promoters Shareholding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Pronoy Roy: 15.94% • Ms. Radhika Roy:16.32% • RRPRholdin g Private limited: 29.18% 	Public Shareholding: Foreign portfolio Investors: 18.77% Financial Institutions:0.01% Non Institutions and others: 19.14

Source: Newslaundry.com and BSE.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), in its 2014 report, did resonate the ideas expressed by the First Press Commission, arguing that the media cannot be compared with any other business activity as it is “the depository of facts and information, it is the preeminent instrumentality that moulds public opinion, tastes, and values. The media cannot be allowed to be captured by narrow interests of its titular

¹⁴⁰ Network18 Website accessed from: <http://www.network18online.com/About-Group-tv18.html>

ownership. It must be ensured that no particular interest is allowed to dominate media, both at the aggregate level and at the level of the individual media entity.”¹⁴²

The point is this indeed was a true picture. The difference, however, being that the media, in the liberalized context, has been found to create a corporate value that suits to the economy of liberalization: aggressive and greedy.

Looking into the complexity in terms of ownership patterns, the TRAI report recommended transparency disclosures to be put in public domain which includes information about shareholding pattern of the entity, FDI investment pattern, vested interests -- direct and indirect -- engaged in the entity, shareholding interest beyond 5% to be disclosed in the Transparency Disclosures. It also should include the loans made by and to the entity¹⁴³.

It is needless to say that the recommendations of this report were ignominiously ignored. But it does point out the lack of transparency in the matters of ownership, making it difficult even to ascertain whose interest is the media serving. Control of the media by political parties, the media corporate and non media entities have been in place. The TRAI report clearly stated the danger that has crept in the media domain - the *quid pro quo* deal between media houses and the corporate i.e. providing favorable coverage to them. An instance of this was the story of the “Radia Tapes”¹⁴⁴ involving prominent journalists from television, print, business heads and politicians exposing similar

¹⁴² Recommendations on Issues of Cross Media Ownership, TRAI,2014, p. 2

¹⁴³ *ibid*, p. 86

¹⁴⁴ The Radia tapes controversy relates to the telephonic conversations between Nira Radia, an influence peddler and an acquaintance of the (then) Indian telecom minister A. Raja, and with senior journalists, politicians, and corporate houses, taped by the Indian Income Tax Department in 2008–09. The tapes led to accusations of misconduct by many of these people which includes well known journalists, businessmen and politician. The Tapes were first carried by *The Open* magazine in the year 2010.

involvements in lobbying and taking important public policy decisions in consultation with corporate and the nexus between them.

The growing economic power of the media enhanced its ability to influence the social and political affairs and thus its ability to mould public opinion the way the media perceives it. Along with the newspapers, television's entry into the media scene had expanded the scope of media with its reach into the nook and corner of the country; it widens the scope even to illiterates. But in its quest for more profit, the priorities have shifted. More importantly, when the media speaks to its constituency, now the middle class which is also the consumer class, became its constituency. As P. Sainath says, the news priorities in the many English language dailies reveals that they "have lost their compass and with it their compassion".¹⁴⁵ The immense power of the media stands indifferent to many issues that warrant immediate attention. This has led to a loss of quality and credibility on the part of the media.

Yet another implication of the neo-liberal order on the Media in India was the emergence of a new journalistic culture that was brought into the newsrooms. The surpassing role of advertising has eaten into the prominent space of the editors in the newspapers. Sahana Udupa, in her book, *Making News in Global India*, writes about such a development in *The Times of India* and how the role of editor had changed over time. She writes:

At the TOI newsroom, editorial members often contrasted the current approach of their newspaper with earlier approaches, by pointing out that the editors of the previous generations had an air of self importance because they held the belief that the role of newspaper was to teach the readers what they should do and think. ... the revised news agenda and editorial policies of the paper were largely executed by the editorial and circulation personnel of the TOI, and later the branding team,

¹⁴⁵ As cited in *Writing a Nation*, Nirmala Lakshman, *Op.cit*, page:xxxii

who were groomed to implement , if not wholeheartedly embrace, the managements new vision of news and readers.¹⁴⁶

It is a fact that the cover price of a newspaper barely covers the cost of printing of newspapers, hence advertising remains the main source of revenue, as already has been discussed. Prior to these developments, the major editorial positions were cardinal to the newspaper and nobody (outside the realm like advertisement department or circulation department in a newspaper) dared to question them. In the changed scenario, the circulation department got into prominence and they began to dictate the editorial policy according to the market.

In such advertising driven revenue model, the smaller media or publications with contrarian or with left of centre orientations find it difficult to sustain as big corporate tend to discriminate them. Praful Bidwai also observes that independent dailies and small magazines are increasingly an endangered species despite the plurality in the country in terms of culture, language and region.¹⁴⁷ In fact some of the concern expressed by the First Press Commission Report seems to engulf the media or the press after liberalization.

To conclude, the press, by and large, was able to maintain its journalistic tradition of being a fearless watchdog and its role as an emancipator until the socialistic tradition remained in India. The neoliberal era brought with itself the ideas of market driven principles to the media. In this context, the study of the writings and approach of Noam Chomsky and Robert W.McChesney will further help to understand the media in the context of neo- liberal policies.

¹⁴⁶ Udupa, Sahana. News, Publics and Politics in Globalizing India: Media, Publics, Politics (UK:Cambridge University press, 2015), p.59

¹⁴⁷ Bidwai, Praful. The Indian media: A grave crisis of credibility. (IPS, Asia Pacific, 2006)

The approaches to study of media by Noam Chomsky and Robert W. McChesney:

It is already stated that the media landscape of India has changed after the economic liberalization. Technological convergence has allowed media conglomerates to combine print, television, radio and the internet and now the distribution avenues in the form of DTH(Direct to Home), HITS (Headened in the Sky) etc. The same conglomerates also controls the newspapers and television channels and now runs mobile networks offering services like 2G, 3G and now 4G. This form of ownership is known as the Vertical integration of media.¹⁴⁸ There is the involvement of large business houses in managing the media houses. The neoliberal policies of profit being the only driving force have entered the media space. In this section, an attempt is being made to understand the theoretical approach of scholars like Noam Chomsky and Robert W. McChesney to the study of media.

Ben Bagdikian, American Journalist and educator, in his preface to his critique of the contemporary media, *The Media Monopoly*, writes about how multiplicity of media outlets in America may appear to have diversity of opinions but in reality only five global dimensional firms¹⁴⁹ actually owns most of the newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios, radio and television stations. The companies have major share holdings in all the media genres, from newspapers to movie studios along with their distribution networks. According to Bagdikian, these five corporations wield more communication power than any despot or dictatorship in history. The media scene in

¹⁴⁸Vertical Integration is when a Media Company owns different businesses in the same chain of production and distribution. When a company expands its business into areas that are at different points on the same production path, such as when a manufacturer owns its supplier and/or distributor.

¹⁴⁹ These five conglomerates are Time Warner, by 2003 the largest media firm in the world; The Walt Disney Company; Murdoch's News Corporation, based in Australia; Viacom; and Bertelsmann, based in Germany.

India too seems to be moving towards the American way described by Bagdikian. For instance, in India, the largest listed company, Reliance Industries is fast expanding its footprint in the media sector. The Reliance Industries in India have invested in various media platforms like television which included TV18 group, Eenadu group, several channels in ETV group, print, news-websites like *firstpost*, and has entered into film production and distribution business and also owns DTH platforms (see Table 1.10). This makes Reliance one of the most powerful media conglomerates in the Indian scene making a resemblance to the state of American Media.

One of the most important perspectives to understand the media in the context of neo-liberal capitalism's influence over the media in the United States was presented by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in their seminal work, *Manufacturing Consent: Political Economy of the Mass Media*. The authors explain how the free market principles influence media biases. In the introduction, it writes,

Most bias choices in media arise from pre-selection of right-thinking people, internalized preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market and political power. Censorship is largely self-censorship, by reporters and commentators who adjust to the realities of source and media organizational requirements, and by people at higher levels within media organizations who are chosen to implement and have usually internalized, the constraints imposed by propriety and other market and governmental centers of power.¹⁵⁰

Herman and Chomsky explain how democracies often postulate that media is an independent entity and is committed itself to reporting the *truth*. The claim from the media is that their choice of news is unbiased and is professional and objective. They also claim that the media is free from the influences of the powerful social groups in the society. This idea is also supported by the members of the intellectual community. However, the truth is that the media, however, is not free from biases and the influences of powerful groups in the society. The elite in the society are able to “fix the premise of

¹⁵⁰ Herman, S. Edward and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, (London: Vintage Books, 1994) p. xii

discourse, to decide what the general populace is allowed to see, hear, and think about, and to “manage” public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns, the standard view of how the system works is at serious odds with reality.”¹⁵¹

Herman and Chomsky further expand on the inequality of wealth and power and its effects on the mass media. To explain how certain viewpoints are retained in the media and others are filtered out, the duo, uses a propaganda model; the choice to accept and reject news stories. The propaganda model seeks to explain biases in a democratic set-up where the media is in the private hands and no formal censorship is in place. The propaganda is even more difficult to trace in the media where there is apparent competition among media houses, attacks periodically and exposes corporate and governmental wrongdoing and portray themselves as the flag bearer of free speech and interest of the society. The limited nature of such critiques and the unequal access of resources in the media and its effects have its bearing on the behaviors and performance of media. The propaganda model explains how wealth and power have the ability to filter out news fit to print marginalizing dissent and allow the governmental and dominant views of the private interest as news. In the model of understanding propaganda, they use five news filters which include the following: 1). 1.Size Ownership, and Profit orientation of the Mass Media 2) The Advertising license to do business 3) Sourcing Mass Media 4) Flak and the Enforcers and 5) Anti communism .

The first filter is of Size Ownership and Profit Orientation of the Mass media can be understood in terms of how the mass media has been owned by a particular class of people belonging to the wealthy strata of the society. The media firms are large businesses owned and controlled by the wealthy owners and managers and they are

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, p.i

subjected to “sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces, and they are closely interlinked, and have important common interest with other major corporations, bank and government. The large scale investments as a pre-requisite for new entrants also act a hindrance making the concentration of ownership in the hands of a few corporations”¹⁵². There is also a structural relationship in the media company’s dependence and ties with government. Chomsky and Herman writes that, “The radio-TV companies dependence and networks all require licenses and franchises and are thus potentially subjected to government control and harassment. This technical legal dependence has been used as a club to discipline the media, and media policies that stray too often from an establishment orientation could activate a threat”¹⁵³. So the interest of big business plays and important role in selection of news. This acts as the first powerful filter that affects news choice of the media organizations.

The second filter of the propaganda model is advertising. The newspapers revenue model puts excessive dependence on advertising to cover the costs of doing business. Chomsky and Herman writes that, “With the growth of advertising, papers that attract ads could afford a copy price well below production cost. This put papers lacking in advertising at a serious disadvantage: their prices would tend to be higher, curtailing sales, and they would have less surplus to invest in improving the salability of the paper... With advertising, the free market does not yield a neutral system in which the buyer choice decides.”¹⁵⁴ The advertisers’ choices influence media’s prosperity and survival. The advertisers decide on which kinds of media deserve advertisements and anything that appears unfriendly to their palate, as a rule, advertisements are withdrawn.

¹⁵² Ibid, p.14

¹⁵³ Ibid,p.13

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.p. 14

In order to stay on circulation with profits, the media produces advertisements friendly content. In other words, it is not the poor and marginalized but the big corporations and their subsidiaries are the biggest advertisers and hence, the media ends up at the service of the wealthy and corporations. This is how the advertising acts as a filter affecting news choice.

The third filter of the propaganda model is sourcing the mass media. The mass media is in a constant need of sources to maintain a steady flow of news. Due to economic constraints, there is a concentration of reporters and camerapersons at places from where news often emanates and where regular press conferences are held. Therefore, the sources of news become the White House, the Pentagon and the US state departments in the case of media in the United States.¹⁵⁵ Another source of news being the business corporations. In the US, the corporate sector has the resources to produce public information and propaganda on the scale of Pentagon and other government bodies. This makes the sources limited for the media to report from and makes the government and versions from private entities to be published as news without much investigations. This is how the Source becomes a filter to news.

The fourth filter mentioned in the Propaganda model by the authors is flak. Flak refers to the negative response to a media statement or program¹⁵⁶. It may take the form of letters, telegrams, phone calls petitions, law suits, speeches and bills before congress or any other threat complaint and punitive action. Flaks are taken seriously by the media in the US and attention is given to them. The government is the biggest producer of flak which regularly assailing, threatening and “correcting” the media. They mentions how in

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* p.18

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* p.26

the 1970's and 1980's the corporate community along with political investments, sponsored the growth of institutions such as American Legal Foundation, The Capital Legal Foundation, The Media Institute and Accuracy in Media(AIM) for specific purpose of producing flak.¹⁵⁷ Thus flak acts as a filter to the news.

The fifth and the last filter is anti communism as a control mechanism. This filter was used in the media during the time of the cold war. Since the Soviet, Chinese and Cuban revolutions were traumas for the Western elites, anti-communism became a dominant religion. Chomsky and Herman writes that,

The anti-Communist control mechanism reaches through the system to exercise a profound influence on the mass media. In normal times as well as in periods of Red scares, issues tend to be framed in terms of a dichotomized world of Communist and anti-Communist powers, with gains and losses allocated to contesting sides, and rooting for "our side" considered an entirely legitimate news practice." Thus anti communism was a potent filter filter of news.¹⁵⁸

It must be stated that the Propaganda Model that was propounded by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman after a thorough analysis of the US media: how biases in the media which may not be apparent on the surface, exist and thereby promote certain viewpoints. Its importance being that the development of the media-scape in India after the process of liberalization in 1991, can be placed under the framework developed by Chomsky and Edward Herman. It is a fact that the concentration of media ownership in the post liberalization and excessive reliance on advertising has led to the allegiance of the media to the market forces. B.G. Verghese, a well-known journalist, had commented on the state of the media by saying that in the Indian media, it has become a question of loyalty to the market rather than loyalty to the values of journalism. Editors are brand managers instead of content managers.¹⁵⁹ Another Journalist Madhu Trehan, expressed similar view points in the interview conducted for this study. She explicitly expressed

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.* p.27

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.* p.30

¹⁵⁹ As cited in Lakshman, Nirmala, *Writing a nation*, (New Delhi: Rupa Publishing, 2008) p.xxxi

that how a newspaper would devote an entire page on the diseases like diarrhea caused by germs like bacteria and in the next page would have an advertisement for an antiseptic antibacterial lotion or solution for the disease. The unethical connections between the new-stories and the advertisements become apparent often. It suggests that the advertisers would have *bought* two pages from the newspaper, but the readers are not informed about it. Thus we can see the influence of advertising that have increased after the liberalization process has become a deciding factor of news content. In the context of ownership of large newspapers having advantages over the smaller newspapers also began to appear after the liberalization. Many large newspapers have had predatory pricing, meaning that selling the newspaper at a very low cost and very below the cost of production. This leads to heavy competition, in which the smaller newspapers are driven out of the market. Predatory pricing was started in India by the Times of India in the 1990's.¹⁶⁰ After the strategy became successful, the other big newspapers followed suit. If we analyse, one of the other filter from the propaganda model, i.e. Flak, a measure used in the form of legal cases against media organization to muzzle opinions. Subir Ghosh and Parnjoy Guha Thakutra, in a book, titled, Sue the Messenger, have compiled a list on how corporates are harassing authors and journalist for their stories. One of the court cases involves the author himself where his book, Gas Wars: Crony Capitalism and the Ambanis, was given a defamation notice calling for “cease on sale, publication and distribution of the book” and suggested all existing copies be destroyed , that online publicity be stopped and asked for an unconditional apology.¹⁶¹ The newspaper which published the review of the

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Madhu Trehan, editor of NewsLaundry

¹⁶¹ Ghosh, Subir, Guha Thakurta, Paranjay. Sue the Messenger (NCR Delhi: Authors Upfront, 2016), p.1

book were also asked for damages of Rs 100 crore within 10 days.¹⁶² The author writes that the notices did not point out any factual error but was devoted mostly to the company's perception and understanding of the controversy. The notices interestingly didn't turn into a legal case. The author argues that the aim of such legal notices is to intimidate authors and journalist. These notices are called SLAPPS or strategic lawsuits against public participations which means "litigations meant to harass, intimidate and silence critical writers who are expected to give in after they are faced with prospects of incurring high expenditure on legal defense."¹⁶³

The approach of Robert W. McChesney is not very different from the approach of Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman. He analyses the role of the media from the standpoint of democracy where the biggest threats to the survival of democracy and constitutional rule in the United States comes from class inequality and militarism. These two factors according to him will lead to corruption, secrecy, oligarchy and a loss of liberty. A free press therefore is required to monitor and keep in check the central threats of class inequality and militarism¹⁶⁴. With the unanticipated and histrionic changes of the media scene with the rise of the "new information" age, the importance of media, journalism, of entertainment culture and shaping the world has tremendously increased. He argues that the media is at the heart of the "capitalist political, the centre of the marketing system, and a source of tremendous profit in their own right"¹⁶⁵. And since in the realm of neo liberal policies, where profit should rule as much social life as possible,

¹⁶² *ibid*, p.2

¹⁶³ *ibid*, p.5

¹⁶⁴ McChesney, Robert W, *The Political Economy of the Media: Enduring Issues, emerging dilemmas*, (New Delhi: Aakar Books,2010),p.13

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*, p.14

McChesney argues that in such as scenario anything that comes in the way of profit is suspected by such media.

He also argues that since media is owned by the big businesses, therefore it promotes an ideology that is tied with capitalism. He writes that media presents,

Business good. Governments bad. Big business very good. Big Government very bad. Taxes on rich, bad. Social spending aimed at poor and working class, even worse. Take care of number one, and everyone fend for yourself. There is no such thing as “society”, only individuals in fierce competition with one another, and their immediate families, their only free loaders. Extreme and growing inequality is not only acceptable, it is the carrot necessary to give the wealthy incentive to get even richer so they will invest and spur growth, and it is the stick necessary for the poor to be willing to work harder and be more productive. Markets are infallible, the unquestionably superior way to regulate human existence and the basis for all freedom. human interference through governments or labour unions, no matter how well intentioned, will only make matters worse in the long run, because it will lead away from a pure market solution.¹⁶⁶

The political economy approach of the media in McChesney’s opinion does not believe that the present media system to be natural or inevitable or impervious to change, which is it’s made to look like. His approach is that the media system is the result of policies made in the name of the public but often without the informed consent of the public¹⁶⁷. This approach to study media is complicated and tries to make connections of how media and communication systems and its contents are shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labour practices and policies of the government¹⁶⁸. It links how political and economic systems works and the social power is exercised in society. It also questions whether the media is a force for social justice or it for oligarchy. His approach which he calls the political economy approach is often associated with the political left because of its stance towards market but according to him it grows directly out of the mainstream liberal democratic political theory. The argument is that the U.S. constitutional system rests on a viable and healthy press system

¹⁶⁶ *ibid*,p.15

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*, p.12

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*,p.12

and therefore the approach of political economy arises out of it. In his book Rich Media Poor Democracy, McChesney writes that

There is an inherent tension between capitalism and democracy. Its benefits notwithstanding, capitalism promotes inequality, selfishness, corruption monopoly, commercialism, militarism and a number of other phenomenons that undermine the capacity for effective self government. Media can play a central role in making capitalist societies operate in a more democratic manner; indeed they are necessary for democracy regardless of the economic system.¹⁶⁹

The heart of his argument is that in the past century the media industry has become an important part of the capitalist system and has become profitable ventures. But at the same time factors like monopolization and hyper commercialism have also crept into the media industry. With incessant pressure for profit, McChesney argues the media has become an anti democratic force. The arguments presented by Edward S. Herman along with Noam Chomsky and Robert W. McChesney focuses on how the control of the media in the contemporary world is restricted in the hands of the wealthy class. The media therefore has become a tool of profit making and furthering the voice of the ideology of the business class. With the concentration of media in the hands of a few individuals and corporations and the illusion of multiplicity of media outlets owned and control by these individuals and corporations is deceiving in democratic societies. The role of media in a democracy is to be a fierce watchdog but with profit making becoming the central motive of media houses, the role of media is being compromised.

In the Indian scene as it has already been discussed the same privately owned press playing an important role in the pre-liberalized era, changes its orientation to serve the interest of the few. The media in this new system is to a great extent disconnected from the people in the ground. One of the telling factors of the Indian media is that it was

¹⁶⁹ McChesney, Robert. Rich media poor democracy, (New York: The New Press, 1999), p.37(Kindle version)

not always how the stories are carried out or missed out but how these are filtered out. In the process, of changed concerns and priorities, the issues of the poor and the marginalized sections are often being ignored or not given any prominence. The thesis in the next chapters delves into the study of media and examines the nature of change in terms of reportage. In doing so, people's movements and their representation in the pre and post liberalization period is studied. The attempt is also to understand if and how the media deliberately tries to distort dissenting voices.

The next chapter will analyze the people's movements during the post-independence period and its representation in the media. The case studies that will be taken for study are the Railway Strike of 1974, the Textile Mill Workers Strike of Bombay in 1982-83 and the Mine Workers Strike led by Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha.

Chapter 2

Peoples' Movements and Media in post-independence era

This chapter deals with the representation of peoples' movements in the media (print in particular because that was the only media platform then) during the pre liberalized era in India. The movements selected for the study in this chapter are three separate strike actions by workers; and from three major sectors of the industrial economy then – the Railways, the Mines and the Textile industry. While the Railways and the Mines are government owned, the Textile sector included the Public Sector Undertakings (particularly mills that were taken over from the private sector by the National Textiles Corporation in 1976 and a few private mills too). As it has already been discussed in the previous chapter, the media had undergone tremendous changes with the liberalization of the economy in 1991. Therefore the objective of this chapter is to delve into the struggles of workers and to see how the press reported the events in pre-liberalized India. The Indian Railway strike of May 1974, The Bombay Textile Workers Strike of 1982 and The Mine Workers' Struggle in Dalhi Rajhara.

The newspapers which are selected for analysis are *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu*, *The Economic Times* and *The Indian Express*. These are representative samples from the northern, western and southern parts of India. The Times of India and The Economic Times are published from the same publishing house, i.e. Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. from Mumbai. *The Hindu* is published from Chennai. *The Indian Express* is published from Delhi.

The Indian Railway strike of 1974

It is an undisputable fact that the Indian Railway strike of 1974 was one of the most important trade union actions in the history of independent India. The importance of the strike is being in terms of the number of workers who participated in it and also owing to its impact; the strike was, perhaps, the only one in the history of independent India whose impact on the economy was most intense. The railways in India was commonly referred to as the as the “lifeline of the nation”¹ because of its importance in carrying not only passengers but because of its crucial role in the movement of goods and services. The Railways were set up in India by the British in the 1850s and it became indispensable for the economy of the colonial administration. The significance of the railways amplified in independent India as the reach of the railways increased considerably. .

By 1970s, the railways became a huge establishment and in 1974, the year of the epochal railway strike, it had employed over 17 lakh permanent workers and at least 3 lakh casual workers and incidentally, it was the largest employer in India at that time.² The workers in the railways were divided into categories depending on the nature of their work. This was done in order of pay determination. Some of the important groups of categories included the loco running staff (locomotive drivers, shunters, and fireman and engine cleaners), the traffic running staff, the signal and telecommunication staff, station masters, yard staff and ministerial and clerical staff.

The Railway strike of 1974 was the culmination of several factors. These factors include broadly the increasingly unrepresentative character of the recognized unions whose leadership had got co-opted by the Railway administration, leading to the

¹ Stephen, Sherlock. The Indian Railways Strike 1974 (New Delhi: Rupa & co, 2001), p.32

² Ananth, V. Krishna. India Since Independence, (New Delhi: Pearson Publications, 2011), p. 127.

emergence of a number of category-wise unions to address their sectoral grievances. Meanwhile, issues of pay-scales in the light of the decline of the absolute and relative income of the railway workers in the early 1970s was the immediate provocations for the strike.

The Rise of Category Unions

In order to understand the railway strike of 1974, we must trace down the history of the trade unions in this sector and their inability to negotiate the demands of the workers over a period of time. The Indian Railway workers were one of the most unionized in the country and the history of strike actions by them dates us back to 1862, when the very first railway strike was organized in Howrah.³ Under the colonial administration, the Railways started the tradition of granting recognition to certain unions from 1925 onwards. The All India Railwaymen Federation (AIRF), founded in 1925, had emerged into a collective all-India body since then and it consisted of the unions in the various company owned railways across the country. The AIRF remained in place as the representative body of the railway workers even after independence and the nationalisation of all railway companies. As did the colonial rulers, the government of independent India too recognized the AIRF along with the newly founded federation, the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) soon after independence. It must be stressed that the AIRF, a conglomerate of unions across several railway zones, had fought against railway companies during the colonial rule.

In the post-independence period also the tradition of recognized trade unions continued. The National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) was set up in the year

³ Nearly 1200 railway workers went on strike for eight hours day. Most of the workers however were Europeans and also some Indians which brought in the tradition of trade unions in India. Cited from Stephen Sherlock. p. 40

1948 by the Indian National Congress leaders, such as Hariharnath Shashtri and G. Ramachandran. The NFIR was affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). Its stated aim was to commit the working class to the Congress's vision of the post-independence India.⁴ It should be noted here that in the years immediately after independence (1947-1952), Jayprakash Narayan, the veteran socialist leader, was the president of the AIRF. The AIRF leadership, however, turned docile over the years and were coopted increasingly. This was evident in an attempted strike action by Central Government workers in the 1960s for wage increase. Stephen Sherlock, perhaps the only academic to research on the 1974 strike, writes:

It was essential that the railway workers are well organized for the strike since they were the largest and the most strategically placed group of government employees. In reality, preparation of the railway workers was amongst the poorest and as a result, the participation of the workers was very uneven.⁵

The strike was met with harsh response from the state and one of the repercussions was that the railway board withdrew its recognition to the AIRF with immediate effect. This shook the foundation of the AIRF in the railway workers' movement. The governments succeeded in using the tool of de-recognition to discipline the militant union and the AIRF leadership caved in soon and its recognition was restored. Thereafter, 'both the recognized unions contended with the terms of their relationship with the management because it gave them a monopoly over the right to speak for the workers.'⁶ Recognition from the railway board acted as a tool to maintain good relations with the management as it gave them the monopoly over the right to speak for the workers. The AIRF too, by now, came under the patronage of the railway administration. As the members of the recognized unions also enjoyed certain privileges

⁴ Sherlock, *op. cit* p. 43

⁵ Sherlock. *Op. cit*, p.48

⁶ *ibid*, p.49

which included the provision of using premises in the railway land, the right to organize on railway property and free travel passes and so on, the union leaders began to enjoy these privileges at the cost of trade unionism. Organizing the workers and addressing their grievances through protest actions had taken a back seat. In other words, the AIRF was co-opted by railway administration and there was hardly any difference with its ways vis a vis the congress party affiliated NFIR.

The co-option of the railway unions left the workers in the lurch. The late 1960s witnessed an unrest among the railway workers and they not only began to show their anger towards the management but also their disaffection towards the recognized federations. By and large, the railway men considered the recognized unions corrupt and ineffectual and as an arm of the management. This was the context of the emergence of new trade unions in the railways. These unions were run and managed by workers and were formed on the basis of the interest of a particular category of the railway workers. The union of the locomotive workers was the first to be formed as a category union which was followed by the Firemen's council.⁷ The firemen's council was formed in the Southern zone of the railways and they organized two strike actions, putting forth the grievances of the drivers and the fire-men, especially seeking reduction of working hours, in 1967 and 1968. This enabled them to be the voice of the workers. The strikes were also joined in by drivers and shunters. This strike brought to the fore the fact that how the recognized unions failed to represent the interest of the workers. To quote Stephen Sherlock on the condition of the recognized unions:

The recognized unions claimed legitimacy from official status granted by the Railway Board, the Fireman's Council could exist as a viable organization only so long as it was respected by the workers. The leaders of the recognized unions were regarded as corrupt and self seeking. The

⁷ *ibid*, p. 56

leaders of the Firemen's Council, in contrast, gained nothing for their work except victimization from the management.⁸

In both the strikes -- of 1967 and 1968 -- the management refused to negotiate with the category unions (as they were unrecognized unions) and the recognized unions were used to end the strike by mobilizing their supporters. As it has been mentioned, the strikes brought the fireman and the loco drivers close and this resulted in the merger of these two category unions. As has been mentioned already, the main issue behind the strikes of 1967 and 1968 was the reduction of working hours. There were other grievances too; the wage gap between them and other railway workers and the management's apathy towards their physical conditions of work.

The Loco Running Staff Association, a category union, also played an important role in the workers unrest of 1970-71.⁹ A major strike in the year 1972 also made it possible to mark the presence of the union in the southern and south central railways in a big way. The reach of the Loco Running Staff Association was also felt in the northern Railway where it was able to carry out the strike. Not surprisingly, during all these strikes, the state used repressive measures by imposing laws such as the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) and also invoking Section 144 of the CrPC, banning assembly of workers.¹⁰ However, the positive effect was that, the Loco Running Staff Association was able to expand its reach in both the Southern and Eastern Zones. To

⁸ *ibid*, p.65

⁹ The agitation of 1970 was not planned but was a spontaneous reaction to an incident. On the 26th of July 1970, six policemen beat and robbed a shunter at Adra railway station in West Bengal. The workers agitated and stopped work and demanded the arrest of the policemen. For the workers the resentment was against the repeated harassment of the workers by the police. Demonstrations were held in South Eastern Railway Headquarters on 27th and 28th of July 1970. The Locomen played a crucial role in the strike. Again in 1970 Workers at Bhilai went on a lightning strike over dispute between two recognized unions. The police lathi charged the demonstrations at Bhilai and a number of workers were also arrested. The Loco Running Staff Association supported the cause of the sympathy strike by the workers. In 1971 also a Wildcat strike in Bihar and other strikes in places like Dhanbad was supported by the Association.

¹⁰ Sherlock, *Op.Cit*, p.101.

quote again from Stephen Sherlock on the how Loco Running Staff Association developed militant unionism which went missing from the recognized unions like the AIRF,

During the strike the Loco Running Staff Association was clearly on the offensive, strengthening its relative position within the railway labour movement. The Association developed a symbiotic relationship with the growing workers militancy, supporting agitations which began without its intervention and giving a lead to those who were hesitant to act. Its solidarity with other category unions, particularly in the eastern region, strengthens the general trend of independent action by unofficial unions and helped instill confidence amongst workers that they could act without relying on the recognized unions. The strikes were not all successful in terms of demands won but they were at least able to resist incursions by management and reach reasonable concessions. Like a guerrilla army consolidating itself, the Association was able to reap benefits even from stalemate.¹¹

Again, in May 1973, the AILRSA organized a nation-wide strike with as many as 42,000 drivers across the country striking work. The strike was met with repression with large scale arrests and detention of the leaders and provisions such as the Defence of India Rule (DIR). The impact of the strike, this time, forced the then Railway Minister, L.N. Mishra, to invite the AILSRA leaders for talks even though the recognized unions opposed the move.¹² Even though the talks were unsuccessful it did bring to the fore the massive support to the AILRSA from the workers and its emergence as a parallel organisation to the AIRF and the NFIR.

The Workers Grievances:

The wages of the railway employees are determined by the pay commissions appointed by the government from time to time. The Railways, as it has already been discussed, was created by the British and was treated as a Government department and not as an independent corporation. The same system continued even after independence and the railways was treated as a separate government department. The wages, therefore, were

¹¹Ibid, p.106.

¹²Ananth, *Op. Cit*, p.129

determined by the pay commissions set up by the government from time to time. The employees of the Railways were thus treated as government servants. Any increase in the wages of the railway employees would cost the Central Governments exchequer and therefore the government was not willing to rationalize the wages compared to other Public sector units. Stephen Sherlock writes:

The pay commissions thrust wage fixing into a straitjacket in which neither the railway management nor the railway workers could manoeuvre. In the public sector undertakings and in the private sector, wages were set through the thrust and parry of collective bargaining and thus, to some extent at least, represented a compromise accepted by the concerned parties. The decisions of the pay commissions, however, were made unilaterally and rarely satisfied the expectations of the affected workers. Worse still, although the workers were expected to accept what was handed down, the government was not bound by the commission's findings.¹³

Between 1947 and 1974, the government of India constituted three pay commissions. The negotiations of wages in the Railways, unlike other PSUs, where the wages and other terms could be negotiated, here the workers had little scope for such negotiations. Even though the First Pay Commission provided for Dearness allowances, which compensated the workers' wages with the increase in prices, it remained inadequate in the face of the rising cost of living. The Second Pay Commission of 1959 also did precious little in terms of increasing remunerations.¹⁴

The 1974 railway strike for higher wages and for fixation of a minimum bonus had added trouble to the existing state of economy which was indeed in a huge crisis. The economy was hugely impacted by the Bangladesh liberation war in 1971 coupled with the problem of huge influx of refugees from East Pakistan to the country. The expenditure on the war had caused diversion of funds which were meant for other

¹³ Sherlock, Stephen, Railway Workers and Their Unions Origins of 1974 Indian Railways Strike, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 24, No. 41 (Oct. 14, 1989).

¹⁴ Ibid

developmental needs and the budget deficit of the government went up.¹⁵ Apart from the war, there were other factors such as the monsoon failure of 1972-73 affecting food grain output by 8 percent in 1974. The fall in the food supply was also owing to the fact that a large amount of surplus food stocks had to be used to feed the refugees from East Pakistan.¹⁶ Another important factor was the oil crisis- the OIL shock of 1973- when OPEC was formed by the oil producing Gulf countries. This led to a four fold increase in prices of oil. The increased oil prices along with the monsoon failure led to a serious crisis in the economy. There was steep rise in prices of essential commodities by 23 percent in 1973 and up to 30 percent in 1974.¹⁷

In this context the Third Pay Commission could increase the wages only meagerly while the rise in prices was steep. 'The Basic pay was raised from Rs 170 per month to Rs. 196 per month for workers in the class IV. As it has already been mentioned that 'the prices of essential commodities had risen by 23 per cent in 1973 and the government's decision to impound an installment of the dearness allowance lead to militancy in the workers.'¹⁸ 'A comparison of the railways with other Public sector Enterprise like BHEL and Hindustan Machine Tools, where wages for workers in the same category was Rs. 294 and Rs. 350 per month.'¹⁹ This disparity in the wages indeed created discontentment among the railway workers.

The category unions, as we have already discussed, had gained recognition and support from the workers and were ready for agitation. . As far as the two recognized federations were concerned, the growth of the militant category unions posed threats to

¹⁵ Ananth, *Op. Cit*, p.116

¹⁶ Ibid p.116

¹⁷ Ananth, *Op.Cit*, p.116

¹⁸ Ibid. p.130

¹⁹ Ibid

their existence. The AIRF, meanwhile, as a strategy for regaining its support among the workers, decided to bring out some changes in their approach. 'By 1973 there was a general, though, undirected, feeling that the AIRF needed an infusion of new ideas and leadership.'²⁰ One of the most important changes was a change in its leadership. The AIRF, in its Secundrabad convention, in October 1973, decided to replace Peter Alwares, the existing president, with George Fernandes. By then, George Fernandes had a reputation of being a fearless trade union leader in Bombay. Sherlock cites the reasons for his entry to invigorate the AIRF as:

Fernandes had established a formidable reputation as a trade union leader in Bombay, becoming the dominant figure in a city with a tradition of trade union strength equaled only by Calcutta. He was known as a brilliant speaker and an excellent organizer who had been able to invigorate previously weaker sections of the trade union movement. He also had the credentials of having supported the railway workers struggles in the past. During the 1960 strike he had personally led a demonstration to stop trains being run by strike breakers and had been beaten up by police and imprisoned for two months for his efforts.²¹

The decision to bring in George Fernandes was seen as a course correction by the AIRF and it was also a necessary step in the context of the increasing influence of the category unions. Hence, this was a measure which was taken to restore the eroding base of the AIRF among the railway workers. The government was aware of the forthcoming strike and when asked by journalists about the strike warning by Railway workers, the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi said that the "Railmen are holding the nation to ransom"²² She also described the railway traffic disruptions as 'anti-national'. The Prime

²⁰ Sherlock, *Op. Cit.* p.233

²¹ Ibid.p.234

²² Railmen are holding the nation to ransom, *The Indian Express*, April 2nd 1974, p.1 The report said, 'The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, here today described the disruption of rail traffic as anti national and deplored that a handful of railwaymen were "holding the nation to ransom". Speaking about the move tfor a general strike or a go slow agitation in the Railways from tomorrow, she told reporters at Raj Bhavanthat she was not questioning their intention. But when the railmen stopped the movement of train in the time of "grave difficulty", it would affect the national interest. Mrs. Gandhi said under such circumstances, it was the responsibility of the press to create an atmosphere in the country against such anti-national activities.'

Minister also was aware that to simply derecognize the recognized unions will hardly help matters as National Coordination Committee for Railwaymen's Struggle (NCCRS) was a platform of both the recognised unions and many others without recognition by the administration. She urged the press to "create an atmosphere in the country against the anti-national activities,"²³ It should be noted here that she suggested that the idea of a strike, legal in the sense of the law, were anti-national activities.

When the grievances of the workers and their growing discontentment were not getting resolved through negotiations, it was clear that a strike was imminent. The Secundrabad Convention of the AIRF in 1973, where George Fernandes became its president, also passed a resolution in favour of a national strike in the railways.²⁴

Stephen Sherlock says:

the resolution for a general Strike was used against him to discredit Fernandes, as he was not in favour of a strike. Fernandes was aware that there was a feeling of support for the strike among the members of the organization but he believed that the AIRF lacked resources either Organizational or financial.²⁵

Fernandes began working on a strategy and he tried to convince the leadership of the AIRF on the importance of the association with category unions in the event of a strike. On 27th February, 1974, a convention of 110 railwaymen unions, which included the influential Loco Running Staff Association (LRSA) and the newly formed the National Coordination Committee for Railwaymen's Struggle(NCCRS) was held. The convention prepared a memorandum including the workers demands for wage increase, statutory bonus of 8.3 percent and full D.A. for the workers in Railways like other PSUs and also the regularization of 3 lakh casual workers. The memorandum also included the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ananth, *Op.Cit* , p.130.

²⁵ Sherlock, Stephen, *Railway Workers and Their Unions: Origins of 1974 Indian Railways Strike*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 24, No. 41 (Oct. 14, 1989)

demand that the victimization of railway workers involved in the previous strikes should be reversed and also AIRF would not abandon the members from the other unions who might be victimized in future. This memorandum was sent to the Railway Board, which was ignored by the board. The convention also resolved to call an indefinite general strike, if their demands were not met through negotiations by the railway Minister by 10th of April 1974. To quote Stephen Sherlock again on the imminence of the strike in 1974 in which he explains:

Fernandes was able to channel the momentum for a strike into a campaign led by the AIRF. There was a unique combination of circumstances which he exploited. First of all there was the exasperation with the findings of the pay commission. The commission's award seemed more attuned to circumstances of 1970 when it was established. In 1970 it would have seemed niggardly, but in the midst of the inflation and shortages of 1973 it was greeted with anger. As the months went by the economic situation deteriorated further. The government's refusal to grant any form of relief generated ever-increasing resentment amongst the railway workers. The success of the loco running staff's strike and other category unions' campaigns showed the mass of workers that militant action was possible. The attitude of the government convinced them that it was necessary. In such a situation a call for workers to forget their differences and combine in a united campaign was sure to elicit a good response.²⁶

The Railway Board, on 15th of April 1974, called the representatives from the NCCRS and informed that their demands were unacceptable. On the very same day, the NCCRS held a meeting which decided to serve the notice for a general strike from 8th May 1974. An action committee was formed with 13 members which included representatives from AIREC, CITU, AITUC, and BMS. Fernandes emerged as a consensual leader of the NCCRS. The government held negotiations with the then Deputy Minister for Railways, Mohammed Shafi Quereshi. The Railway Minister L.N. Mishra refused to take part in the deliberations. The talks with the Deputy Minister didn't yield any result. This futile exercise went on till the end of April 1974. The leaders of

²⁶ Ibid

NCCRS decided to meet on 1st May 1974 on the Occasion of May Day in Lucknow and then to meet the other leaders on 2nd May 1974 for talks.

George Fernandes took part in the Lucknow rally but was arrested the very night (1st May 1974) at Lucknow and sent to the Tihar jail in Delhi. Other militant leaders of NCCRS which included H.S. Chowdhury, S.K. Dhar, and P.K. Barua of the Loco Running Staff Association and Nrishingha Chakrabarty of the CITU were also arrested. The news of the arrests spread among the workers and the strikes began in many Railway stations from 2nd May itself.²⁷ In Bombay the Victoria Terminus and Central Station in Bombay were among the railway stations that was locked up by the railway workers on that day. Protests began to spread in different parts of the country. In Patna, Gaya and Ferozepur, family members of the railway workers sat on the railway tracks to halt trains. In the Southern India, the strike started from 2nd May itself instead of the declared date of 8th May 1974. Thousands of Railway workers were put behind bar across the country.

The government's strategy of arresting the central leadership and the most of the militant union leaders was a measure to weaken the strike. This, however didn't dampen the spirit of the workers and in the wave of the arrests of the leadership, workers did not wait till 8th May to start the strike. Workers in many centres spontaneously kept off the work. Train services across the country came to a halt and Railway workshops were closed which included Jamalpur, Chittaranjan, Varanasi, Perambur, Kharagpur, and Golden Rock. The strike that ensued saw the participation of workers of over 17 lakhs.

The strike was met with brutality. During the period of the strike more than 50,000 railway workers were arrested and among them 10,000 were already in jail by 2nd

²⁷ Ananth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 131

May 1974. Defense of India Rules (DIR) and Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) were used to detain the agitating workers. The families of the railway workers were also harassed when at least 30,000 families were evicted from their official quarters, as a means to coerce workers to join work. Paramilitary forces and Police harassed workers and several railway colonies turned into hunting grounds to discipline the agitating workers.²⁸

With this general backdrop of what the 1974 Railway strike was about and the way in which the government of the day dealt with it, let us now look into how the various newspapers of the time dealt with the event.

The Newspaper Reportage:

This section will look into the media representation of the strike. How far the media covered this event? What was the nature of the coverage? Were they reproducing the version of the State that this strike was anti-national? Or did they report it with objectivity and had shown compassion to the legitimate issues of the workers? The strike, an united effort of over seventeen lakh workers in the railway, posed a powerful challenge to the government.

Newspaper reports, during the strike period were by and large, expressing empathy with the workers. There were also few reports that appeared to be blaming the workers leading the country to chaos. Even prior to the strike, the newspapers reported on the simmering tension among the workers when the National Railway Mazdoor Union went for a 24 hour *dharna* on 2nd April 1974. This was a pre-cursor to the strike planned and executed by the NCCRS members.

²⁸ Ananth, *Op.cit*, p. 132

Such an analysis, indeed, could begin with the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's observation in a press conference at least a month before the strike began, on April 2, 1974: She did not mince words when she stated that 'the Railmen are holding nation to ransom'.²⁹ *The Indian Express* reported the Prime Minister's statement, faithfully and that she urged the 'press to create a proper atmosphere in the country against such anti national activities'. More importantly, *The Indian Express* published another news report along with the Prime Ministers report titled, Railman plan dharna from today.³⁰ Interestingly, this report was placed adjacent to the Prime Minister's statement so that reader could read between the lines on how the government saw the strike as well as what was actually happening. This is indeed an example of ethical journalism.

As for instance, the report 'Railman plan dharna from today', was clear and to the point in reproducing what Mr. H.N. Singh, Zonal Secretary of the AIRF, said in his statement explaining the programme: It contained an elaborate list of the demands of the railmen and it ran as follows:

1. All Railmen should be treated as industrial workers and allowed all benefits and facilities eligible to other industrial workers, and
2. There should be job evaluation of railmen through a 'scientific system' to be followed by a reclassification and re-gradation of with the need based minimum wage for lowest paid workers. Others were pending completion of job evaluation and re-classification, parity in wages with workers of other union government undertakings with Dearness allowance linked to the cost of living index and supply of subsidized food grains and other essential commodities through departmental shops.³¹

At the same time, there were articles expressing anguish about the fragmentation of the railwaymen unions and the internal tussle within the various trade unions and how this is weakening the bargaining power of the workers. For example, *The Times of India* published a lead article K.C. Khanna, titled, 'Must Railways Aground? Wheels within

²⁹ The Railmen are holding nation to ransom, *The Indian Express*, 2nd April 1982.

³⁰ Railmen plan Dharna, *The Indian Express*, Vijaywada 2nd April, 1974

³¹ Ibid

Twisted Wheels.’³² on 9th April, 1974, wherein the burden of his argument was to explain how ‘industrial relations in the Railways are at a dead end’³³ and it pointed towards the disunity among the various trade unions and also pointed the fact how the middle level workers don’t have representation in the unions and grievances are not heard. The article even suggested that the mushrooming of unions have not helped and also draws a comparison with other PSUs where wages have failed to keep pace with wage hikes in other public undertakings. It states that

Compared with the employees of nationalized banks and the life insurance corporation, railwaymen have a reasonable case for higher emolument. A Government which legislates to make the payment of bonus compulsory for concerns in the red and applies this to his nonprofit making steel plants in any case not on the strong ground in turning down a similar demand by reilwaymen.³⁴

The arrest of George Fernandes and other leaders of the NCCRS:

The arrest of George Fernandes, the president of AIRF, and other militant leaders of the NCCRS late into the night on May 1, 1974, was one of the most effective weapons used by the government to repress the strike. The strategy was to deprive the movement of its most prominent leaders which in turn, will demoralize the workers. However, this backfired as the workers responded to the arrest of its leaders with a strike on their own initiative throughout the country. George Fernandes’ incarceration invited large scale reportage all over the media. Let us have look at the reportage of the arrests of the prominent leaders and also the nature of the reporting.

It was the covered in almost all the newspaper taken for the study. *The Hindu*, on 3rd May,1974, reported the arrest in its first page with a title, ‘Fernandes, other Leaders

³² Must Railways Aground? Wheels within Twisted Wheels, *The Times of India*, 9th May,1974

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ *ibid*

Held in a Pre-dawn Swoop.³⁵ The report writes about the arrest as a part of a series of ‘swift developments more than 300 leaders of the Railway Unions were arrested in a pre-dawn swoop’³⁶. The report mentions of the arrests having been made under Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). It published excerpts from the press release from the Action Committee of NCCRS terming the “arrest of Mr. Fernandes and other leaders of the Action Committee just before the “crucial phase of the negotiations the government had lost its credibility.”³⁷

The Action Committee in a press release stated that with the arrest of Mr. George Fernandes and other members of the Action Committee just before the “crucial round of negotiations” the Government had lost all its credibility. It asked the railwaymen to organize united protest actions all over the country immediately and stand firm and continue their preparations for the May 8 strike.³⁸

The same report, then explains how the arrests took place citing the official government source, where they term the arrest as ‘minimal action to ensure the maintenance of essential transport service and see that the law and order situation did not escalate.’³⁹ The same report also the explains the impact of the arrest leading to lightning strike in Bhopal and arrests in other parts of the country like Gujarat and imposition of section 144 of the CrPC in Jabalpur. It is important to note here that the news report published the statement of the Action Committee and the government’s official explanation was placed below this report. The same day, *The Hindu* carried other reports which included the discussion in the Lok Sabha and the letter from Railway Minister, L. N. Mishra to NCCRS convener George Fernandes, who was “under detention, has charged him of not being sincerely and earnestly interested in negotiations towards a

³⁵ Fernandes, other Leaders Held in a Pre-dawn Swoop, *The Hindu*, 3rd May, New Delhi, p.1

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *ibid*.

settlement which served the genuine interest of the railway men.”⁴⁰ The reports sounded empathic with the cause of the workers’ and also questioning the intentions of the government for settlement through negotiations.

The Times of India, in its lead news story on 3rd May 1974, with the heading, “Wild Cat Strike by Railway workers”. carried the news of the arrest of trade Union leaders and the resultant strikes in different parts of the country. It stated on the implications of the strike as ‘the nations lifeline- the railways was at a flash point today with the railwaymen walking off their jobs at many places in retaliation against the arrest of their leaders.’⁴¹ The report goes on to write about how the railway workers have reacted with a strike in Pathankot and Ferozpur in the Northern Railways, Patna and Gaya in the Eastern Zone of the Railway. One of the important pieces of writing that day was the lead article in the Editorial page by Mr. K.C. Khanna, titled, ‘Impending Railway strike: Both Sides Overplay their hands.’⁴² The article questioned the decision and manner in which the president of AIRF, George Fernandes and other leaders were arrested. The article stated:

The government’s decision to arrest the president of the All India Railwaymen’s Federation and the manner in which George Fernandes and others invited this action show how politics can play havoc with the economy. Mr. George Fernandes was obviously acting “tough” when he refused to sign even the agreed minutes of the previous meetings with the deputy minister Mr. Quereshi and arrived in Lucknow on the very day the talks with Mr. Mishra was due to be held. But the authorities compounded his folly by arresting not only him but other militant leaders all over the country even before the negotiations had concluded and this laid themselves open to the charge of breach of faith.⁴³

In its page 5, the same day, *The Times of India* had two reports on the issues the first one titled, “Mishra rejects railmen’s demand for parity”⁴⁴ in which L.N. Mishra’s statement in the Lok Sabha where he rejects the demand of the railway workers as

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.5

⁴¹ Wild Cat strike by Railway workers, *The Times Of India*, 3rd May, 1974, New Delhi, p.1

⁴² Impending Railway strike: Both Sides over play their hands, *The Times of India*, 3rd May 1974, New Delhi, p.4

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Mishra rejects railmen’s demand for parity, *The Times of India*, 3rd May 1974, New Delhi, p.5.

industrial workers is reported. The second report titled, 'Leaders blame govt for crisis'⁴⁵ reproduced the version of the unanimous opinion of the Action Committee of the NCCRs. *The Times of India* editorial⁴⁶ expressed a pro-worker attitude. It said that during the first few rounds of talks, the government only agreed to the peripheral issues like minimum daily rations, permanent employment of some categories of casual workers but the core issues of payment of a minimum bonus and a parity of wage scales with other public sector employees were not considered for discussion. If conceded by the government, these two demands will send the railways wage bills by Rs. 400 crores and will result in deficit financing by the government. The editorial however termed the timing of arrest of George Fernandes and other leaders as unfortunate as the final rounds of talks were due. On the state of the economy, it termed the government as 'its own author of its misfortunes. The current crisis can be traced directly to its(governments) own lack of national incomes policy and its mindless insistence on a compulsory minimum bonus for all industrial employment unrelated to profit.'⁴⁷

In a similar tone, *The Hindustan Times* in its editorial titled, 'Tactical Blunder', on 3rd May 1974, pronounced the government guilty of gross ineptitude and political misjudgment in arresting George Fernandes and other railway workers all over the country in the midst of the crucial negotiations. It said: "How can the Government avoid the charge of breach of faith and rupturing the negotiations even if the minister had come to the conclusion that further discussions were fruitless."⁴⁸ The editorial was very critical

⁴⁵ Leaders blame govt for crisis, *The Times of India*, 3rd May 1974, New Delhi, p.5

⁴⁶ Collision Course, *The Times of India*, 3rd May 1974, p.4

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Tactical Blunder, *Hindustan Times*, 3rd May 1974

of the arrests and also about the rigid position the Railway Minister had taken in Parliament. To quote from the editorial:

Mr. Mishra's explanation in the Lok Sabha for this pre-mature action is unconvincing.... Mr. Mishra had offered to release the arrested men and negotiate a settlement if the strike notice is withdrawn. This is most unlikely and maybe considered a non starter. Moreover what is there to discuss after the Minister's statement in the Lok Sabha clearly drawn the line and has said that the railways cannot assume a huge wage liability of Rs. 500 crore (which is what he claims to be involved) and must stop accepting certain lesser demands which even so might cost as much as Rs. 70-80 crores.... The Railway strike would still be wrong and gravely damaging. The government might have to bend or the unions might be broken, but the nation would inevitably suffer. This can still be avoided. Let Mr. Fernandes and others be released so that the negotiations are resumed. And let the unions realize that they owe a responsibility to the nation to work for the regeneration of the economy and not for the false struggle on the wrong issues at the wrong time.⁴⁹

The editorial, however, was skeptical of the timing of the strike call- in a wrong time when the economy is not in a good shape. This indicates that the newspaper had not completely come out of the 'nation-building framework of the Nehruvian era'.

The *Indian Express* too carried the news of the arrest of George Fernandes and other leaders in its front page itself with the headline, 'Stage set for Railway strike as labour leaders were rounded up.'⁵⁰ The report carried the news of George Fernandes's arrest under MISA, prior to the crucial round of negotiations to be held the day after. The report quoted George Fernandes's wife, Liela Kabir, saying the labour leader was unaware of any such move and was preparing for talks. More importantly, it discussed about a letter to the Railway Minister by the Action committee, in which the Action Committee's representative reminded the Minister of his assurance when negotiations commenced that no arrests or penal action would take place. The letter also questioned the credibility of the government in front of the railwaymen if the assurances are flaunted in this manner. There were many indications that the newspaper was taking a pro-worker stand. Firstly, the *Indian Express* prominently highlighted the arrest of the leaders in its front page.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Stage set for Railway strike as labour leaders were rounded up, *The Indian Express*, 3rd May 1974, p.1

Secondly, the report also expressed the ramifications of the arrests in different parts of the country including the Bombay bandh⁵¹ in its report titled “Uproar Walkout in Parliament”⁵². The editorial in *The Indian Express* described the strike as ‘Mr. Mishra’s strike’, clearly holding the government responsible for the imminent strike as the Railway Minister’s move to arrest the trade union leaders led to the immediate strike. Had the minister carried out the negotiations, this could have been averted. It stated:

The railway strike now looks inevitable. If by some miracle it does not come about, it will not be because the government has not tried enough to incite one. The arrest of George Fernandes and what looks like a general round up of trade union workers in several centres throughout the country in the least and most flagrant provocations ever since the start of what were supposed to be but never became anything that anyone understands by the term negotiations.⁵³

As in the case of *The Hindistan Time* (which was discussed in the earlier paragraph), this editorial also warned about impact of such a strike on the economy of the country.

The Economic Times, like the other newspapers, reported the arrest of the railwaymen leaders in its first page itself. The report titled ‘Fernandes Held’ also had another report titled ‘Bandh Today’. The report blamed the Government as it ‘took up cudgels against the strike poised railway workers by arresting Mr. George Fernandes and the other union leaders under DIR.’⁵⁴ It also reported that how the arrest evoked protests in the parliament as well as outside. The opposition’s condemnation of the arrests and the government’s action as being termed as ‘lunatic, unwarranted and high handed’.⁵⁵ In the main story, L.N. Mishra’s statement in the Lok Sabha was quoted and said that the arrested leaders will be released if the unions withdraw the strike notice. In the report,

⁵¹ Bombay Bandh Begins, *The Indian Express*, 3rd May 1974, p.1

⁵² Uproar Walkout in Parliament, *The Indian Express*, 3rd May 1974, p.1

⁵³ Mr. Mishra’s Strike, *The Indian Express*, 3rd May 1982

⁵⁴ Fernandes Held, *The Economic Times*, 3rd May, 1974,p.1

⁵⁵ *ibid*

titled, 'Bandh Today,' on Bombay it reported that how the trade unions 'reacting swiftly and strongly to the arrest of the railway union leaders as the joint action committee of the trade unions gave a call for Bombay and Thana Bandh.' It also warned that 'Bombay will be a dead city on Friday since there is a public sympathy to the railwaymen's cause, especially because the way the Government carried out arrest of Mr. George Fernandes'. It should be mentioned here that Fernandes was a popular trade union leader in Bombay and hence the Bandh was total and on expected lines. The report also wrote about how the railway employees walked out in protest against the arrest of the leaders in Bombay. Also importantly, it devoted a lot of space reporting the unexpected death of Mr. V.R. Malgi, General Secretary of the National Railway Mazdoor Union, following his arrest, due to a coronary attack according to the police sources.⁵⁶

Reportage and the editorial positions of the newspapers indicate that it had a strong disagreement with the arrest of George Fernandes and other leaders of the NCCRS. It can also be clearly understood from the editorial in *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times* and *The Indian Express*, that strike in railways would mean additional strain to the economy and hence should be avoided. The newspaper reports had highlighted how the pre-emptive arrest of the union leaders was a provocation to the railway workers for a strike.

The reportage of the Railway strike:

As discussed hitherto, the strategy of arresting the leaders of the movement backfired and it provoked strikes in different parts of the country. The workers were also not willing to wait until 8th May 1974, for a reply to the strike notice. The newspaper reports analyzed above showed how the arrest led to lightning strike. The newspapers

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

reported different kinds of actions of both the government and of the workers. *The Hindu* reported on its 6th May 1974, edition, in its first page that the Strike had already begun in the Southern railway. It also reported of sabotage and intimidation of loyal workers in the Southern Railway.⁵⁷

It is interesting to see the newspaper's pages where it acts as a platform for both the government's statements as well as the Trade union leaders' versions of the statements, published simultaneously, in the front page of the newspaper. For instance, *The Hindu* in its 7th May 1974 issue, published Railway Minister L.N. Mishra's appeal to the railwaymen "not to be misguided" into going on strike and that the strike was not in the interest workers.⁵⁸ The report of the decision to continue with the strike by the Action Committee was also published in the same page. The report titled, "Railmen Stick to Strike Decision" featured the statements made by the Action Committee of the NCCRS that the strike shall began on 8th May 1974 since all their attempts at a 'negotiated settlement of their demand having been frustrated by the "adamant attitude of the government" and that 'the strike shall begin at 6 a.m. on May 8.'⁵⁹ Other newspapers taken up for this study can also be seen giving wide coverage to the position of the Railway workers and their unions. As for example, the *Indian Express* of 7th May 1974, publishing two lead reports on its front page carrying tales from the workers's unions. The main lead is of the 'Action Panel gives go ahead signal to Railmen' where the Action Committee of the NCCRS giving the go ahead to the call for a nationwide strike was reported. The second lead story was a box item that published the appeal by George

⁵⁷ Sabotage Bid on Arkonam Line: Sleepers Burnt, *The Hindu*, 6th May 1974, p.1

⁵⁸ Mishra Asks Railmen Not to be Misguided: Door Open for Talks, *The Hindu*, 7th May 1974, p.1

⁵⁹ Railmen Stick to Strike Decision, *The Hindu*, 7th May 1974, p.1

Fernandes, requesting the Prime Minister to intervene to ‘avert the catastrophe’.⁶⁰ Similarly the *Times of India* also carried a report of George Fernandes’ plea to the Prime Minister as its lead story⁶¹ along with NCCRS decision to go ahead with the strike from May 8th 1974. The newspaper also published the Railway Minister’s appeal to ‘resist the “illegal and anti people’ strike to the people.’⁶²

In order to get a clear picture of the strike we must understand that the strike, as such, began on different dates in different parts of the country. For example, in Bombay, the strike was for 24 hours on 2nd May 1974 after the arrest of the Trade union leaders. The workers there went back to work till 8th May. While in the Southern Railway, the strike started on 2nd May onwards. In some regions the strike began on 7th or 8th May.⁶³ So the newspaper reports on the improvement in services in some areas before the actual strike and then the images of complete shut down on the 7th and 8th of May 1974 must be seen in this context.

The newspaper reports of 7th and 8th May point to a complete shutdown of railway services across the country. *The Times of India* splashed photographs showing trains halted at V.T. Railway station. One of the photographs was captioned as, ‘While the Railway station claimed that the services would be run despite the strike, all the gates at V.T. station remained closed under police guard on Wednesday.’⁶⁴ The newspaper’s lead news story ran with the title, ‘Rail services dislocated throughout the country’.⁶⁵ Apart from news reports of the shut down, the papers also reported of the mass arrests of

⁶⁰ The Indian Express, 7th May 1974.p.1

⁶¹ Fernandes Renews plea to PM, The Times of India, 7th may 1974,

⁶² The Times of India, 7th May 1974.

⁶³ Sherlock, Stephen, The Indian Railway Strike of 1974, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2001,p.366

⁶⁴ The Times of India, 9th May 1974

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

workers in Bombay, where hundreds of workers had gathered for a meeting and how they were prevented from being at the meeting and arrested.⁶⁶

In the days that followed, the government's official sources claimed that there is improvement in the movement of goods and services and also the number of workers entering work had improved. Even though the official version of these claims was published, the newspapers ensured that they were alongside reports on how the trains were halted and thus exposed the false claim of the government.

An interesting cartoon by R.K.Laxman that appeared in the *Times of India* (see appendix-1) show a couple, reading a newspaper, on the complete shutdown of the railway services in the country while the All India Radio (a government controlled media- the strikers often referred it as All Indira Radio) in the background talking about how the strike is a failure. Here, the husband forbids his wife to switch off the radio, as it is nice to hear the commentary that trains are running while in reality it was just the opposite. A striking contrast of the government owned media and the independent press in India! In many ways, the press exposed the persistent propaganda of the government.

Newspapers also attacked the propaganda machine of the government. For instance, in an editorial, the business newspaper, *The Economic Times* condemned the attempt of the government using propaganda to deceive the people into believing about the train services on 10 May 1974. To quote from the editorial:

The blast of propaganda let loose by the Railway Ministry is unlikely to deceive anybody. Perhaps the railway minister and some of his obliging colleagues imagine that the psychological effect of the near total paralysis of the railways services can be shielded from the vigilant public by spreading the myth that at some end on the other end of this sprawling subcontinent a train or two had run to suspended schedule.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ ibid

⁶⁷ The Economic Times, 10th May 1974

The same editorial also blamed Mr. L.N. Mishra as being responsible for the strike and writes that ‘our political set up does not confer any prescriptive democratic right to spurn negotiations.

The editorials during the strike had highlighted the mistakes of the government as well as the Trade union leaders. In the *Economic Times*’ editorial on May 10, 1974, only a couple of days since the strike had officially begun, titled, ‘Enough is enough’, the paper commented that the Railway strike now looks like a stalemate and caused untold damage to the economy and also brought suffering to the people. The editorial is critical of governments stand and writes that ‘confident that it can break the strike, the government seems to give the unfortunate impression of wanting to bend the strikers to their knees as well. This would be a hollowed victory.’⁶⁸ It added: ‘The very fact that the strike was notified and the negotiations were under way and it was then the Government swooped into the union leaders. These ill timed arrests are responsible for the breakdown of talks’.⁶⁹

The strike was called off on 27th of May 1974. It remains a fact that during the strike period almost all the important railway centres of the country was shut down or severely affected. The government was relentless in its attitude of a not negotiating with the unions and instead used the state’s repressive measures to contain the strike. The workers also, in many instances, indulged in sabotage and damaged railway property. The government’s high handedness can be assumed from the fact that even after the unconditional withdrawal of the strike, as many as 50,000 workers were dismissed from

⁶⁸ The Economic Times, 15th May 1974

⁶⁹ *ibid*

the services.⁷⁰ The point pertinent from the scope of this thesis is that these incidents were widely reported in the press throughout the strike period with an empathy towards the workers.

In other words, the newspapers have reported the Railway Strike in such a way that it was not only compassionate about the plight of the workers but also they exposed the government propaganda while expressing their concern about unruly behavior of many workers sabotaging railway tracks and property. Most importantly the editorials in most of the newspapers highlighted the how the government used its repressive powers and stalled the democratic process of negotiations.

The Bombay Textile Workers Strike of 1982

Yet another important moment of industrial conflict in the post-independence period and incidentally in the post emergency era was the Bombay Textile workers strike of 1982-83. It was one of the longest industrial conflicts, in the history of trade union movement in India, lasting for about 18 months of total general strike by the workers. The textile industry, just like the Railways, had a history of trade unionism and strikes and its origins can be located in the colonial period.

The industry had unions and the history of organised trade union activities in that dates back to 1918⁷¹. Rajni Bakshi writes about the history of trade unionism in the Textile Mills.

The earliest trade unions in India were formed in the textile industry. The relatively articulate Bombay textile worker was once regarded as the vanguard of the Indian labour movement. But the

⁷⁰ Ananth, V. Krishna, *India Since Independence*, (New Delhi: Pearson, 2011), p.133

⁷¹ The 1918 strike involved 80 textile mills and around one lakh forty thousand workers participated in the strike.

concept and practice of work stoppage by workers as a mode of protest in Bombay's textile mills predates the formation of unions and any legislation regulating the collective bargaining process.⁷²

The strike in 1982 was the culmination of a number of factors. The pattern of recognized unions having failed to perform their basic responsibilities in other industries such as railways also applied to the Textile sector. The strike of 1982-83, thus, was a protest and reaction of the workers against the recognized unions that failed to address their concerns. Even though the demand of the workers was for improved working conditions, there were several other factors leading up to the strike. To understand the workers grievances we must also trace the causes leading to the strike.

A brief history of trade unionism in the Textile Mills:

Textile workers in Bombay have a long history of organisation. In fact the Girni Kamgar Union (GKU) of the Textile Mills was formed in the wake of the general strike of 1924-24. During the period, the system of mill committees was also formed, through which the different categories of Mill workers sent their representatives to the GKU. This gave a decentralized character to the union. But the system of mill committees lasted only until the next strike in the textile mills, i.e. in 1934, when workers organized strike against wage cuts, retrenchment of over 10,000 workers, both of which were the consequence of the economic depression that began in 1929 and set in through the early 1930s, affecting all segments of the industrial world in India. The workers protested in the form of picketing and mass meetings. The 1930's was also a period when the Communist Party was banned by the colonial Government and many of its leaders, who were earlier involved in the activities of the trade union were arrested in various conspiracy cases

⁷² Bakshi, Rajni, The Long Haul: The historic Bombay Textile Strike, (BUILD Documentation Collective, 1986).

including the Meerut Conspiracy case. It was in this context that the Bombay Industrial Dispute Act was passed by the government in 1938.⁷³ It was one of the most repressive pieces of legislation. According to Rajni Bakshi,

The stage was thus set for the enactment of the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act (BID Act) of 1938 which further sought to control the militant element, especially as represented by the communist led unions, and for all practical purposes outlawed strikes. It also represented the growing trade union aspirations of the Indian National Congress which was in turn supported by the industrialists. Despite the communists' exhortations to all trade unions to boycott the Act, the workers made ample use of its machinery of conciliation and settlement.⁷⁴

The Act, though provided for Unions in the factories, it had to be sponsored by the employer and unions were entangled with complex legal procedures. However, the arrest of the trade union leaders belonging to Communist Party of India, paved the way for the coming of Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMSS), a Congress backed union in 1945. To quote Amrita Chhachhi and Paul Kurian,

the Act was opposed by all sections of the working class and a mass demonstration of 90,000 workers took place in Bombay, the conflicts between the two tendencies within the GKU, the arrest of the communists and the repressive attitude of the government left the ground free for the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS).⁷⁵

The RMMS became the sole negotiating agency for the textile workers in Bombay. Then, with the Bombay Industrial Relations Act of 1946, which was a continuation of many other industrial regulations, providing for establishing only a single representative union in the industry and the condition that it should have the support of minimum 25 percent of workers from the industry within a period of six

⁷³ This provided for registration of the Union. Registration under the Act conferred certain rights. This Act also provided for Labour Officers and conciliators appointment for different areas or industries It also provided for reference of disputes to various authorities. It classified matters affecting employees in schedules I and 11 and provided a set of rules called Standing Orders.

⁷⁴ Bakshi, *Op.cit*,p.14

⁷⁵ Chacchi, Amrita. Paul Kurian, New Phase in Textile Union, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 17, No. 8 (Feb. 20, 1982).

months after its formation⁷⁶. Also, Section 14 of the Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946 stated that ‘Firstly, that in any local area there shall not at any time be more than one registered union in respect of the same industry;’ These provisions were continued after independence. The legal complexities of the BIR Act made it possible for the RMSS to continue as the sole representative of the workers and denied opportunities for other parties to form unions representing their ideology. In fact, the CPI, the Socialist party, the Republican Party of India, The Peasants and Workers Party and the Lal Nishan Party launched a major drive among the workers and garnered sufficient support for recognition of the GKU. The Labour Commissioner did accept the application from the GKU, under pressure, but the RMSS took up the issue in the Industrial court. Chacchi and Kurien write about how the workers responded to the call for the formation of a separate union other than the RMSS:

In just one day over one lakh workers became members and queues were formed in front of the membership tables. The first hearing was in favour of the GKU, but the RMSS took the issue to the Industrial Court where it languished for years and the GKU lost its claim. Hence as the opposition unions realised in 1959, the RMSS was virtually impossible to dislodge through legal means.⁷⁷

The RMSS which enjoyed the patronage of the Congress government worked within the purview of the BIR Act and was also a force which neutralized the militant aspects of the workers struggle. On the role of RMSS, Salim Lakha writes,

The RMSS’ supine attitude to the prevailing problems of the labour force alienated many workers. It was claimed that the RMSS not only facilitated the technological modernization, but was also thoroughly corrupt and submissive. The RMSS had complied with the Mill owners wishes by

⁷⁶ Section 13 of Bombay Industrial Relations Act stated: Any union which has for the whole of the period of 1 [three calendar months immediately preceding the calendar month in which it so applies] under this section a membership of 2 [not less than twentyfive per cent] of the total number of employees employed in any industry in any local area may apply in the prescribed form to the Registrar for registration as a Representative Union for such industry in such local area. Retrieved from International Labour Organization website:

<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/93736/109699/.../IND93736.pdf>

⁷⁷ Chacchi, Amrita. Paul Kurian *Op.Cit.* pp.267

agreeing to modernization in the mills leading to heavier workloads without sufficient monetary rewards for their members. It had tackled the issues of technological change on an adhoc basis lacking any comprehensive policy for dealing with an industry wide process of structural change from which the workers could also benefit.⁷⁸

The erosion of support to the RMSS was evident when in the 1970's; the strikes organized by the opposition unions drew a 'crowd of 26,735 workers in the first day which increased to 1.15 lakh on the third day.'⁷⁹ It was also in this context, that the emergence of Datta Samant, a new leader in the textile industry as a leader of the workers who led the strike of 1982 assumes importance.

The Background of the textile workers strike in 1982:

As it has already been pointed out, the RMMS, an affiliate of the Congress party's INTUC, received patronage from the successive governments that ruled Bombay and later on Maharashtra, after independence. One of the major causes of discontent among the workers was the low wage structure in which the basic minimum pay had remained low. It saw a meager rise of 'Rs 30 in 1947 to Rs. 40 per day in 1962'⁸⁰ along with very little increments annually. Whereas, in many industries, both private and public sectors, workers earned more in terms of salary and other perks such as holidays and vacation.

Comparing the wages of the textile industry with others, Salim Lakha wrote:

...wages in the industry (textile) compared poorly with those paid in the chemical, pharmaceutical and engineering sectors. In the latter industries, wages were higher by as much as 60 to 100 per cent, and the workers had superior housing. One estimate claimed the minimum total pay of textile workers equaled Rs.660 per month. The MGKUs P.N. Samant denied mill owners claim that the wage was Rs. 937. Instead Datta Samant stated that very few workers earned Rs 800 to Rs.900, but most received about Rs 700.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Lakha, Salim, Organized Labour and Militant Unionism: The Bombay Textile workers' strike of 1982, in (ed.) Ghanshyam Shah, Social Movements and the State :Readings in Indian Government and Politics.

p.235

⁷⁹ ibid.

⁸⁰ ibid

⁸¹ ibid. p.233

Along with low wages, another concern of the workers was the *badli* system; nearly 40 % of the workers were employed under the *badli* system. The *badli* workers had to work for extremely low wages and fluctuating work conditions. On the condition of the *badli* workers, Raji Bakshi writes:

The 2.3 lakh workers on the muster rolls of the mills who were the backbone of the imminent battle was constituted by the one lakh among these who were *badli* workers. This young younger lot of workers, who had little to lose or much to gain were the core of the tornado which was about to tear through the mill area. Many *badlis* normally get work for only 5 to 10 days a month and earned about Rs. 150 to Rs. 300 as wage. It has been a common practice for years that a *badli* may come to the mill everyday in the hope of work with no guarantee of actually getting it. As a result not enough *badlis* were made permanent. Instead *badlis* have always been systematically given breaks in their service to ensure that they do not accumulate 240 days of continuous service to ensure and become eligible for a number of benefits. The RMMS not only failed to protect the interest of *badli* workers at an institutional level but actively became party to the corruption which further undermined the position of these workers. Mill level RMSS functionaries have, for decades taken thousands of rupees from *badli* workers desperate to become permanent.⁸²

Technological modernization and automation, a feature across the textile industry in India in the late 1970s, added to the miseries of the workers. These changes resulted in the reduction of employment. So much so, the decline in employment was ‘around 16 per cent in the average workforce of the mills between 1961 and 1980’.⁸³ The coming of new machines also meant more work loads. Though, initially, the modernization and mechanization of the mills, which began in 1940s, had led to a decrease in the work force, over a period of time this became counterproductive. ‘Where there were 1, 97,000 workers in 1961, the figure dropped to just over 1, 65,000 workers in 1980 – a drop of over 32,000 or about 16% in 20 years.’⁸⁴ The new machines, however, increased the amount of production, so the profit. As the loom assignments increased, naturally, the condition of the workers began to deteriorate in terms of their physical health; this resulted in high absenteeism among the workers. Absenteeism rose by 20 per cent in

⁸² Bakshi, Rajni, *Op.cit*, p.39

⁸³ Lakha, Salim, *Op.cit*, p.234

⁸⁴ Bakshi, *Op.Cit*, p.36

December 1978, indicating bad health of the workers. Rajni Bakshi in her book documents the condition of workers in these mills. She describes the plight of the workers, their poor and unhygienic living conditions around the Mill areas, and how they lived in overcrowded *chawls* or tenements.

In 1982 most workers were still living in dingy chawls where 15 to 30 men shared a room about 10 feet by 10 feet in size. That beds are used in rotation by workers on different shifts has for long been a “quaint” feature of Bombay, often related to outsiders when attempting to illustrate the bizarre quality of life in the country's prime metropolis. Many workers leave their families behind in their villages and eat their meals at the homes of women who make a living by providing them with food for a monthly fee. In effect, many such workers have no home in the city. This instability combined with the unhealthy, tension-filled working conditions has led to a very high rate of absenteeism. Often bemoaned by the mill-owners as one of their worst problems, absenteeism is a phenomenon common to most workers, regardless of their living conditions. While managers of mills have always argued that absenteeism is due to the worker's laziness, it is actually a product of the often hazardous working conditions in the mills and the toll they take on a man's health.⁸⁵

The failure of the recognized union to address the issues faced by the workers has already been discussed; the union, in fact, was even collaborating with the factory owners. For instance, it facilitated the process of automation and in the process, workers' concerns were neglected. As a result, the workers began looking for new avenues to vent their grievances and they approached a relatively new leader in the textile industry Dr. Dutta Samant. He was familiar to them as the medical practitioner attached to the ESI hospital in Bombay. His entry happened to be in the context of the conflict between the workers and the management of the Empire Dyeing Mills. After a prolonged strike that lasted 77 days, the workers received a raise of Rs. 150. The strike also witnessed police clashing with the workers and one worker died during the conflict. In yet another incident, while the RMSS was negotiating for bonus on behalf of the workers, lacking trust in the sincerity of the union, the workers approached Datta Samant to lead a strike

⁸⁵ Bakshi, *Op. Cit.*, pp.33-34

in 1981; and subsequently workers in seven mills across Bombay went on strike over the issue. Datta Samant had a huge support of the badli workers and other young workers.

Datta Samant gave a call for an indefinite general strike from 18th January 1982; it received tremendous response from the workers in spite of RMSS's opposition to it. The main demands of the strike included higher wages and improvement in the working conditions of the workers. They sought a wage rise from Rs. 250 to Rs 400 a month and a bonus claim of 20 percent. Other claims included permanent employment of the *badli* workers, allowances for leave and travel, and a payment of house rent.⁸⁶

These demands were rejected by the mill owners outrightly. The then Congress Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Babasaheb Bhosale, labeled the workers strike as illegal, as according to him the RMSS was the only recognized union and ruled out any possible discussion with the agitating workers. Thus began one of the longest strike actions by the unionized workers in India. In the context of this thesis, the next section will look into the media's representation of this significant event.

The Newspaper Reportage:

This section will look into the media's representation of the strike. How far the media covered this prolonged strike? What was the nature of the coverage? Did they cover the strike with objectivity and show compassion to the legitimate issues of the workers? At the outset, it is important to note here that unlike the railway strike of 1974, which was against the State, the textile mill workers strike was fought against private mills owners. The textile strike lasted for more than a year, received widespread support from the

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p.237.

workers. It must also be said that, since the strike was a prolonged one, the reporting on the textile strike was not done on a continuous basis. It is also a fact that unlike the Railway workers strike, which paralyzed the whole country, the Textile workers strike affected only a particular industry and impacted less; the media's approach was different and limited in comparison with Railway strike. There was reasonable coverage on certain developments of the mill strike in terms of the negotiations and the events such as the 'production roko' organized in the month of October 1982. The newspapers chosen for analyzing the media coverage of the textile strike are, The Hindu, The Times of India, The Economic Times and the Hindustan Times.

The beginning of the strike

On the day before the country wide solidarity strike called for by various trade unions, i.e. on 18th of January 1982, in support of the indefinite strike of the Textile mill workers led by Datta Samant in Bombay, *The Hindu* published a report titled, 'Two Pronged plan to face strike'. The report talked about the Central Government's approach of a two pronged strategy of persuading the trade union leaders, who have threatened a countrywide stoppage on 18th of January, 1982. It reported on the strategy of the government: focusing on the workers who have been 'coerced and compelled to participate in the strike' and expressed hopes that the government will take the necessary steps to deal sternly with it. To quote from the report,

The Centre is pursuing a two-pronged policy of persuading the trade union leaders to give up the threatened country-wide work stoppage on Tuesday, while taking all possible steps to deal sternly with any acts of coercion to compel unwilling workers to join the strike. In the wake of the Prime Minister's appeal cum-warning to the working classes not to participate in this politically motivated strike, the Home Minister, Mr. Zail Singh, promised in a broadcast tonight full protection for loyal workers opposed to it. Though attempts would continue to be made until the last moment to avert this all India strike, the Central and State Governments are taking countrywide precautions to prevent intimidation and violence. The police arrangements that are

being made are more or less on the same scale as the steps taken at the time of the 1968 railway strike.⁸⁷

The report cites the Union Home Minister's broadcast. He described the opposition's demand for the withdrawal of the National Security Act (NSA) and the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) that were tagged on to the strike call by the trade unions as part of the solidarity strike, as 'only a facade to conceal the designs of certain parties which were trying to bring the Government into disrepute.'⁸⁸ The report, in a separate segment, writes about the National Campaign Committees', which had organized the day long stoppage, version under a separate heading 'High Handedness'. Apart from the government's version of dealing with the strike, the paper also, in the same page, reported the statement by the striking unions. Here the committees' version is presented, in which they accused the government of high handedness to browbeat the workers with punitive action before the strike. The report stated:

The committee has strongly condemned the arrests of trade union leaders in various states describing it as a high-handed move to terrorize the working classes and deny them the opportunity to resort to even legitimate protest to ventilate their grievances. The Bihar order to shoot at sight those indulging in acts of sabotage and violence was sharply criticized along with the alleged threats to derecognize the unions and treat participation in this strike by Government employees as tantamount to a break in service. The committee has also denounced the efforts being made by the official media to foster the impression that the majority .of organized labour was opposed to the strike.⁸⁹

The report, in a separate section, with the heading 'Textile Strike plan', writes about the concerns of the government on the indefinite strike in the Textile Mills. It writes, 'it is more concerned with the proposed indefinite strike in the textile industry in Bombay affecting nearly two lakh workers in what could easily escalate into a confrontation with the Government rather than a trial of strength with the mill-owners

⁸⁷ Two-pronged plan to face strike, The Hindu, 17th January 1982, p.1

⁸⁸ *ibid*

⁸⁹ *ibid*

over the demand for increased wages.’⁹⁰ The report, however, does not present any version from the textile mill workers or any statement from the members of the MGKU. The report focused more on the view of the government on the proposed strike and also the charges made by the opposition parties.

Then, on the events of the first day of the textile workers strike, i.e. on 18th 1982, *The Hindu* reported in a single column in its first page on 19th January 1982, titled, ‘Bombay Textile workers on Strike’ plainly informing about the strike. To quote,

About two lakhs workers in the first two shifts in 35 of the 60 textile mills here went on an indefinite strike to press their demands for pay revision and improvement in their service conditions. The strike was total and peaceful. The strike call was given by the Maharashtra Girmi Kamgar Union headed by Dr. Datta Samant, M.L.A. The strike has been opposed by the INTUC-affiliated Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor SangK. The last indefinite strike in the industry was in 1974 when the workers struck work for 40 days demanding higher wages in response to a call given by the AITUC—led Mumbai Gimi Kamgar Union.⁹¹

On 20th January, 1982, *The Hindu* carried a report titled, ‘Mixed response to strike call’ analyzing the impact of the country wide stoppage or a strike called by the National Campaign Committee. The report carried the statement of the Union Labour Minister, Mr. Bhagawat and Railway Minister, Mr. P.C. Sethi, ‘congratulating the working people for "ignoring" the strike call, and the campaign committee on its part greeted the workers for their "successful strike".’⁹² The report then informed that even though the telecommunication sector was not affected by the strike, still there was inadequate information from the news agencies on the impact. The newspaper were largely depended on the information provided by the governmental agencies:

Even though the telecommunication network was not affected by the strike, the flow of information from different parts of the country was inadequate, largely because the two main news agencies — PTI and UNI — were immobilized by the strike. The main source of information

⁹⁰ ibid

⁹¹ *The Hindu*, 19th January, 1982, p.1

⁹² *The Hindu*, 20th January, 1982, p.1

about the impact of the strike was the network of Government Press Information Bureau Offices at different centres across the country, which worked round-the-clock.⁹³

The second part of the news report, presented a summary of the impact of the general strike called in solidarity with the Bombay Textile workers strike in various parts of the country, its general observation was that the strike disrupted work in many parts the country.

The Hindustan Times, a Ne Delhi based paper, covered the Textile workers strike. On 19th January 1982, a report datelined Bombay, in its 8th page, the *Hindustan Times*, reported the Textile strike with the title, 'Textile Strike near Complete'. The report informed the readers about the strike as well as highlighted the demands of the workers.

It said:

The Workers in the textile industry here, which employs over three lakh hands, began an indefinite strike to press their demands for higher wages and security of services for temporary workers. The strike which covered all the 60 mills was complete and peaceful. It was led by militant trade union leader Datta Samant backed by four other unions. The recognized union for the industry, the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS) of INTUC is not a party to the strike.⁹⁴

While reporting about Datta Samant's warning to the government against repressive measures it said:

Dr. Samant has warned the government against adopting repressive measures to deal with the strike. He said if he was arrested and repressive measures were let loose, the authorities would have themselves to blame if the workers retaliated. Dr. Samant demands that wage increase of Rs. 250 to Rs. 400 per month to be given to the workers and nearly a lakh of temporary hands to be confirmed. The additional financial burden on Mills on account of these demands alone is calculated at once to be over Rs 100 crore by the workers and Rs 150 crore a year by mill owners.⁹⁵

The report also presented the views of the President of RMSS; he is not opposed to the strike but, 'we are opposed to the manner in which the strike call has been given

⁹³ *ibid*

⁹⁴ *The Hindustan Times*, 19th January 1982, p.8

⁹⁵ *ibid*

and the methods adopted by Dr. Samant's union to coax the workers to join the strike'⁹⁶. Finally, the report shared an important piece of information that the workers of the mills run by the National Textile Corporation and Maharashtra Textile Corporation also joined Datta Samant's strike.

The Times of India, which had a Bombay edition, reported the Textile Mill workers strike in its front page on 21st January, 1982, titled 'CM invites Samant for talks' the report covered Datta Samant addressing representatives of mill workers. It said:

The President of the Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union (MGKU) Dr. Datta Samant has reiterated the organizations determination to continue the six day old strike in the cotton textile industry. Addressing a meeting of representative from about 60 mills at Ghatkopar late last night, Dr. Samant urged the workers to maintain peace 'despite provocation by vested interest'. He said he had been invited by the new Chief Minister, Mr. Babasaheb Bhosale.⁹⁷

It is a clear case that the newspaper represented the view points of the trade union leader Dr. Samant.

The Times of India further covered the story of the impact of the textile strike. How the strike is affecting the Yarn market in Bombay and the demoralized conditions of trading in the last week of week of January. It wrote, 'The strike in the textile mills , the increase in liquidity ratio by the RBI and stringent control on bank credit, restrained activity in most sections, prices tended to seek lower levels on slack demand.'⁹⁸

In another report in *The Times of India* on the 5th of February 1982, on the Textile workers strike titled, 'Centre Support state' it talked about the Central Government's support to the state government on the issue of the strike. It featured the Union Labour minister's statement. It reported his statement saying, 'In any event, the Central

⁹⁶ ibid

⁹⁷ CM invites Samant for strike talks, *The Times of India*, 24th January 1982, p.1

⁹⁸ Nylon polyster yarns down, *The Times of India*, 1st February 1982

Government is firm that the issue should be settled through normal legal machinery available under the Bombay Industrial Relations Act.’⁹⁹ The same report also featured, from a PTI source, S.A. Dange’s appeal to the Chief Minister for a meeting ‘with all the trade union leaders in cotton textile industry to settle the 18 day strike’.¹⁰⁰ Dange, it may be noted was a leader of the communist party and the trade unions in Bombay since the 1920s and was an accused in the Meerut Conspiracy case; he had, however, left the party by the 1970s. Along with this, it also featured a statement from Mrs. Roza Despande, leader of All India Communist Party and Dange’s daughter, about her interaction with the Chief Minister of Maharashtra. The report said, ‘according to the All India Communist Party leader Mrs. Roza Despande, who is Mr. Dange’s daughter, the octogenarian leader conveyed this suggestion to Mr. Bhosale when the Chief Ministers called on him. Mr. Bhosale did not directly react to this suggestion according to Mrs Despande. The Chief Minister said that he was never anti labour and would not resort to repressive measures against the strikers who, under the banner of Dr. Datta Samant’s Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union, struck work demanding more wages and bonus.’¹⁰¹

The Times of India published another report, in its front page, on 12th February 1982, titled, ‘Samant offers poll to end mill strike’ comprehensively presenting his position on the issue of the strike. Apart from Datta Samant, the report also featured a statement from the Mill Owners Association President. To quote from the report:

The president of MGKU, Dr. Datta Samant has agreed to let strike bound cotton textile mills in the city to resume operations on a unit to unit basis, if a majority of workers so desire. This offer is in response to the Chief Minister Bhosale’s recent appeal to mill hands to resume work. Dr. Samant has suggested to the CM to hold ballot, secret or otherwise, outside each unit. If majority favours

⁹⁹ Centre Support state, *The Times of India*, 5th February 1982,p.1

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

the re opening of the unit, the mGKU was willing to bow its wishes. Sources close to Dr. Samant have all along been maintaining that it was the workers decision to go on strike to realize a series of demands including wage revision. Despite Dr. Samant's caution the workers insisted upon embarking on a protracted struggle, it is claimed by these sources.¹⁰²

The report further goes on to say that the offer is quite a challenge to both the Chief Minister and RMSS; the hold of Dr. Datta Samant among the workers was clear. It writes that 'Dr. Samant has all along been maintaining that the RMSS continues to be recognized body only by virtue of the provisions of the Bombay Industrial Act.'¹⁰³ The report then talks about the President of Mill Owners Association, Mr. Harishchandra Maganlal's claim that, 'majority of the workers were getting fed up with the strike and were keen on resuming work... it was only a fear psychosis which prevented them from returning from work. Efforts have been made to reopen some of the mills have met with partial success and normalcy was to be expected in these mills soon.'¹⁰⁴ It again featured MGKU leader, Mr. P. N Samant, refuting the claims, and also the Soviet order of cloth,

He said some of the senior personnel in a few mills had reported for work but in the absence of the workforce, they could not do precious little. The association is keen to resume operation in view of the massive soviet order for about 120 million metres of cloth... Some observers feel that the timing of the Soviet offer had indirectly strengthened Dr. Samants position. The mill owners were not much perturbed of the textile strike initially because of the unsold piled up with them. However the Soviet offer appears to have changed the situation.¹⁰⁵

It is clear from the reports that appeared in *The Times of India* that the paper strikes a balance between different points of view in its coverage of the strike.

The Economic Times published three editorials within a span of a week on the issues around the textile strike in the month of April 1982. The first editorial was published on 9th of April, 1982, with the title, 'Continuing Strike', in the backdrop of the closure of a textile mill in Sholapur due to the textile workers strike. The editorial talks

¹⁰² Samant offers poll to end strike, *The Times of India*, 12th February 1982

¹⁰³ ibid

¹⁰⁴ ibid

¹⁰⁵ ibid

about the fact that, these ‘power looms should face the possibility of a closure as a result of the Bombay textile strike. It did draw attention on the ramifications of the prolonged strike for the economy.¹⁰⁶ The editorial, apart from discussing the Sholapur closure, talked about the impact, the textile strike is having on the retail traders and other services associated with the textile industry. However, it refrained from blaming anybody (workers or management) for the situation. The editorial, rather sounded emphatic to the conditions of the workers due to strike.

The misery that the textile strike has produced for the striking workers themselves is beyond computation. All strikes of course cut off the incomes of the workers on strike and create difficulties for them as the length of the strike increases. Post savings if any gets quickly exhausted and other resources difficult if not impossible. The terms for borrowing harden when however, the number of workers involved in one area becomes massive, and few escape hatches remain open. Those to whom individual families could ordinarily turn are themselves victims. Traders might extend accommodation to a few of their customers tighten up whenever such large number get involved. Many workers withdraw from their villages, but others cannot. Massive suffering is thus the result of this senseless strike. When will this strike come to an end.¹⁰⁷

The second editorial was published on 12th of April, 1982. The editorial titled, ‘Bombay Textile strike’ talked about the ‘tremendous impact that the Bombay textile strike had on the textile workers, on retailers, on producers of goods and services consumed by textile workers and on the industry producing inputs like dyestuffs and textile stores. It also has had a powerful effect on the textile mills themselves, on production and exports of textile and through these and other inter relationship on the national economy.’¹⁰⁸ The editorial also talked about how the mills also faced problems during a strike. These problems include, apart from salaries of staff and expenses, and interest on loans on borrowings to finance large stocks of finished products. And income during the strike was nil or negligible. The editorial linked the textile strike to highlight

¹⁰⁶ Continuing struggle, *The Economic Times*, 9th April, 1982

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*

¹⁰⁸ Bombay Textile strike, *The Economic Times*, 12th April 1982.

India's balance of payment condition, which was not in a good shape. 'At a time when our balance of payment continues to be in acute difficulties, the blow that the Bombay textile strike has given to our export earnings is indeed a heavy one.'¹⁰⁹ It must be pointed out here that *The Economic Times* indicating the country's depleting foreign currency reserves or the growing balance of payment difficulties which have begun to emerge in the economy in early 1980s.

Then the third editorial, which was published a day after, on 14th April 1982, titled "The Strike Must End", which analyses the strike and delve into the causes of the strike. The editorial argues that how in the textile strike in Bombay, 'neither labour nor management will emerge from this strike unscathed.'¹¹⁰ It writes:

Even if labour is able to achieve partially some of its objectives, it will be quite sometimes after the strike is over before it will have made good its losses during the strike period. And these losses will obviously be greater, the longer the strike continues. As for the Mills, they have crippled by the adverse market conditions that they have been facing some time. the long the strike, for many of them, be the proverbial straw on the camel's back.¹¹¹

The editorial also analysed the causes of the strike, as not so much a conflict between the management and the workers. But it mentioned that the strike is the result of the disaffection of the workers with the existing leadership of the recognized unions. To quote again

The strike's unfortunate part of the situation is that the strike does not really arise from a basic dispute between the workers and management. But many workers may no doubt be dissatisfied with their wage conditions and few any industry are able to resist the extravagant promises put forwarded by labour leaders noted for their willingness no make potentially unreasonable demands- sometimes even achieve some of them... The real reasons for the strike are quite different. These are rooted in dissatisfaction and even frustration of the existing leadership of the recognized union, which has lost the confidence of the workers. At the very top, the leadership of

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ The Strike Must end, *The Economic Times*, 14th April 1982

¹¹¹ *ibid*

the union has been weak. At the lower level it is charged, it has often been corrupt and thoroughly insensitive to the needs of the workers.¹¹²

It then went on to argue the role of the recognized unions that led ‘someone else to walk in and take over control.’¹¹³ The solution ‘from a national point of view can only be found in the provisions to the workers of an alternative leadership that can protect the workers fundamental interest... in that way or whatever other means can be found within a democratic framework, the textile strike must end.’¹¹⁴ In short, all the three editorials discussed the textile strike from different points of view and highlighted the plight of the ordinary mill workers due to the strike. The editorial, “The Strike Must end” specifically highlighted the failure of the recognized unions in addressing the issues of the workers and had become corrupt and inefficient, eventually making way for an alternative union.

The Economic Times again, in its weekly section of Mid Week Review, published two articles on the strike. From *The Economic Times* Research Bureau, Madhav Datar wrote a piece titled, ‘Textile Strike cast as ominous shadow’. The other write up was an interview with Dr. Datta Samant, president, Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union. Mahadev Datar presented a comprehensive view on the state of the textile industry and discussed the impact of the textile strike on ‘production level and cotton prices. The production of all varieties of cloth during the first quarter of 1982 at 683.3 million metres was 32.5 percent below the production level achieved during the period of 1981.’¹¹⁵ Datar then discusses the demand made by the Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union and states that ‘the wages of the textile workers are low in comparison with wages in other industries in Bombay. Textile workers get compensation for increased living

¹¹² ibid

¹¹³ ibid

¹¹⁴ ibid

¹¹⁵ Textile Strike cast as ominous shadow, *The Economic Times*, 26th May 1982.

cost. But as 100 per cent neutralization is available at the lowest level alone, other categories have experienced a fall in real wages.’¹¹⁶ It argues that Bombay had ‘lost its edge over textile workers from other centres (not to speak of other industries). In the past, textile workers in Bombay used to get higher wages as compared to textile workers in other centres. Since the mid seventies, textile workers in Tamil Nadu have fared better as their wages have increased at a relatively faster rate’.¹¹⁷ The author was critical of the mill owners and said that ‘the argument of mills do not have capacity to pay draws a blank with workers because textile industry does not seem to have shared increased profit during the years of prosperity.’¹¹⁸ On the issue of modernization of mills, the author cites a CSO study on wages and productivity, according to which, real wages in textile industry have not kept pace with the increase in labour productivity. On this he adds:

If it can be said that the pace of modernization is at faster rate in Bombay than other centres, it becomes easier to understand the discontent among textile workers in Bombay. Bombay workers have closely witnessed the increase in productivity following modernization and the gap between wages and productivity becomes all the more glaring. The modernization process therefore cannot have a smooth sailing unless the worker have a feeling that they have a just share of the increased production.¹¹⁹

What is important, in the context of this work, is that the article objectively highlights the issues pertaining to the textile industry. While objectively assessing the situation, empathy towards the cause of the workers is evident throughout the article. The article also presents the viewpoint of the MGKU and also cites a study pertaining to the industry to prove the point made by the union.

In the interview with Datta Samant, President of MGKU, a wide range of questions were presented before him. Some questions are presented below.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

¹¹⁹ *ibid*

1. The textile strike is more than 100 days old. As a leader of 2.5 lakh striking workforce, how do you keep their morale?
2. Though it may sound a bit absurd, what exactly are the demands of the textile workers?
3. Apart from low wages, textile workers are facing many other problems like their speed of work, supervision of work has gone tremendously due to modernization. As a unionist have you focused your attention on all these issues?
4. How do you react to the threat of textile workers being sacked and related to that what are the factors that prevented MGKU from seeking the status of representative union under Bombay Industrial Resolution (BIR) Act before it gave a call for strike¹²⁰

The questions were not only limited to the issues raised by MGKU during the strike but also hinted how automation and modernization have led to newer problems related to speed. The interview gave the labour leader a platform to reiterate his issues and present the workers side of the story.

Then, on 3rd June 1982, *The Hindu*, reported of the possibility of talks that was suggested by the Maharashtra Chief Minister, Babasaheb Bhosale during his interaction with the press. The report said:

Talking to reporters, Mr. Bhosale expressed confidence that the strike would end soon and a settlement evolved without any humiliation to the workers. Asked if the Maharashtra Girmi Kamgar Union, president, Mr. Datta Samant, who is spearheading the current strike would also be involved, he said. "Dr. Samant is a trade union leader and an MLA and we cannot totally ignore him"¹²¹

The Hindu published an article from a special correspondent from Bombay, on 13th June 1982 on the issue of strike. The article titled, 'Politicians' Playground' begins with the hardships faced by 2.50 lakhs workers in the textile industry and its ancillaries. It writes, 'The five-month old textile strike in Bombay is dragging on without a solution in crippling the industry and its ancillaries it has caused untold hardship to the workers numbering about 2 50 lakhs.'¹²² The article then talks about the efforts of former Union

¹²⁰ The Economic Times, 26th May 1982.

¹²¹ The Hindu, 3rd June, 1982, p.1`

¹²² The Hindu, 13th June 1982,p.2

Minister Mr. Adik Ramadas's to break ties with Datta Samant and Chief Minister's backing for his efforts and finally he retracting from it. The article, interestingly, talks about Datta Samant's 'loss of credentials' due to his loss in the by-elections. It also suggested that the opposition is using the strike to fulfill their political gain. It said:

The Chief Minister's statement chilled the hopes of the workers who were expecting better times. But they seem to be adamant and against any face-saving compromise. This despite Dr Samant's toss of credentials because of the by-election defeat and the start of a new academic year which should draw the wards of the workers to Bombay. The opposition parties are happy that the INTUC's credibility has suffered much due to the strike. The sincerity of Congress (I) leaders' individual efforts to find a solution is doubted. These efforts are viewed as image building exercises or as attempts to throw up an alternative leadership to Mr. Bhosale.¹²³

The article blames the Congress and the INTUC as causes for the workers' disenchantment with these organisations. Regrettably, it holds, that the high command has not taken into consideration the grave situation developing on the textile front. It also warned that when the Bombay Municipal Corporation election takes place next year this would have its impact on the outcome. It is going to be a herculean task for the ruling party'.¹²⁴ The article also talked about the extent of damage the strike could inflict on the textile industry and attributed this to the inability of the Congress led INTUC who, by and large, failed to represent the grievances of the workers.

The Hindu, again on 23rd of June 1982, reported the statement of Mr. H. Maganlal, the Chairman of the Bombay Mill Owners Association, titled, '26 million man days lost due to strike'. It was, obviously, a reproduction of statistics presented by the management side. To criticize the strike. The report said:

Mr. H. Maganlal, Chairman, Bombay Mill owners' Association, told the annual general meeting of the association today, the loss of production had so far been around 600 million metres of cloth valued at Rs. 600 crores. The loss of exports was around Rs. 115 crores and the loss of revenue to the Central and State Governments was around Rs. 120 crores. The workmen had lost more than

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ *ibid*

Rs. 125 crores by way of wages and fringe benefits. The strike had thus turned out to be disastrous to all concerned, he added.¹²⁵

The Textile Strike from October 1982

The mill owners gave an ultimatum to the textile workers to join work or face dismissal by the first week of October 1982. Since the workers refused to join work, the mills began to recruit new workers to break the strike. 'At the end of September an official of the MOA (Mill Owners Association), R.G. Shetye, had admitted that 30,000 to 40,000 new workers had been recruited in the mills and this was almost half the number of workers inside at that point.'¹²⁶ This move exerted pressure on Samant to intensify the struggle. Therefore, in early October, he announced a second jail bhara campaign along with a three day utpadan roko (production ***bandh***) in all industries apart from the textile industry, where his unions were in control. On 11th of October, 1982, 11,000 of Samant's workers courted arrest and were sent to jail. 'The 'utpadan roko' evoked excellent response and about 3,500 units (approximately 90% of the Units under Samant's control) shut down for three days.'¹²⁷ These events also saw renewed coverage in the press.

One of the events that received much coverage as a part of the Textile Workers strike was the decision of the Bombay Electric Supply & Tramway Company Limited (BEST) Workers Union a trade union led by Geroge Fernandes, decided to undertake an indefinite strike in support of the Textile workers demands from 11th October 1982. On the same day, around eight lakh industrial workers protested in solidarity with the mill workers' strike. About 75,000 mill workers had planned to court arrest as a form of protest. *The Hindu* reported about the preparation for the indefinite strike led by BEST

¹²⁵ The Hindu, 23rd June 1982.

¹²⁶ Bakshi, *Op.Cit.*, p.83

¹²⁷ *ibid*

employees and also about the government's plan of action such as prohibitory orders and deployment of paramilitary forces in Bombay. The report stated:

Greater Bombay came under prohibitory orders banning assembly of five or more persons from today as the Maharashtra Government geared the State machinery to meet the three-day production bandh called by the militant trade union leader, Dr. Datta Samant, from tomorrow to back the 266-day old textile strike. Large contingents of CRP and SRP moved into the city to assist the 22,000 strong city constabulary to maintain law and order in view of the unprecedented protest action involving about eight lakh industrial workers owing allegiance to Dr. Samant's unions in the State. About 75,000 striking millmen would court arrest on the first day of the three-day agitation in Bombay and other parts of the State, Dr. Samant has said.¹²⁸

The Bandh saw violence and many workers got injured. *The Hindu* reported the incidence of police resorting to 'to firing and lathi charge (today) in Bombay to quell violence indulged in by agitators, who launched the three day 'stop production' and 'pack jails' stir, in response to the call by the militant trade union leader, Dr. Datta Samant, demanding immediate settlement to the nearly nine-month old textile strike in Bombay'.¹²⁹ The news report also covered the statement of the Chief Secretary of Maharashtra in which he stated that barring a few incidents, the state remained unaffected. The report said:

Over 10,000 persons courted arrest and 290 industrial units remained closed in Maharashtra today. The Chief Secretary to the Maharashtra Government, Mr. R. D. Pradhan, told newsmen that barring sporadic incidents of violence in Bombay, normal life and work in industries throughout the State, by and large, remained unaffected.¹³⁰

In the ninth page, on the same day, *The Hindu* also carried a comment from the Chief Minister that claimed the 'Bandh was a flop'¹³¹. 'The Maharashtra Chief Minister, Mr. Babasaheb Bhosale, today described as "flop", the "jail bhara" agitation launched by the militant trade union leader, Dr. Datta Samant, in support of the demands of the striking textile workers in the City.' Along with the CM's statement, the report also

¹²⁸ The Hindu, 11th October, 1982,

¹²⁹ The Hindu, 12th October, 1982

¹³⁰ *ibid*

¹³¹ *ibid*, p.9

carried the number of arrests made in Pune, where nearly, '200 Industrial workers, drawn from various units in and around Pune courted arrest at the Collectorate today in sympathy with the striking textile workers in Bombay'.¹³² The placing of news reports indicates that how the newspaper report, while carrying the comment of the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, also presented the facts from the ground.

One of the important news during the textile workers strike was the Bombay High Court's order¹³³ on August 13th 1982. This was reported in *The Times of India*. In the court order, it asked, 'why the government should not be directed to make a reference in respect of the Bombay textile workers demand under section 73 of the Bombay Industrial Relations Act. The court has also asked the state government to inform the court why pending such a reference, an order of interim relief to the workers should not be made.'¹³⁴ The Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court observed that the proposal for a tripartite committee to be set up by the Union government did not prevent the state government from acting under section 73 of the Bombay Industrial Relations Act. The report vividly covered the instruction of the court:

His lordship made three observations when a writ petition filed by Mr. P.H Pradhan, an advocate and the Bombay Mill Owners Association came up hearing today. The respondents to the petition are the state of Maharashtra, Dr. Datta Samant, President of Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union, The RMSS and the Commissioner of Police. The petitioners had prayed for a writ of mandamus on appropriate order directing the state of Maharashtra to declare the prolonged strike of the textile workers in Bombay as illegal under the Bombay Industrial Relations Act, as it was not organized by a recognized union. The petitioner also prayed for an order directing Dr. Samant to withdraw immediately and not to resort to coercive methods on loyal workers. They also prayed for a direction to the police commissioner to give protection and help the willing and loyal mill workers.¹³⁵

¹³² *ibid*

¹³³ The Bombay Mill owners Association approached the Bombay High Court against Datta Samant to withdraw the strike.

¹³⁴ Bombay Textile order: Court order to government, *The Times of India*, 13th August 1982

¹³⁵ *ibid*

The Hindustan Times too reported on the three day ‘production roko’ in the state in support of the textile workers’ strike. On the 9th of October, *The Hindustan Times*, in its front page report titled ‘Bandh Fear Grips Bombay’ said:

Lakhs of white and blue collar workers lending ear to militant labour leader Datta Samant are set to begin a statewide three day bandh to mark the beginning of ‘production roko’ phase of Dr. Samant’s war on Maharashtra Government. Because of past experiences, fear grips the mind of the law abiding citizens about the impact of the ‘bandh’ on the general life. The police which have already made extensive ‘bandobast’ has issued show cause notices to hundreds of anti social elements particularly musclemen supporters of Dr. Samant as to why they should not be bound down for the bandh period.¹³⁶

It then goes on to say that the textile workers’ strike had failed to move the government and hence, ‘Datta Samant has now decided to involve workers from other sections too. He claims to have backing of 1.5 million workers in the state and have some strong pockets of influence on the outskirts of Bombay. The three day *bandh* is mainly to record support for the strike.’¹³⁷

The Hindustan Times again, on the 11th of October 1982, one day ahead of the ‘industrial bandh’ reported on the support for the Bandh from Lok Dal MP, George Fernandes, and his supporters in BEST (Bombay Electric Supply and Transport) along with Datta Samant’s statements. It said:

More than 300 people have been rounded up and prohibitory orders were promulgated in Bombay and several other places in Maharashtra as the state government geared up its security machinery to face the three day ‘industrial bandh’ called by trade union leader Datta Samant from tomorrow. Lok Dal MP and Hind Mazdoor Panchayat leader George Fernandes, who commands support in the Bombay Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking has expressed support to the Bandh. He directed the BEST workers to strike from the midnight tonight. The BEST strike will continue indefinitely to press for employees demands, including dearness allowance and enhanced house rent.¹³⁸

The report also carried the statement of Dr. Samant that ‘he had directed his followers in BEST and the City Industrial and Development Council (CIDCO), which

¹³⁶ The Hindustan Times, 9th October, 1982, p.1

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ The Hindustan Times, 11th October 1982,p.1

manages new Bombay, to strike work for one day.¹³⁹ It then informed that about 75,000 workers would court arrest on the first day of the agitation in Bombay and other parts of the state.

On the same day (11th October 1982), *The Times of India*, published an article by, Prem Shankar Jha.¹⁴⁰ The article is titled as ‘Death of an industry: Aftermath of the textile strike. The article analyzes the strike and presents the fact that more than one fifth of the workers in the mills have returned. It however does not mean that the production have picked up. It writes how the mill owners, on the pretext of the strike, intend to end its problem of over-staffing. The writer is empathetic to the workers as the strike is used as a pretext for job cut and he raises the point how it will affect the workers as well as the families:

Slowly but surely, the strike in the Bombay textile mill is fizzling out. At most recent count over 51,000 workers, more than one fifth of the 240,000 employed by them had returned to work. The mill owners estimated that around 1500 are returning everyday and the return flow is likely to increase. The figures however do not reflect the extent to which production has picked up. .. what is more, it is the larger and more modern mills , such as Bombay Dyeing and Century Mills , that have come back to stream. The Mill owners have decided to make use of this textile strike to end severe overstaffing in the industry. According to a study by the Textile Research Bureau some time ago, the Bombay textile industry should have been employing a total of 85 persons per loom against the actual complement of 113 workers. The mill owners have decided that when they reopen their units, they will enforce this norm. If they go through with this, 60,000 persons who are bread earners for at least 250,000 people in the city , and in equal number in the villages will find themselves out of work. Last month the mill owners issued an ultimatum to the workers to return to work by beginning of October, or face dismissal. The time limit has now expired. The stage is therefore set for the mass dismissals which will achieve the desired reduction in overstaffing.¹⁴¹

On 12th of October 1982, the day after the production *bandh* and agitation by workers *The Hindustan Times* in its report titled ‘10,000 arrested: firing in Bombay’, informed that ‘in spite of the government’s smart tactics to keep the number of arrests

¹³⁹ *ibid*

¹⁴⁰ Economic editor, *The Times of India*

¹⁴¹ Death of an industry: Aftermath of Textile Strike, *The Times of India* , 11th October 1982

low, over 10,000 workers were today arrested on the first day of the three day 'jail Bharo' and 'production roko' agitation launched by militant labour leader in support of the nine month old strike by over two lakh Bombay textile workers, according to state government'¹⁴². Interestingly the report after informing about the agitation which involved incidents of clashes between the police and the agitators and the near total collapse of the bus transport in the city also quotes the Chief Minister who said that the agitation was 'a flop':

There were eight incidents of agitator clash with police, who cane charged at seven places hen agitators insisted on collecting to offer satyagraha. In one case police open fired. Of the 6,200 conductors and drivers of 20,40 Bombay 'local' buses, only 100 had reported for duty this morning. Only 22 buses were moved out of the depot but were withdrawn within a short time. But the Chef Minister described the agitation as 'a flop'.¹⁴³

The newspaper report clearly makes the distinction where the Chief Minister's official version of 'a flop' in reality was an agitation which had seen widespread support among the workers. The duty of a newspaper is not only to report the official version but also to verify the claims made by the government.

However, on 12th of October, *The Hindustan Times* editorial titled, 'Samant's Bandh', starts with how the industrial bandh has led to the large scale civic inconveniences. The editorial praised the government's action of arresting Datta Samant.

It said:

Datta Samants call for industrial bandh in Maharashtra could only result in large scale civic inconvenience and since other unions also responded to his call, the dislocation of normal public life was almost total. Fortunately the incidents of violence were few and far between. For a change, the police were fully geared to meet any law and order eventuality. The Bhosale government showed exceptional courage in arresting Datta Samant. But by no means, should it be concluded that his arrest would somehow put an end to Bombay's nine month old agony.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² The Hindustan Times, 12th October 1982, p.1

¹⁴³ ibid

¹⁴⁴ Samants Bandh, The Hindustan Times, 12th October 1982.

The editorial even while praising the Chief Minister, was also critical of the handling of the agitators by the government. It was also critical of the government's inability to take any initiative to end the strike. It presented the impact of the prolonged strike on the workers as,

The textile strike has already become the longest industrial dispute in the country and yet the antagonists remain as deadlocked as they were nine months ago. The Bhosale administration stick to its old stand that no talks can take place unless the agitation is withdrawn, The Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh, stick to its position that under Bombay Industrial Relations Act, Samants Union, The Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union has no locus standi and Samant wants direct talks. The remarkably simple fact is that workers have struck work for over eight months. To the workers, it was the grievances which were not addressed, which they think are legitimate demands.¹⁴⁵

The editorial then argued that there was no alternative other than 'talking with Samant. Formal or informal talks with him could not or should not mean recognition to the MGKU. Unfortunately, the Bhosale government lacks the political gumption to take any meaningful initiative.'¹⁴⁶ The editorial is even critical of the Union Finance Ministry for not exerting its influence over the mill owners to settle the strike.¹⁴⁷ It was also critical of the rigid attitude of all the parties involved in the strike. The state government as well the Central governments were also responsible for the prolonged strike. In other words, the editorial was objective on this count. The protest of 11th October, 1982, was reported in the front page of *The Times of India*, on 12th October 1982 along with two photographs (see annexure). One Photograph is of police clashing with the striking workers and another where an auto driver is getting injured during violence, with a caption, the Poor suffer. The report informs how the 'sporadic incidents, a police firing and cane charges or unruly demonstrators marred the three day "production bandh"

¹⁴⁵ ibid

¹⁴⁶ ibid.

¹⁴⁷ ibid. To quote the report, 'For reasons best known the Union Finance Ministry has yet explore the possibility of using its financial clout over mill owners to settle the strike. Political or financial reasons should convince the Central leaders of the need to take a flexible and generous approach to negotiations with Samant.'

called by Dr. Datta Samant in support of the nine month old textile strike in the city.’¹⁴⁸
The report highlights the arrest of Dr. Datta Samant and other leaders and the Esplanade Court remanding them to judicial custody till 25th October.

Interestingly on its page four, *The Times of India* published another report ‘Little response to bandh call: Government.’ This was from the official statement of the government. The report said that ‘the call for “production bandh” given by Dr. Samant evoked little response in Bombay, Thane, Pune Aurangabad and Nasik and none at all in the rest of the state, according to official source.’¹⁴⁹ The adjacent report, however, claims that ‘4000 Samant aides court arrest in Thane and in Kalyan. The workers courted arrest and the textile mills remained closed due to bandh call by Dr. Datta Samant.’¹⁵⁰ The newspaper, in the same page, also published a photograph of Datta Samant’s arrest with the caption, ‘Datta Samant waves his hand to his followers as he boards a bus after his arrest.’¹⁵¹ In this way, the newspaper published the claims made by the administration and counters it with the reports from the grounds.

The Economic Times, reported in its front page on 13th October 1982, the news of Datta Samant’s indefinite industrial strike to continue but that the BEST workers withdrew their strike in Mumbai. The report titled, ‘Samant to withdraw from BEST strike: Industrial strike to continue’ said that,

The Unions led by Datta Samant have decided to extend their two days old “stop production agitation” units indefinitely. The Maharashtra Unit of the Centre of Indian Trade Union(CITU)

¹⁴⁸ Firing , Cane charge on arrested Samant, *The Times of India*, 12th October 1982, p.1

¹⁴⁹ *The Times of India*, 12th October 1982, p.5

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

has already given a call for a days strike tomorrow against state governments repressive measures against Dr. Samants followers.¹⁵²

The report further writes about the Dr. Samant led union withdrawing from the BEST, which have kept the BEST in flux as the George Fernandes led Best Workers Action Committee had refused to end the strike and 'have decided to continue the strike till their demands for higher house rent and dearness allowances was met.'¹⁵³

The Times of India, in its front page on 16th October, 1982, published a report titled, 'Textile Workers Plight'. The report is based on the two hour debate in the Lok Sabha on the issue of the Bombay Textile workers strike. The title was indeed pro-worker and it reported the scene from Lok Sabha on the issue and stated:

The two hour debate in the Lok Sabha today on the nine month textile workers strike in Bombay was masked by sharp and angry exchanges between some opposition members and the Union Minister of state for commerce, Mr. Shivraj Patil. The thin attendance on the treasury benches was no deterrent for Mr. Patil who often hit back at the opposition whenever the debate was sought to be politicized.... The Opposition members charged the government for adopting anti labour politics and thereby causing hardships to thousands of workers in Bombay. Mr. Patil turned the table by saying that it was the opposition which was adopting disruptionist tactics to 'throw into fore' the agitating textile workers in Bombay. This was adding misery to their problems.¹⁵⁴

The Economic Times also reported the Lok Sabha discussion on the Bombay Textile Strike in a more comprehensive manner. The report published on the 16th of October, 1982, titled 'Debate on Textile Strike leads to walk out' reported that the 'opposition staged a walkout in the Lok Sabha protesting against the ruling of deputy speaker G. Lakshmanan that notice has to be given before making any allegations against the Prime Minister.'¹⁵⁵ The walk out took place during the discussion on the calling attention motion on the Bombay Textile workers strike and it 'was sparked off by a remark regarding the Prime Minister by name by Mr. Harikesh Bahadur (DSP), one of

¹⁵² Samant To withdraw from BEST stir, *The Economic Times*, p 1.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Textile workers plight, *The Times of India*, 16th October 1982.p.1

¹⁵⁵ Debate on Textile Strike leads to walk out, *The Economic Times*, 16th October 1982,p1

the sponsors of the motion.¹⁵⁶ It also reported the reaction of the Minister for Commerce to the charges raised by the opposition on the issue of the textile strike.

The Commerce Minister Mr. Shivraj Patil also faced the wrath while replying to supplementaries on the motion tabled by Mr. Satyanarayan Jatiya and others. But Mr. Patil adopted an aggressive posture and lashed out at the opposition for supporting the strike which would benefit neither the worker nor the government. The commerce minister said the government was prepared to resolve the pressing demands of the workers relating to wages, house rent and conveyance allowance. But these had to be settled in such a manner that mills did not close down and so that workers continue to receive these benefits.¹⁵⁷

The Economic Times reported how Datta Samant's trade unions in other industries have decided to donate one day's salary towards striking textile workers. The report was published on 28th October 1982. It reported how 'More than 85,000 workers owing allegiance to Dr. Datta Samant's Union in 2000 to 3000 factories in Bombay and Thane industrial areas to donate one day's salary towards "bonus" to the striking textile workers in the city.'¹⁵⁸

The Hindu on 18th of January 1983, reported 'Textile strike a year' and reported on the completion of one year of the Textile workers strike in its front page. It stated

Dr. Datta Samant, president of the Maharashtra Girmn Kamgar Union, told newsmen here this evening that the striking textile workers would observe tomorrow as "black day" to mark the anniversary of their work stoppage. The strike would continue till the workers' demands were met. Prohibitory orders have been promulgated in the city and morchas have been banned. About 500 activists of the union have been taken into preventive custody.¹⁵⁹

By 1984, the Union government took over 13 mills. Four months after the take-over, only five of the 13 mills were working. And more importantly, only about 16,000 of the 36,000 workers in those 13 mills had retained their jobs.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

¹⁵⁸ Samants TU to pay bonus to millmen, *The Economic Times*, 28th October 1982

¹⁵⁹ Textile strike a year, *The Hindu*, 18th January 1983.

¹⁶⁰ Bakshi, *Op.Cit*, p.103

The newspapers mostly took an empathetic view of the condition of the workers during the strike. One of the important roles of the press is to act as a platform for diverse viewpoints. The press gave space to both the mill owners and the trade union leaders to present their view points so that the readers get an opportunity to assess it. What is more important was that the editorials were sensitive towards the plight of the workers in the sector even when they did not attack the rigid and non-negotiating stand of the mill owners. However, newspapers like *The Economic Times* provided space for articles which were critical of the mill owners. Interview with the trade union leader, Dr. Datta Samant, was indeed a pointer to where the newspaper stood.

The Mine Workers Struggle and the Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangathan:

The mine workers struggle in Dalli Rajhara, catering to the Public Sector, Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP), in Chhattisgarh (then Madhya Pradesh), led by Shankar Guha Niyogi was one of the epochal struggles for workers' rights. Shankar Guha Niyogi was instrumental in organizing the workers; he was himself, a worker in the steel plant. He joined the Bhilai Steel Plant in the early 1960's. Soon after joining the plant, by 1964-65, Niyogi had already become a union organizer and was the secretary to the Blast Furnace Action Committee in the Plant. In 1967, he left Bhilai to become a member of the Co-ordination Committee of the Communist Revolutionaries (an offshoot of the famous Naxalbari movement). He lost his job soon and was, since then, associated with a number of activities in the border regions of Maharashtra and Bastar. An article brought out by the People Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) reveals the activities of Niyogi during those times; his involvement with various struggles in the Bastar region, specifically his

fight for the rights of the *adivasis* living in the region. His approach to trade unionism was indeed different from the routine.

Niyogi was arrested during the internal Emergency of 1975 under Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) and incarcerated for a period of thirteen months. After his release from prison, Niyogi formed the Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangathan, and became its first organizing secretary. The work of this organization revolved around the iron ore mines in the Durg region with iron ore bearing hills of Dalli and Rajhara. Soon the CMSS became popular among workers as the workers suffered a large number of hardship in the mines. Ilina Sen, an activist among the tribal in the Chhattisgarh, writes in her book about the activities of the CMSS as:

Like any trade union, the CMSS engaged in day to day battles over determination of bonuses, wages and allowances. It also ran a campaign against mechanization, almost coterminous with the struggle for departmentalization. In support of unions position, Niyogi argued that full mechanization was not the desired technology option for a labour surplus country such as India, and that better strategy for the Dalli Rajhara mines in future was 'semi mechanization'.¹⁶¹

The workers, barely after the formation of the CMSS, gathered to show strength on 31st May 1977 to press their demands including pre monsoon allowance. They gathered in front of the police station on 3rd June 1977 and it ended in a police firing in which nine workers were killed and fourteen were injured. Though Shankar Guha Niyogi was arrested, the workers continued with their struggle. Within a span of a fortnight, even before Niyogi was released, the management signed an agreement with the union. It must be mentioned here that the CMSS was not a recognized union and hence it was a victory and recognition to the newly formed union. One of the major events of the CMSS during that period was the indefinite strike, in September 1977, demanding increase of wages

¹⁶¹ Sen, Ilina, *Inside Chattisgarh: A political Memoir* (New Delhi: Penguin, New Delhi, 2014), p.73

and improved living condition among others. The daily wage was so low 'on the days on which one got work, one earned around Rs. 4. The unloading charges for handling ore used to be a meager 27 paisa per ton.'¹⁶² The working conditions of the workers were very poor and on some days the 'workers were forced to work almost sixteen continuous hours a day. Much of their wage and service conditions were so poor because of the fact that most of the 8,000 miners were on contract labour.'¹⁶³

In the early months of 1980, the CMSS agitated against mechanization of mining operations by the steel plant and it intensified during 1981. Following an agitation in the steel plant Niyogi and other leaders were arrested and detained under National Security Act. The arrests were followed by a strike by the workers in the steel plant. After a period of two months, the workers were able to strike a deal with the management where partial departmentalization was agreed upon; in other words, a partial end to rampant casualization of labour in the mines. The issue of mechanization was still not addressed.

Apart from the steel plant, the presence of the CMSS was also there in the affiliated unions of the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, the political front of CMSS, in various ancillary units of the steel plant. Despite the repression from the management, the workers continued with their struggle. A pamphlet published by the PUDR gives a fair account of the activities:

The Morcha affiliated unions that took root in this belt include Pragatisheel Engineering Shramik Sangh (PESS), Chattisgarh Shramik Sangh, Chattisgarh Cement Shramik Sangh and Chattisgarh Mill Mazdoor Sangh. A massive rally held on 2 October 1990 was the major turning point in this movement. The union especially PESS, built up a steady demand for implementation of minimum wages, a living wage, adequate work safety and abolition of contract labour. The movement faced intense repression and violence both from the police and the hired hoodlums of the management. The focal point of the struggle in the last few months has been in the units owned by Simplex

¹⁶² Ibid, PUDR report, p.3

¹⁶³ Ibid

group. For practically over ten months the workers are on strike. A large number of workers were arrested under section 107 and section 151 CrPC, in blatant violation of law, in much the same way as these sections were used against the miners in 1977 which had eventually led to the firing incident.¹⁶⁴

Shankar Guha Niyogi was arrested invoking old pending cases against him but was released on bail on 4th February 1991. He continued with his union activities after his release from jail in the month of April 1991. However, he had to pay with his life soon after.. Niyogi was murdered in Bhilai on 28th September 1991; he had himself perceived threat to his life and also lodged complaints with the police about it on 29 April 1991 and another one 4 July 1991.

Newspaper reportage on the Mines Workers' Struggle:

This section will look into the media reportage of the important events in the struggle led by the CMSS in the Bhilai steel plant under the leadership of Shankar Guha Niyogi.

The Indian Express reported the incident of firing in Rajhara in its front page on 5th of June 1977 with the title, 'Eight die in police firing'. It reported on the incident of firing that happened in Bhilai, following the arrest of leader Shankar Guha Niyogi. The subsequent protestsheld by the workers against the arrest leading to stone throwing by the workers were also reported. Police opened fired on the workers killing eight people. The report stated, 'eight persons were killed when police opened fire twice early in the morning and around noon [today] on a violent crowd of workers at Dalli-Rajahara mines in Bhilai Plant in Durg district according to reports received at state police headquarters this morning.'¹⁶⁵ Placing the report on the front page shows the importance of the news as

¹⁶⁴ ibid, PUDR report, p.3

¹⁶⁵ Eight die in police firing, The Indian Express, 5th June 1977, p.1

far as the newspaper is concerned. It is important in the context of the withdrawal of the emergency, during which trade unions suffered a lot along with the press freedom.

The Indian Express also published an editorial, on 6th of June 1977, on the same issue. The editorial titled, 'Police firing' criticized the firing and brought in how after the Emergency, for the first time, the Janata Government too have used repressive measures against the workers. The editorial stated:

The Mine workers of Bhilai have been fired upon by the police- twice in one day killing eight of them. This is not the first time that agitating workers have faced police bullets in the country. But it is the first time this has happened after barely sixty days of the Janata Government coming to power. Reports on the firing available so far are sketchy and based on the briefing of the district administration. The police fired first in the darkness of night at 3.30 am when the workers are said to become "violent" and threw stones at the police who had arrested the leader, Mr. Shankar Guha Niyogi, has been described as a "Naxalite" and according to the district administrations briefing, had committed the crime of making "derogatory" speech at a public meeting earlier in the evening.¹⁶⁶

The editorial further argued that how the restoration of democracy and civil liberties after the Emergency have made no difference to the workers who raised their voice for their demands. It said:

The starting point of the trouble admitted was the arrest of the workers leader for making "derogatory" speech. It would appear that restoration of democracy and civil liberties changes nothing for the workers if they dare to speak up for their rights and demands. The police will swing into action, arrest the leaders if they make a "derogatory" speech and fired upon workers to maintain "law and order". Trained in the exercise of absolute power, the organs of the administration probably do not know how to act otherwise. The bogey of "violence" and dubbing any one raising a voice of protest as a "naxalite" are usually convenient alibi.¹⁶⁷

The editorial, referring to the emergency, argued that these sorts of undemocratic activities (police firing against agitating workers) will erode the credibility of the government; 'if the organs of the power in the new set up are not made to accept the norms of principles of democracy.'¹⁶⁸ The editorial also demanded for a judicial inquiry

¹⁶⁶ Police Firing, *The Indian Express*, 6th June 1977.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*

into the Bhilai firing incident and said that the 'Janata Government must not dither if it wants its commitment to democracy and popular rights to remain unsullied.'¹⁶⁹

Apart from the editorial, *The Indian Express* also carried a report, on 6th June 1977, on the increase in the death toll of the workers in the Bhilai firing. It also reported a joint press conference by three trade union leaders, Mr. P.K. Moita of CITU, Mr. Deosharan Dubey of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha and Mr. Satyendra Sabha of the Mazdoor Sangh and their condemnation of the police firing. The leaders, "accused the district administration of hiding facts of the incident"¹⁷⁰ was also reported.

The Hindu, dated 14th June 1977, reported on the police firing, more than ten days after the incident. The occasion was the then Home Minister's statement in the Rajya Sabha about the action taken was reported by the paper. It stated:

The Home Minister, Mr. Charan Singh told the Rajya Sabha today in view of some Negligence on their part, high police officials and the Magistrate connected with the police firing at Dalli Rajhara mines of the Bhilai steel plant on June 3 had been asked to proceed on leave. Replying to a calling attention notice on the police firing in which nine persons were killed and 14 injured. Mr. Charan Singh said the Commissioner and the DIG should also have reached the spot. "We have asked them to explain." The calling attention notice was in the name of Mr. Vithal Gadgil (Cong - I) and eight other members. In a statement on the incident, the Home Minister said a mob of about 2,000 had injured policemen, besides detaining some of them after their leader was taken into custody.¹⁷¹

The Hindu published another report on 15th of June 1977. It reported the Home Minister's agreement to consider the suggestion made by Parvathi Krishnan to enhance the compensation to the victims of the Rajhara firings. It stated:

The Home Minister, Mr. Charan Singh, agreed in the Lok Saba to-day to consider suggestions from Mrs. Parvathi Krishnan (CPI) and others to enhance the compensation paid to the victims of the police firing on workers of Dalli Rajhara mines in Durg district of Madhya Pradesh on June 3. Mr. Charan Singh, who was answering questions after making a statement on the incident in reply to a call attention motion, said on the basis of the information he had, the employers of the mines were justified in renouncing an agreement taken by the workers under duress and the police were

¹⁶⁹ ibid

¹⁷⁰ Death Toll rises to 10, *The Indian Express*, 6th June 1977

¹⁷¹ Rajhara Firing: Police Asked to Explain, *The Hindu*, 14th June 1977

within their rights to resort to firing as otherwise it was not possible to maintain law and order. However, if the judicial probe ordered by the State Government gave a different finding, suitable action would be considered. When some member¹⁷² alleged that 30 people were killed in the incident and not nine as officially claimed, Mr. Charan Singh said all aspects could be examined during the enquiry.¹⁷²

The murder of Shankar Guha Niyogi and its reportage:

The murder of the trade union leader, Shankar Guha Niyogi, on 28th September 1991 was covered in *The Hindu* on the 29th September; the report was based on various organizations condemning the murder of Niyogi. It carried the statement of organizations affiliated with CMSS and others condemning the murder. The report stated:

Several organizations have condemned the shooting of Shankar Guha Niyogi, a trade union leader of Chhattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh, in the early hours of Saturday at Bhilai. The Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh- (CMSS), with which Niyogi was associated, said in a statement here that 'his murder was a premonition of things to come.' Ms Sodha Bhardwaj, Secretary of the Sangh, said that since last year a CMSS-affiliate, The Pragatisheel Engineering Mazdoor Sangh (PESS), had been organizing contract labour working in ancillaries of the Bhilai Steel Plant. The PESS had demanded immediate implementation of the Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act which would have implied the regularization of the predominantly contract labour force, implementation of the Madhya Pradesh Engineering Wage Board recommendations and provision of safe working environs and equipment to prevent industrial accidents. Ms Bhardwaj said: "In response, the industrialists, through their goondas, the administration and police have used violence and repression to deny the workers their basic rights." "They insisted on dealing with what is essentially a labour dispute as a law and order problem, thus further vitiating the atmosphere through attacks against the (union) leadership which began with the arrest of Mr. Niyogi on charges on which he has since been acquitted, followed by an attempt to exterminate him out of Chhattisgarh and now finally in his murder."¹⁷³

A protest by journalists, student and various civil society groups in Delhi was also reported by *The Hindu* on 2nd October 1991. It reported, 'Hundreds of people from various walks of life here today held a dharna at Gole Methi Chowk, the official residence of the Prime Minister to protest against the killing of Shankar Guha Niyogi, a trade union activist and to demand a CBI inquiry into the incident.'¹⁷⁴ The report also wrote how 'the trade union movement, spearheaded by Niyogi, was in support of

¹⁷² Higher compensation to victims of police firing, *The Hindu*, 15th June 1977

¹⁷³ *The Hindu*, 29th September 1991

¹⁷⁴ Dharna in protest against killing of trade unionist, *The Hindu* 3rd October 1991

implementation of Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act of 1970, in terms of the regularisation of contract labour force, implementation of Madhya Pradesh Engineering Wage Board recommendation, provision of safe working conditions and better rehabilitation facilities for the workers.’¹⁷⁵

The Hindu gives a follow up of the news of Niyogi’s murder on the same day, 3rd October 1991. The report titled, ‘Murder leaves workers in M.P. restive’ delves into how the police have been unable to trace any clue in the murder. It writes, ‘The killers of the noted labour leader, Shankar Guha Niyogi, are still untraced. The Marxist trade union leader of Chhattisgarh, who had also acquired a fabulous reputation as a 'social reformer' among the workers, was gunned down early on Saturday last at his residence in the steel town of Bhilai by some unknown assailants.’¹⁷⁶ The report brings into focus the theories that have emerged as a possible reason for his murder. One of the theories according to the report was the mafia being behind the killing of Niyogi. The police however denied any such findings. The report states

The most widely talked about among them is the use of 'hired assassins' by certain liquor mafias whose business was in jeopardy, thanks to Niyogi's successful campaign against it. The 'conspiracy' is believed to have been hatched in collaboration with certain other vested interests, among them a big private company. Niyogi himself was aware of it and talked about it to the correspondent of a fortnightly who was with the labour leader the previous night and was one of the few to have last seen him alive.¹⁷⁷

It also informs about how the workers in Chhattisgarh were restive in the wake of the murder of their leader. It also informs how Niyogi was instrumental in the cause of abolishing contract system. It states

¹⁷⁵ ibid

¹⁷⁶ Murder leaves workers in M.P. restive, *The Hindu* 3rd October 1991

¹⁷⁷ ibid

The murder has left the labour force of Chattisgarh, particularly the Dalli-Rajahara miners whom Niyogi had organised into a powerful movement, restive. His following was mainly among the contract labour. Ironically enough, with the abolition of the contract system and consequent wage rise to the workers — no doubt because of Niyogi's movement itself — his influence had tended to wane, according to well informed sources. This, these sources say, had prompted Niyogi to shift his area of activity to the large number of private ancillary and other industries in Bhilai and earn the ire of the powerful vested interests.¹⁷⁸

The Hindu published an article on Shankar Guha Niyogi on 20th October 1991, titled 'An Uncompromising Unionist', written by Amit Baruah. The article narrates the struggles led by Niyogi in Chhattisgarh. It also writes how Niyogi faced repression from the state for his activities and how he was instrumental to achieve several demands of the workers.

Arrested and detained on several occasions, the subject of choicest abuse by vested interests in the region, Niyogi had come to inform the head of State or the situation arising out of the year-long strike of some 90,000 contract workers being led by the Pragatisheel Engineering Shramik Sangh. Niyogi began his career as an employee of the Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) in 1968. Detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) during the Emergency, he shot into prominence in 1977 when the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS) led by him organized contract workers in the captive iron-ore mines in Dalli Rajhara, in the southern part of Durg district. The CMSS, in its formative stages, took up the issues of State repression linked to the demands of workers. It is a well-known fact that the daily wages of piece-rate workers in the manual mines of Dalli Rajhara rose from a paltry Rs.4 a day in the pre-1977 period to Rs. 72 in 1989-90.¹⁷⁹

The article also writes how the Niyogi was the leader who believed in alternative politics. It also informs how the 'The Madhya Pradesh Government then tried to extern him from the five districts of Raipur, Durg, Rajnandgaon, Bastar and Bilaspur. Yet another stay order was obtained by Niyogi from the court.'¹⁸⁰ The article presented the range of activities Shankar Guha Niyogi was engaged in and also that the trade union movement in Chhattisgarh in general and the death 'warrant' and his death.

The news reports and articles around the Mine workers movement were by and large, empathetic to the cause of the workers. More than anything, these were upholding

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*

¹⁷⁹ An Uncompromising Unionist, *The Hindu* 20th October 1991.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*

democracy including the legitimate rights of the workers to agitate for their rights. This should be seen in the context of the National Emergency and the curtailment of freedom. The firing in Rajhara happened just after two months after the Janata Party government came to power at the Centre after the withdrawal of Emergency. *The Indian Express* editorial's scathing criticism of the firing can be viewed as the renewed interest of the press in highlighting the gross violation of democratic right of citizen to criticize the authority for wrong doing. The news reports in *The Indian Express* clearly mention the source of information as the official information from the administration and the editorial also mention that the 'Reports on the firing available so far are sketchy and based on the briefing of the district administration.

The police fired first in the darkness of night at 3.30 am when the workers are said to become "violent" and threw stones at the police who had arrested the leader, Mr. Shankar Guha Niyogi. He has been described as a "Naxalite" and according to the district administrations briefing, he had committed the crime of making "derogatory" speech at a public meeting earlier in the evening." It mentions how the authorities dub anybody to be "Naxalite" on the basis of the leader making a "derogatory" speech, which according to the editorial is democratic right of every citizen to criticize the government.

In continuation of the analysis in this chapter, the next chapter will delve into peoples' movement and their representation in the media after the economic reforms (liberalization) under Dr. Manmohan Singh since July 1991. The case studies taken for analysis are the Narmada Bachao Andolan, The struggle in Nandigram and Singur, Koodankulam Anti nuclear struggle, the Pricol Workers strike of 2009 and the workers

strike at Maruti plant in Manesar in 2012. This will help to understand the changes media representation and perception after the liberalization.

Chapter 3

Peoples' Movements in the Liberalized Era

We have discussed as to how the media reported on the movements before liberalization in the previous chapter (Chapter 2). This chapter will attempt to analyze how the media reported on the movements after liberalization. Doing this will help us understand whether the perception of term 'economy' which underwent changes from the Nehruvian era to the post-Nehruvian period had any impact on the approach of the media in reporting the movements organized and participated by the common masses.

This chapter attempts to analyze the reportage of the peoples' struggle which include the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the struggle against land acquisition in Singur and in Nandigram in West Bengal, the struggle against the setting up of a Nuclear Power plant in Tamil Nadu and workers agitation in the Pricol factory in Coimbatore in 2009 and at the Maruti Factory at Manesar in Haryana in 2011-2012.

The core concerns of this chapter will be to look into the media's representation of these protests and enquire as to whether there was a perceptible change in the approach. In doing so, the attempt will be to measure the extent to which the media covered these events? What was the nature of the coverage? Were they reproducing the version of the State that these protests/strikes were was against the 'progresses of the country? Or did they cover with objectivity and show compassion to the legitimate issues raised in these protests as was done in the case of those proceeding the liberalized era as seen in the previous chapter.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan:

The Narmada Bachao Andolan is one of the longest lasting grassroots peoples' struggles against big dams in the Narmada Valley. The struggle began in the 1980's and is still continuing; it has lasted for over three decades since then and in a sense can be taken as representing the core concerns of this thesis in that it began before the liberalization phase had set in and carries on through the transition from the Nehruvian era to the post-Nehruvian phase. It will be appropriate then to look into in as brief as it is possible the long history of this movement.

A brief history of the protest:

The history of dams across the Narmada River had begun as early as at the dawn of independence and as part of the development strategy of the Nehruvian model marked by big dams. In fact, it was Jawaharlal Nehru, our first Prime Minister, who had envisioned 'Dams as the Temple of Modern India.' Dams began to be seen as a necessity in the newly independent country as they were seen as means to generate electricity, for controlling floods, irrigation and also for providing potable drinking water to the people. Dams, in the process, became symbols for development. Dilip D'souza cites Patrick Mccully in his book, where he estimates that 'from 1947 to 1980, we spent about 15 percent of our total national expenditure on building those thousand-plus dams.'¹ Some of the well-known dams that came up during the period include the Bhakra Nangal, the Damodar valley, the Hirakud, and the Srisaïlam project.

¹ D'Souza, Dilip. *The Narmada Dammed: An Inquiry Into the Politics of Development*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002), p.1

However, the dams across the Narmada Valley belonged to a later period and was announced in the early 1980s. The Government planned to build 30 large, 135 medium and 3000 small dams and harness the waters of the Narmada and its tributaries. One of the important features, and an also a cause of conflict, in Narmada project was that the river flows through three states of Madhya Pradesh (MP), Maharashtra and Gujarat. The river flows for nearly 90% in Madhya Pradesh, and most of the remaining through Gujarat and in a brief stretch it also flows through Maharashtra.²

The present struggle in the Narmada valley, however, started in the late 1980s with the formation of the Narmada Valley Development Authority in 1985 and subsequently its plan of building dams in the Narmada River. In 1988 the project was 'billed at a colossal cost of Rs 40,000 crores,' and it involved 'constructing 30 large, 135 medium and over 3,000 small dams on the 1,312-km-long Narmada River and its tributaries.'³ The Sardar Sarovar Dam is one amongst the 30 large dams planned across the river. The height of the dam was proposed at 136.5 metres (455 feet) which became the focal point of both the dam-builders plans and the Narmada Bachao Andolan's opposition. The project was opposed on the ground that it would displace more than '320,000 people and affect the livelihood of thousands of others. Overall, due to related

² In 1965, the Khosla committee planned a 530 feet high dam in Navagam (the site of the Sardar Sarovar dam today) while allocating 13.9 MAF (million acre feet) of water to MP and 10.6 MAF to Gujarat. This proposal was immediately locked in a dispute between the so-called riparian states i.e. Gujarat, Maharashtra and MP over the sharing of the costs and benefits of the project. The chief minister of MP, Mr. Govind Narayan Singh, objected to the unprecedented submergence as a result of the dam and contested the claims of Gujarat on the Narmada waters. Gujarat on the other hand claimed a higher share of water on the basis of the projected needs of the "drought prone area" in the far-off Kutch region. In this effort, Gujarat also made Rajasthan a party to give itself more bargaining power, although Rajasthan - a non-riparian state - had nothing to do with the project. Cited from Friends of Narmada website retrieved from <http://www.narmada.org/nvdp.dams/> Date: 11/11/2017

³Tripathi,Salil, Singh. N.K.,. A flood of controversies, India Today,1988, Accessed from <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/narmada-valley-development-project-controversy-acquires-a-sharper-edge/1/329894.html> date: 11/11/2017

displacements by the canal system and other allied projects, at least 1 million people are expected to be affected if the project is completed.’⁴ A United Nations report addressed the issue of displacement due to the Sardar Sarovar Dam. It informed how the tribal or the adivasi people will be affected by the project and whose livelihood depended on the forests and relocation of these indigenous people will disturb their lifestyle. It stated:

Two third of the over 40,000 families expected to be displaced by the reservoir’s creation will be tribal people or adivasis, belonging to different groups collectively referred to as *Bhils*. Displacement of adivasis from their traditional lands and resources due to the creation of reservoirs, canals, and reforestation significantly impacts on the ability of adivasis to fully enjoy their human rights. They live mainly in 14 villages in Gujarat, 33 in Maharashtra and 53 in Madhya Pradesh. The adivasis are largely self sufficient, growing their own food and collecting fuel, building materials, fodder, fruits and other resources from the forest and common lands around their villages, as well as relying on water and fish from their rivers. Resettlement away from their territory means the destruction of their lifestyle and village organization.⁵

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) emerged in the late 1980’s with Medha Patkar as its major leader. The NBA, however, in the present form is the amalgamation of several NGOs based in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. The NBA is an umbrella organisation with the Narmada Ghati Nav Nirman Samiti from Madhya Pradesh and The Action Research in Community Health and Development from Gujarat along with Medha Patkar's Narmada Charanrast Samiti (Narmada Oustees Association), forming its nucleus, and came into place after Medha Patkar visited the region in 1985. The NBA was supported, notably, by Baba Amte and B.D. Sharma, Ramaswamy Iyer, S.C. Behar, L.C. Jain, Kuldip Nayar, Swami Agnivesh and later Arundhati Roy.

The project received funding of 450 million US dollar of the \$ 6 billion (1970 estimate) project from the World Bank. The NBA was constantly engaged in critiquing the possible socio-economic and environmental effects of the project. The affected people

⁴ Ed.Cullet, Philippe. The Sardar Sarovar Dam Project: Selected Documents(Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing limited, 2007), p.446

⁵ *ibid.*

of the Narmada project were also engaged in non-violent protests in Ferkuwa, a place in the Madhya Pradesh-Gujarat border beginning in December 1990. In early 1991, the announcement of an indefinite hunger strike by the seven-member squad against the project was also organized. Following this, the World Bank in 1991, sent a two-member team to assess the rehabilitation aspects of the Sardar Sarovar Project. Bradford Morse and Thomas Berger, who consisted the two member team, after their visit to the project affected areas of the Sardar Sarovar Project, submitted a report, known as the 'Morse Report'. The report said:

We think that the Sardar Sarovar Project, as they stand are flawed, that resettlement and rehabilitation of all those displaced by the project is not possible under the prevailing circumstances and that the environmental impact of the projects have not been properly considered or adequately addressed. As a result, we think that the wisest course would be for the Bank to step back from the projects and consider them afresh. The failure of the Bank's incremental policy should be acknowledged.⁶

A couple of months after this, the World Bank sent out the Pamela Cox committee which 'suggested a sort of patchwork remedy to try and salvage the operation.' Even after the Morse report was submitted, the funding in the SSP continued for the next ten months. 'In October 1992, the Executive directors of the board of the World Bank agreed to continue funding upon achievement of some benchmark improvement by March 31st, 1993.'⁷ The deadline could not be met by the government and it announced that it would not seek the remaining balance of the committed World Bank loan for the SSP. Instead, the State Government of Gujarat, the principal beneficiary of the projects, raised funds by issuing Sardar Sarovar Bonds in 1993, to fill the \$ 450 million financial gap.

⁶ Bradford Morse & Thomas R. Berger, Sardar Sarovar - Report of the Independent Review (Ottawa: Resource Futures International, 1992), p.1

⁷ Ed. Fisher, William F, 'Introduction', Toward Sustainable Development?: Struggling Over India's Narmada River, (New York: M.E. Sharpe,1995), p.6

In the year 1993, Manibeli village in the state of Maharashtra turned out to be the first village to get totally submerged under the Sardar Sarovar Project. The NBA, under Medha Patkar, organized the 'jalsamarpan' agitation. The affected villagers decided to stay put in their villages even while the water level increased and allowed themselves to be submerged. The then central government responded to this by setting up a review committee under the chairmanship of Jayant Patil, then advisor to the planning commission. The committee report which was to be published November 1993 is not yet released. In May 1994, the NBA filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court, 'questioning the whole basis of the Sardar Sarovar Dam and seeking a stay on the construction.'⁸ The NBA, in the meanwhile, also supported the cause of other people affected by other dams in the Narmada valley. The other notable dam in the Narmada river is the Maheshwar Dam, Indira Sagar Dam, and Bargi Dam. William Fisher, writes about the developments that have taken place during this time:

In December 1994, "Narmada" remained an open story, its outcome not yet resolved. Despite lawsuits, non violent satyagraha, coordinated international lobbying, an independent review of a World Bank project, the Dam was half built. Court permissions to close the sluices at the base of the dam had been granted (the gates were closed in February 1994, permanently impounding water behind the dam for the first time), the villages of Vadgam and other threatened villages were evicted in June 1994, back water of the Sardar Sarovar Dam submerged Vadgam and parts of other villages in the Narmada valley twice during 1994 monsoon.⁹

In January 1995, the Supreme Court asked the Union Government's counsel for an undertaking to stay all construction activities on the Sardar Sarovar Project without the knowledge of the court. Thereafter, in May 1995, the court allowed the union government to construct humps in the dam. After some initial hope from the Supreme Court, the Narmada Bachao Andolan faced its biggest setback in the form of the Supreme Court

⁸ Roy, Arundhati, 'The Greater Common good', The Algebra of infinite Justice,(New Delhi: Penguin Books,2002) p.69.

⁹ Fisher, *Op.Cit.* p. 7

judgment on October 18, 2000. The court in its 2 to 1 majority judgment, allowed the immediate construction on the dam upto a height of 90 metres. The judgment said that the project is now in an advanced state of completion, therefore any major changes if had to be made, then they must have some compelling reason. The judgment stated:

The SSP is now in an advanced stage of construction, with the central portion of the dam already raised to 80 m.; the canal constructed upto a length of 140 Kms. ; and most of the equipment for various components of the project ordered and some of it already wholly or partly manufactured. An expenditure of over Rs. 3800 crores is said to have been already incurred on the project; significant social costs have also been incurred in terms of displacement and rehabilitation. The benefits for which these costs have been and are being incurred have not materialized yet. In that situation, anyone with a concern for keeping project costs under check and for ensuring the early commencement of benefits would generally like to accelerate rather than retard the completion of the project as planned. If any suggestion for major changes in the features of the project at this juncture is to be entertained at all, there will have to be the most compelling reasons for doing so.¹⁰

Apart from this, the judgment also argued that, ‘The allegation that the said project was not in the national or public interest is not correct seeing to the need of water for burgeoning population which is most critical and important’¹¹ Further, the judgment authorized ‘construction upto the originally planned height of 138 m in 5-meter increments subject to receiving approval from the Relief and Rehabilitation Subgroup of the Narmada Control Authority’.¹²

Following the Supreme Court judgment, the work in the SSP resumed. The Sardar Sarovar Dam was completed in 2017. The Struggle however continues. The Sardar Sarovar project was inaugurated on 17th September 2017. Medha Patkar and thirty-six others started ‘Jal Satyagraha’ at Chota Barda Ghat in Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh to demand rehabilitation for the affected people.

¹⁰ Andolan v. Union of India, A.I.R. 2000 S.C. 3751 Accessed from the Supreme Court of India website: <http://sci.gov.in/judgments>

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid*

The Narmada Bachao Andolan is an ongoing struggle and it has already completed thirty years. In an interview, Medha Patkar, expressed the broad political philosophy of the NBA.

The first and the foremost are the development issues, which people are raising wherever they are questioning the development process. The point is that the communities which are based on the natural resources are compelled to sacrifice those resources in the name of development, with the principle of eminent domain that the state resorts to. The state takes away these natural resources from the communities, the fish workers, the farmers, or manual labourers. It certainly stands by the marketized, industrialized, urbanized communities, and that small section of the society then uses these resources or the benefits drawn out of these resources at the cost of all those who lose theirs. This society certainly doesn't give a real share in the benefits to those who sacrifice their land, water, forests. This is considered as a part and parcel of development and the tradeoff that is necessary.¹³

The long struggle of the Narmada Bachao Andolan had some important events, which will be taken for studying the media reportage. Some of the events of the Narmada Bachao Andolan that has been taken up for this study on the media reportage are:

- The beginning of the Narmada Bachao Andolan in 1989 with the protest in Harsud, Madhya Pradesh,
- The World Bank's Withdrawal of funds for Narmada Project in 1993
- The Supreme Court Order on 18th February 1999 allowing to raise the height of the Dam
- The final Verdict of the Supreme Court in October 2000

An attempt will be made to look into how the media reported these important watersheds during this struggle.

¹³ Interview by Venu Govindu with Medha Patkar, in Domkhedi, India (Aug. 7, 1999) Accessed from <http://www.narmada.org/events/satyagraha-2000/medha.interview.99.html>

The reportage of the Narmada Bachao Andolan:

The newspaper reports in the early period of its coverage were comprehensive in nature. The reportage usually featured the news report along with inputs highlighting the issues that the Narmada dam could have an impact on the people. For example, the reportage of Baba Amte led rally of 60,000 people against the dam project in a place called Harsud in Madhya Pradesh is a case in point. *The Times of India* on 6th September 1989, published a report prior to the rally in Harsud, Madhya Pradesh by Baba Amte. The report titled, 'WB to help Narmada oustees' in its eighth page. The report informs about how 'the World Bank is reported to be willing to finance the relief and rehabilitation of the multipurpose Narmada Valley Development Project'.¹⁴ The report further informs about how a section of the experts in the World Bank hold the opinion that instead of blaming the government authorities, it is willing to look into the issues of implementing the policies of rehabilitation. It stated

There is departure from the earlier position that the World Bank will not be willing to even look into this aspect of financing the project for the basic reason that it does not involve creation of assets. The logic for the present shift is that the project affected people will have to be resettled at other places and this will involve purchasing of land. This part that is, purchasing of the land could be brought within the creation of assets and the World Bank could finance it then.¹⁵

The report was also critical of the government and wrote that, 'the Narmada Valley projects, particularly the Sardar Sarovar and the Narmada Sagar, have come under a lot of criticism all over the world because of the magnitude of the population they would displace. It is also a well known fact that the track records of the state governments of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh do not inspire any confidence. In the past, it has proved beyond doubt that the displaced families have always been worse off, as

¹⁴ WB to help Narmada oustees, *The Times of India*, 6th September 1989

¹⁵ *ibid.*

compared to their positions before the project.’¹⁶ The report highlighted the implications of the rehabilitation process on the people. It stated:

Apart from the challenge to the basic concept of the big dams, from the environmentalist, one of the major aspects of criticism against the Narmada Valley development projects is that they would lead to untold human misery because displacement of people on an unprecedented scale. The problems faced by the people who have been forced to migrate in the past, has justified the fears that are expressed in this count. On the other hand, the arguments of the state governments which are perpetually strapped to a resource constrain, is that they always do the best that is possible, although they too agree, that the best offered by them is not generally good enough.¹⁷

Within the same report, it also informed separately, ‘Amte Determined to save Narmada.’ It informed about Amte’s letter in which he declared his fight against the dams in Narmada. The report highlighted the government’s poor track record in terms of its implementation of rehabilitation as well as of the people rehabilitated. Apart from the environmental cost, the people have to bear the problems of migration and also how the fears of the people are genuine as past experiences have shown.

The Hindu too in its reportage highlighted the participation of people in the Harsud rally along with broader aims of the protest. The report was titled, ‘Hands off Villages, say rallyists’. Apart from making note of the huge participation of the people in the Harsud Rally and highlighting the aims of the rally, the newspaper report also dwelled on the question of ‘overall policy of development’. It stated:

About 25,000 people took a mass pledge here today that they "shall not be displaced by destructive projects" and would not allow "crores of people to be uprooted." At a rally against the "development policies" of the Government the pledge was administered by Baba Amte. The Government was asked to alter its development policies radically or else face the "people's wrath." The 15,000 residents of Harsud, in Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh, are to be relocated as the area falls in the submergence zone of the gigantic Narmada Sagar Project (NSP) which is scheduled to displace thousands of villagers as well. In what is probably the biggest ever rally organised by environmentalists and political activists against the development policy, the message to the Government was clear — people will no longer accept projects that upset their life system unthinkingly. Shabana Aizmi, film star. Dr. Shivram Karanth, Jnanpith award winner, Baba Amte. Swami Agnivesh, political activist and a host of activists from Baliapal in Orissa to

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ ibid

Karnataka addressed the rally. The organisers made it clear that though they were concentrating on the Narmada Sardar Sarovar Project and the potential damage it spelt for the environment and the people, it was the overall policy of development that they were questioning.¹⁸

The report also highlighted the people's voluntary participation in the rally and how they reached the site of protest. It further informed about how, 'about 60 voluntary organizations from different parts of the country participated. The organizers said no money had been collected from business houses and the entire demonstration was funded by the people themselves.'¹⁹

There were other reports in *The Hindu* which highlighted how the big dams planned in the Narmada will result in large scale displacement and also the state repression in the form of arrests were reported. In the early 1990s, a report in *The Hindu* on September 1990 on a rally led by Medha Patkar, Baba Amte and Swami Agivesh brings out these aspects. The report titled, 'Narmada evacuees pledge not to leave their land', informs how around 3000 people who would be affected if the dams are built, took oath not to leave their home and would drown themselves in water.'²⁰ It stated:

About 3,000 persons, likely to be affected by submergence when the Narmada dams are constructed, yesterday took oath at a rally on the banks of the river not to leave their homeland and to prefer a watery grave. They were led by the social crusaders, Baba Amte and Ms. Metha Patkar. Swami Agnivesh, who was to join them, was "prevented" from leaving Barwani, Ms. Patkar alleged in her speech at the gathering. The police, however, denied the allegation and said the rally attracted poor public response despite the claims of the organisers that several thousand would attend it. It was, however, admitted that a large area was cordoned off as the organisers had planned to plant saplings there. This could not be allowed as it is the area of future "submergence," it is stated by official sources. Nearly 40 activists of the Narmada Bachao Andolan Samiti were taken into preventive custody.²¹

Medha Patkar's views were published on the issue of alleged harassment of the tribal people and also her allegation on the Central government that had spent money on

¹⁸ Hands off Villages, says rallyist, *The Hindu*, 29th September 1989, p.11

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Narmada evacuees pledge not to leave their land, *The Hindu*, 29th September 1990

²¹ *ibid*

advertising claiming that the dam would not hurt the ecological balance.²² *The Hindu* reported the arrest of 1400 Narmada Bachao Andolan activists on 5th January 1991. The report also writes about the activists who alleged that the, 'the Gujarat police and the District Collector of Baroda brought a crowd of 50 pro-dam agitationists to create a "law and order condition" when tribals were staging their peaceful protest.'²³ And also informed about Baba Amte's "dharna unto death" on January 5th 1991. Medha Patkar, along with seven others also sat for hunger strike two days later and this too was reported.

World Bank withdraws from the Narmada project:

As it has already been discussed that following the Pamela Cox committee set up by the World Bank, it had agreed to fund the Narmada dam project condition upon a certain benchmark recommendations on appraisal of social and environmental impacts of the project. The Union Government's decision to forego the remaining amount from the World Bank for the dam was an important development. The consequences, however, were not favorable for the anti-dam struggle. As, not going for the loan from the World Bank also meant that the government was going to be less accountable to the outside world.

²² Ibid, The report stated: Addressing the meeting Ms. Mehta Patkar is reported to have alleged "large-scale" harassment of the tribals by the authorities in order to 'ensure' poor attendance. The organizers expected at least some 10,000 people to turn up. She is reported to have pointed out a paradox in the M.P. Government's stand. While it was demanding Rs. 1,100 crores from the Central Government for planting compensatory forest to maintain the ecological balance, the State Government was spending crores of rupees on newspaper advertisements claiming that the construction of the dams would not result in any ecological imbalance, she said. The Government's campaign against the big dams would now cover the entire Narmada valley; she is reported to have warned.

²³ 1,400 anti-Narmada activists arrested, *The Hindu*, 5th January 1991.

The Hindu reported the decision to forego the remaining component of the World Bank loan on 31st March 1993. The report was titled, ‘World Bank told of Govt. commitment India foregoes Narmada loan balance’. The report informs how India ‘asked the World Bank to cancel the remaining balance of the loan for the Narmada dam project’²⁴ and ‘of the \$450 millions sanctioned by the World Bank and the International Development Association, \$280 million has been disbursed. As a result of the Indian decision conveyed to the Bank today, the bank will not give the remaining \$170 millions.’²⁵ The report also informs from the Bank officials source, ‘that at no point did New Delhi ask for extension of time to meet the benchmark requirements. In addition to the Sarovar project, the officials noted, the Bank had financed the first stage of the canal project. The amount involved was \$250 million from the Bank and IDA.’²⁶ The editorial stand of *The Hindu* was favouring this decision as it would ease the pressure on Indian government from international quarters. It suggested that since the international funding agency is now out and the project is already delayed, the state governments will now have to indulge in imaginative funding methods. To state from the editorial:

While the financial institutions have not been particularly enthusiastic, some of the ideas mooted do not seem to be poised for a smooth take-off either. It is in the matter of evolving imaginative funding methods which would enable sticking to rigid time schedule that the real challenge lies.²⁷

The focus of the editorial was more about the need for completion of the Narmada project rather than get bogged down with the multiple issues involved in the relocation, rehabilitation and ecological costs. The same newspaper had reported on the Narmada River project and had highlighted the various social, cultural and ecological

²⁴ World Bank told of Govt. commitment India foregoes Narmada loan balance’, *The Hindu*, 30th March 1993, p.1

²⁵ *Ibid*,

²⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

ramifications of the project of building dam in the Narmada River on earlier occasions. So we may assume that there is a little shift in the way, the project was now perceived.

In the year 1994, the Narmada Control Authority decided to stop the construction work in the Sardar Sarovar Dam. The then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh of the Congress party, Digvijaya Singh, who was newly elected in 1993, petitioned before the court 'to lower the height of the dam from 136.5 to 130.8 meters in order to save 30,000 people and 6,500 hectares of land from submergence'.²⁸ The Supreme Court, in May 1995, issued a stay on further construction of the dam. The work therefore remained suspended in the period between 1995 and 1999.

The Supreme Court Order on 18th February 1999 allowing to raise the height of the Dam

The Supreme Court, in its 18th February, 1999, order on the writ petition filed by the Narmada Bachao Andolan in 1994, allowed 'the state of Gujarat to raise the height of the dam to RL 85 metres, excluding the humps necessary for maintenance for safety of the dam.'²⁹ The *Indian Express* reported on 19th February 1999, that the construction of the Narmada Dam to resume after five years. It informed: 'In an interim order delivered today by the three-member bench comprising Chief Justice A S Anand, Justice B N Kripal and Justice S P Bharucha, the Government of Gujarat has been permitted to raise the height of the dam from 80.3 metres to 85 metres (this is excluding the hump which is

²⁸ Narula, Smita. *The Story of Narmada Bachao Andolan: Human Rights in the Global Economy and the Struggle against the World Bank*, (NYU School of Law, 2008), p.374

²⁹ *Narmada Bachao Andolan V. union of India and other*, Writ petition (Civil) No. 319 of 1994 of Supreme Court of India, Order of 18th February 1999

to be constructed for the safety of the dam).³⁰ The report also informed about the petitioner counsel's argument. It stated, 'the petitioner, Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), represented by Shanti Bhushan argued that there was human rights violation as far as R&R of the present oustees were concerned. Moreover, the award had specified that all oustees affected by constructions due to be taken in the next six months had to be completely rehabilitated before the work could proceed. Just by giving them land, or issuing them notices did not mean that R&R had been completed, he argued.'³¹

The newspapers in this period had given space to different viewpoints. While newspapers like *The Hindu* and *The Hindustan Times* were empathetic to the cause of the movement and highlighted the government's high handedness and intolerance in dealing with the activists.

Kuldeep Nayyar, who was an active supporter of the movement, had written an article in *The Hindu* on 6th April 1999 with the title, 'People versus large dams'. The article was written on the backdrop of the recent Supreme Court order allowing the Gujarat Government to increase the size of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. The article argued that the rehabilitation of the displaced people should be the top priority without taking into consideration, if the dams are useful or not.³² The article was critical of the Supreme Court judgment for not taking into consideration, the lacuna in the process of

³⁰ Narmada construction to resume after 5 yrs, *The Indian Express*, 19th February 1999.

³¹ *ibid*

³² The report stated: I do not want to comment on the Supreme Court judgment on the Narmada dam. I wish the judges had waited for a report on rehabilitation, which they themselves had ordered, before allowing a higher level for the dam. It is no use going over whether the particular dam or, for that matter, any big dam will serve the purpose. Resettlement of the displaced people has to be on the top of the agenda of every project. It is not just mechanical resettlement I have in mind. Migration causes the agony of rootlessness. This is something forced, something violent, which inflicts pain on the people. This aspect has to be attended to before any project is built.

rehabilitation.³³The author also talks about how land is an integral part of the, ‘very charter on which the Adivasi/indigenous culture is based, the resting place of ancestors and source of spiritual power. It is thus regarded with respect and reverence. As a result, large dam projects, especially in the developing countries, ironically, have become the symbols of survival, anxiety and agony for the affected people.’³⁴

The arrest of Medha Patkar and other NBA activists on 7th April 1999, while protesting in front of the Shastri Bhawan in New Delhi, was reported by *The Hindu* as a display of intolerance on the part of the government. The report was forthright on this and stated:

The Union Government today displayed its intolerance to voices of thousands of people displaced from the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) on Narmada, who travelled here from villages in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh to air their grievances and seek justice. Instead of giving them a hearing, the Government ordered their arrest, unmindful of whether it were hundreds of women, old men, along with a bedridden Baba Amte, Ms. Medha Patkar, Kishan Patnaik or Swami Agnivesh.³⁵

The report criticized the manner in which the arrests were made and explained how initially the Union Welfare Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Ms. Maneka Gandhi, agreed to meet the leaders. It added: But ‘the Union Minister made a volte face and though she was present in office, did not make she available to the delegation when they went to meet her. Minutes later, a huge contingent of police swooped on the demonstrators, who were tribal and villagers from the Narmada valley in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and forcefully dumped women and old men in hired

³³ The Narmada Tribunal, which saw logic in the argument of rehabilitation, gave a verdict many years ago that the oustees must be settled six months before their houses and land were submerged in impounded waters. But the verdict has been disobeyed, both in letter and in spirit. True, some of the displaced people have been given land or money to restart their life. But their number is small. Others have no land, no house and no resources to stand on their legs...According to the Tribunal verdict, they should have been given an alternative site by this time. This is what the Supreme Court should scrutinise.

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ *The Hindu*, April 7th 1999

buses. Several women were injured due to manhandling by the police of the Parliament Street station.³⁶

Similarly, *The Hindustan Times* on 9th April 1999, published an article on the condition of people in a village named Jalud, which was going to be the first village to be submerged by Maheshwar Dam. The report was explained how ‘The numerous cracks on the walls of a number of small dwelling houses in this sleepy village on the banks of Narmada river reflect the fear under which the 250-odd families live here.’³⁷ It is a human interest story which articulated the fears³⁸ of the oustees from the villages as well as their problems like non receipt of their compensation amount.³⁹ The article was empathetic towards the villagers losing their lands and tried to represent their fears and apprehensions clearly taking their side.

Following the Supreme Court order, NBA activists sat on a hunger strike. *The Hindu* reported the event on 19th April 1999. It informed how, ‘The Narmada Bachao Andolan activists sitting on an indefinite hunger-strike here since April 12 to press their demand for a complete review of the multi-dam Narmada Valley Project are determined to carry on with their struggle, not at all demoralized by the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh's latest assertion that under no circumstances would dam

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ S Kumar’s power project likely to wreak havoc in Jalud village of M-P, *The Hindustan Times*, 10th April 1999

³⁸ Stated from the report: Savitri Bai, the Schedule Caste sarpanch of Jalud articulated the fears by saying “in the next few months Jalud would be swept under rain waters considering the speed of the dam construction but there is nobody to listen to our demands of justified resettlement”. “Our future is in the dark”, she fears. The Government has acquired acres of super-fertile land and the S. Kumar's (promoters of the power project) is working on establishing what the company officials call “a new Jalud with much better facilities for the oustees with a school, panchayat bhawan, dispensary etc.”

³⁹ Sated from the report: On the eastern side of the main road the Rajputs would be settled while on the western side of the New Colony Road, the Scheduled Castes would settled. He complained that the villagers were not getting cash compensation for their houses, though plot-for-plot had been agreed by the S. Kumar's officials.

projects be stopped.⁴⁰ The report also presented the views of the NBA activists. It mentioned: ‘Prominent NBA activist, Mr. Alok Agrawal, has sharply reacted to this by saying that it is mandatory to fulfill the conditions set by the Union Environment Ministry and the Narmada Tribunal Award before going ahead with the project work. The State Government is blatantly violating the principle of "land for land" and without giving land as compensation to the Narmada oustees, work is on in full swing. There was protest in the Narmada valley following the order.’⁴¹

The struggle of the NBA again saw a new momentum when it decided to launch Satyagraha from 20th June 1999. A *Hindustan Times* report on 6th June 1999 informed about a unique satyagraha and stated, ‘Thousands of tribals living in the submerged areas of the Sardar Sarovar Project dams in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are preparing to “take on the adverse living conditions” this monsoon. The residents have decided to face the adverse circumstances without running away from their generations-old houses.’⁴² It reported from a press conference organized by Ms. Medha Patkar, where she informed about how the tribals and peasants in the affected areas will not move out of their houses. It stated,

NBA activist Medha Patkar,said tribals and peasants of the affected areas are all set to launch a unique Satyagraha from June 20 in Domkhedi (Nandurbar, Maharashtra) and Jalsindhi (Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh).As part of their fight, these underprivileged people are not going to move even an inch from their houses. Charging the State Governments of furnishing wrong information to the Supreme Court, Ms Patkar said the NBA, along with other Human Rights organisations and legal luminaries, would protest the rise in dam height. She said this has seriously affected the residents of the areas since no alternate land has been made available to them in either states.⁴³

⁴⁰ NBA activists to carry on struggle, *The Hindu*, 20th April 1999.

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² Tribals to launch unique Satyagraha from June 20, *The Hindustan Times*, 6th June 1999

⁴³ *ibid*

The Hindu, published an editorial titled, 'Renewed Momentum on the Narmada', on 21st June 1999. The editorial was written in the backdrop of the Supreme Court order allowing to raise the height of the dam and subsequently the silent fast organized by the NBA and its implications on the next hearing of the Supreme Court. It stated,

The contradiction between democracy and development has once again reached a high point with the activists of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) embarking on a silent fast since July 4 at Domkhedi village in Maharashtra. Further plans to step up their campaign with a mass rally through the Narmada river valley in the last week of this month assume particular significance in the context of the next hearing of the NBA petition in the Supreme Court. After work on the dam was stayed in 1995, the court, by an interim order last February, directed the Government of Gujarat to increase the height from 80.5 to 85 metres on the assurance of an amicable resettlement and rehabilitation (R & R) of the affected population. The implication of that order is a further displacement of hundreds of tribal families and the submergence of thousands of acres of land in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.⁴⁴

The editorial also opined that since the state governments have not been able to give any commitment on the issues of rehabilitation, therefore the apex court is treading slowly. It also expressed that the NBA must engage itself with the immediate humanitarian grounds as it has been able to put the 'development debate on the public agenda.'⁴⁵ The editorial raised the issues of rehabilitation and relocation of the displaced people apart from other issues such as NBAs focus should also include immediate concerns rather than a complete opposition to the Dam.

The editorials in *the Times of India* and *the Economic Times* were not opposed to the big Dams in the Narmada valley and juxtaposed the development on the one side and the issues of displacement on the other. It becomes evident in an editorial published in *The Times of India*, titled, 'Dam and Blast' on 2nd August 1999. The focus was on 'the factors in favour of building the dam -- the very real water needs of the farmers of

⁴⁴ Renewed Momentum on the Narmada, *The Hindu*, 21st June 1999

⁴⁵ The editorial stated: It is the immediate humanitarian dimensions that must currently engage the NBA, which has effectively placed the development debate on the public agenda.

Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan -- are largely accepted as outweighing the adverse effects, though technical specifications regarding the height and size of the dam could be reworked to overall advantage.⁴⁶ It added:

It must also be kept in mind that rehabilitation is not just a matter of land and money -- the people whose homes will be submerged have very strong emotional bonds to the land of their birth and their places of worship. If the government cannot guarantee the relocation of villages as units or even keeping families together, those displaced cannot be blamed for harbouring serious reservations. Given its past record, the government's plea that it ought to be trusted on the relief and rehabilitation issue this time around does not inspire much confidence. In fact, many displaced during dam construction in the 'fifties and 'sixties are yet to find a permanent home. If, even at this late stage, the government were to begin implementing comprehensive relief measures, a great deal of confidence would be restored both among the activists and the affected.⁴⁷

Apart of highlighting the problems in rehabilitation, the editorial focused on implementation of relief measures. The focus was more on the benefits that big dam entails and hence the compensatory part alone was emphasized. Similarly, the editorial in *The Economic Times* during the same period focused on the renewed opposition to the Narmada project owing to Arundhati Roy's involvement in the rally. The editorial focused more on the compensatory angle of the rehabilitation process. It stated

‘What is worrisome about the renewed opposition to the Sardar Sarovar project is not the opposition per se. But the fact that far from being a reasoned opposition to the Narmada dam, the ‘‘rally for the valley,’’ has become an extremely emotive issue. One in which Booker prize winning literary skills have whipped up an emotional frenzy that leaves little room for reasoned arguments on costs and benefits. Little wonder then that those protesting against the dam do not restrict their opposition to just the Sardar Sarovar project, but all big dams, past, present and future. This is a position that is difficult to accept.’⁴⁸

It argued, without delving into any issues of relocation and rehabilitation, that, ‘it must be kept in mind that in addition to whatever direct compensation they are offered for being displaced, they would also ultimately benefit from the prosperity that such projects have historically bestowed upon entire regions.’⁴⁹ The dam was presented as

⁴⁶ Dam and Blast, *The Times of India*, 2nd August 1999

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ Don't Stop it, *The Economic Times*, 3rd August 1999

⁴⁹ *ibid*

necessary for development. The article argued that that is the only way project not only in India but in other countries also function. It also argued: ‘If, however, the agitators feel that the compensation being offered is inadequate, they must fight for a better package. However, to start from the assumption that nothing can compensate for displacement is to adopt an inherently anti-developmental posture.’⁵⁰

The Supreme Court’s final order in 2000

It has already been discussed that the biggest setback to the Narmada Bachao Andolan was the Supreme Court’s final order which authorized the construction of the dam to proceed up to ninety meters and for the completion of the construction of the dam. The reporting in this period focused on the importance of the dam for the nation’s progress. The dam, which now gained legitimacy from the Supreme Court and the judgment, was also held as a closure of the movement by many newspapers. *The Hindustan Times* reported the judgment on 18th October, 2000, with the headline ‘Supreme Court gives green signal to Sardar Sarovar Project’, and stated, ‘Supreme Court today cleared the decks for the construction of the controversial Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada river which will benefit three states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat as per the tribunal award but made any further construction subject to clearance from environmental and rehabilitation authority.’⁵¹ Similarly, *The Indian Express* supported the Supreme Court judgment and reported how the dams will benefit the people in the state of Gujarat. *The Indian Express* reported the Supreme Court judgment as, ‘Judgement Day for Gujarat’. The news report highlighted the judgment as a positive story from the

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ Supreme Court gives green signal to Sardar Sarovar Project, *The Hindustan Times*, 19th October 2000

perspective of the state of Gujarat. The report highlighted how the SSP will benefit the state of Gujarat which now stands clear of its legal complication. It stated:

For drought-prone Gujarat, October 18, 2000 is a day that will be etched in stone. The day the Supreme Court cleared the cobwebs around the multi-crore Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) and breathed new life to a project conceived by Sardar Patel in 1946 will long be remembered years after the celebrations and mourning has faded away. For this is a project that has been at the centre of controversy for over 20 years now. From the question of providing water supply to parched throats and fields, to larger ones on development and economy, human rights, environment and politics, the very existence of the dam has been debated.⁵²

The Indian Express editorial titled, Dam the controversy, also wrote on the Supreme Court judgment. It lamented as to how the project had already been delayed, which meant additional cost for the project. It also reiterated that the newspaper's opinion was always in favour of the Narmada Project. It held that the time has come that the benefits of the Narmada project should reach the people, it is meant to. To quote from the editorial:

While this may occasion a sense of vindication in some -- certainly this newspaper has always positioned itself in favour of the project -- the enormity of the task at hand demands a unified and immediate response from the nation, not crass displays of self-congratulation. Time is of the essence here since the project has been practically stalled since 1995, and every hour of delay pushes up costs dramatically. It should be with a sense of relief and utmost urgency that the nation now turns its attention to the crucial job of ensuring that the benefits of the Narmada Valley Project, of which the Sardar Sarovar dam comprises a part, reaches the people it is meant for, just as all the necessary measures for relief and rehabilitation are undertaken for the large numbers affected by the project.⁵³

It also suggested to Medha Patkar that, 'if the energy that Medha Patkar's Narmada Bachao Andolan put into stopping the project is now channelised into maximizing its gains and minimising its negative impact, it would earn the nation's gratitude.'⁵⁴

⁵² Judgement Day for Gujarat, *The Indian Express*, 19th October 2000

⁵³ Dam the controversy, *The Indian Express*, 19th October 2000

⁵⁴ *ibid*

The Hindu reported the news in its front page, titled, ‘SC clears Narmada dam height up to 138 metres in stages’. The report simply explained the Supreme Court judgment and stated:

In a significant decision, the Supreme Court today gave the nod for the construction of the controversial Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada river immediately up to a height of 90 metres and thereafter up to 138 metres in stages on getting proper sanction from the authorities concerned. The green signal was given by a majority judgment by a three- judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India, Dr. A.S. Anand, and the dissenting judgment was delivered by Mr. Justice S.P. Bharucha, who ordered immediate stoppage of construction activities at the dam site.⁵⁵

On 20th October, 2000, in another editorial, *The Hindustan Times* enumerated the necessity of dams and held that ‘the advantage of a big dam is its huge irrigation and power generation potential.’ It also tried to address the criticism that the dam will reap benefits only to the rich, it wrote ‘To say that only the rich farmers will benefit at the expense of the poor tribals who will lose their land is to give an unwarranted ideological twist to an essential economic issue. It has to be realized that prosperity, notwithstanding its uneven distribution, benefits all and not only one section.’⁵⁶

The NBA, following the Supreme Court judgment, again took up the legal Course in 2002 when the Sardar Sarovar dam height was raised to 95 metres. It filed a petition ‘claiming that resettlement and rehabilitation on the ground was not in fact proceeding alongside the dam construction.’⁵⁷ The Court, however, dismissed the petition, ‘claiming that any person with a grievance must first address the independent Grievance Redressal Authority—an administrative body with enforcement powers that was set up in each of the affected states— and only after failing there could they access the Court.’⁵⁸ Following the Court order, the construction of the Sardar Sarovar project continued without

⁵⁵ SC clears Narmada dam height up to 138 metres in stages, *The Hindu*, 19th October 2000

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Narula, *Op.Cit.* p.378

⁵⁸ *ibid*

interruption. On December 31st 2006, the then Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, announced the completion of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. The NBA continued its protest for rehabilitation and compensation.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan, in the aftermath of the Supreme Court judgment, also received coverage from the newspapers. *The Hindu*, *Indian Express* and *The Times of India* gave space to differing viewpoints on the Supreme court judgment. *The Hindustan Times*, for example, continued to publish opinion pieces, like ‘There’s hope after a dead end’ written by Medha Patkar, where she articulated about the judgment and argued as follows:

The judgement reflects how the establishment reacts in the face of such struggles. We went to the decision makers with some presumptions and aspirations. We gave them our inputs. Our going to them meant that we are not negating the decision making process. We know they have their own value frameworks, games, political games; but there are rules of the game also. Between the State and us there is bound to be a relationship, which is based on conflict and dialogue. But now we are realising that our premises are proving to be wrong. The State has become valueless, unrelated to people’s concerns and suffering; it has become ad hoc and anarchist. One cannot really call it a State of one’s dream or imagination. Indeed, the impression which Harsh Sethi gave recently, that that everything is finished, that the NBA is a dead body waiting for burial, is baseless. If you come to the valley you can see it for yourself.⁵⁹

Similarly, *The Hindu* too published articles critical of the Supreme Court judgment. Kalpana Sharma, then a staffer of this newspaper, wrote, ‘A message for the judges’ on 28th November 2000 where she brings in the how the World Commission for Dams(WCD) and if the Supreme Court had waited a few days, it would have been privy to the report published by the WCD. The report she writes informs:

The 45,000 large dams worldwide have displaced 40 million to 80 million people, affected 60 per cent of all rivers, have fallen short of their irrigation targets, have failed to recover costs, have had extensive negative impacts on rivers, watersheds and aquatic systems, many of them irreversible. Further, mitigation measures, where they have been taken, have usually proved ineffective. In

⁵⁹ There’s hope after a dead end, *The Hindustan Times*, 5th November 2000

other words, even if one argues that large dams are necessary and that the damage that they do can be minimised by taking adequate measures, the record suggests that this is not always possible.⁶⁰

The Indian Express also published articles critical of the Supreme Court judgment. One of such article was ‘Three cheers for the losing legion’ written by Max Martin, an anti-Dam activist himself, where he argued as to how the NBA had been successful in bringing ‘the development debate to classrooms, boardrooms and had it broadcast live in our drawing rooms. While doing so, it has also carved out a political niche for scores of similar resistance movements, often fighting against State power, unheard, unseen.’⁶¹

The Narmada Bachao Andolan received coverage of its events. In the initial years of the movement, reports from *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* dealt extensively with the events along with the social and economic aspects of the displaced people. However, we can also see a change in the attitude gradually shifting more towards the necessity and benefits of the big dams in the reports during the later period of the movement and especially after the Supreme Court order in 1999. And following the Supreme Court judgment in October 2000, even the editorials and news reports began to make a cost benefit analysis of the Narmada project, where the benefits of the dam exceeded than the cost in such calculations.

This, indeed, was the case with the reportage on the NBA and its struggles, a movement that panned through the pre and the post-liberalization period; in other words, a movement that began in the 1980s and carried on into the 1990s and thus marked the transition in the economic policy doctrine of the independent Indian state.

⁶⁰A message for the judges, *The Hindu*, 28th November 2000

⁶¹ Three cheers for the losing legion, *The Indian Express*, 10th November 2000

The Singur Struggle against acquisition of farmlands:

In 2006, the left front was elected to power once again in the state assembly elections that year in West Bengal. As a part of its industrialization drive, the government decided to acquire land to set up a motor car plant by the Tata Motors. The land selected for the motor car plant was in a place called Singur in the Hoogly district of West Bengal. The government acquired the land in Singur using the 1894 Land Acquisition Act that was then in vogue.

The Singur acquisition was part of the West Bengal government's new planning to set up industries in the state. On 25th May 2006, the farmers in Singur registered their protest by blocking the Tata motor team from visiting the site and on the very same day the government announced that, 'the state government was going to acquire 32,000 acres of land in the districts surrounding Kolkata as a primary step to set up new industries.'⁶²

The land acquired for the Tata project was agricultural and hence it had directly impacted the farmers. Walter Fernandes, in an article pointed out that in Singur, 'around 250 of the sharecroppers cultivating some of the 997 acres being acquired at Singur have not been registered so they will not be compensated or resettled. Also, the 1,000 landless agricultural labourers and others like barbers, who sustain themselves by rendering services to the village as a community, will lose their livelihood when that land is acquired.'⁶³ One of the important facts about the acquired land was that the land area was

⁶² Bannerjee, Parthasarathi. Land Acquisition and Peasant Resistance at Singur, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 41

⁶³ Fernandes, Walter. Singur and the Displacement Scenario, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Jan. 20-26, 2007)

fully irrigated and also high yielding land. Parthasarathi Banerjee, writes how the small and marginal farmers had little to gain even in terms of compensation as many of the farmers take land on lease.

The land selected for the Tata Motors' project is fully irrigated by both canal water (a Damodar Valley Corporation canal passes through the villages) and groundwater, having two deep tube wells and 27 mini deep tube wells. The land here is fertile enough with a yield rate of 2,436 kg per hectare for rice and 26,604 kg per hectare for potato, which is the main cash crop of the area. While the yield rate for rice is little less than the state average of 2,504 kg per hectare, the same for potato is higher in this area than the state average of 24,711 kg per hectare.² The other main crops are jute and vegetables that grow in abundance in this area. So the marginal farmers and landless can live off the small plots of land they own or take on lease. But they would get very little or no compensation in the process of land acquisition and hence would be the worst sufferer in the process. These people are in the fore- front of the "save agricultural land movement."⁶⁴

The farmers in the area organized themselves after 25th May 2006 in resistance against taking away of their farmlands. A 'Save agricultural land committee' was formed and a demonstration against such acquisition was held on June 1, 1996, in front of the local BDO office. The Trinamool Congress, who was the opposition to the Left front government of West Bengal in 2006, played a crucial role in the struggle against the acquisition. Mamata Bannerjee played an important role in the Singur struggle by means of dharna and hunger strike during the period. Even though, it appeared to be a political fight between two political parties where Trinamool Congress was seen leading the struggle, the movement also saw participation of from a number of Left front activists and supporters. Parthasarathi Bannerjee writes about this aspect of the struggle in Singur:

Though the peasant movement appears like a TMC-led movement, not all the participants in the movement are TMC activists and supporters; there are a -number of LF activists and supporters actively involved in it. A TMC leader and ex-pradhan of one of the gram panchayats was initially with the movement, but finally gave away his land. Many of the landed gentry, some of them absentee, who own bigger portions of land, depend on 'kishans' (i e, hired labours, bargadars,etc) for cultivation of their lands. They principally depend on business or service and have come forward to part with their land in lieu of cash. The LF government is banking on these people in the process of land acquisition, persons who are known to be traditional supporters of the anti-LF parties. On the other hand, the poorer sections of the peasantry, who constitute the main support

⁶⁴ *Op.Cit*, Bannerjee.

base for the LF in the state, are in the forefront of the movement, seeking help from all those coming forward in support of their cause.⁶⁵

The agitation in Singur by farmers and by the Trinamool leader Mamata Bannerjee was able to resist the Tata Motor plant. The agitation sparked off on 25th of May 2006 with the formation of the save the farmland Committee was followed by a series of hunger strikes by Mamata Bannerjee between December 2006 and August 2008, when the Tata Motors decided to shift their plant out of West Bengal in October 2008.

Some of the important events which have been taken for this study of the media representation of the Singur struggle are:

- The formation of the save agricultural land committee
- Mamata Bannerjee's opposition to the plant in Singur in December 2006 and the 26 day long hunger strike against it.
- Construction of the car plant beginning 21st January 2007.
- Calcutta High Court upholds Singur land acquisition on 18th January 2008
- Indefinite Hunger strike by Mamata Bannerjee at Singur in August 2008
- And finally as talks between Trinamool Congress and the West Bengal government fails in September 2008. Tata Motors decides to shift from West Bengal.

⁶⁵ Banerjee, *Op.Cit*

The Reportage of the struggle in Singur:

The reportage in the Telegraph was more in favour of the Tata nano project in Singur. Its reportage highlighted how the state government is offering a good offer to the farmers as compensation and projected the struggle against land acquisition as a Trinamool Congress led struggle for partisan political gains. One of the examples of this is when *The Telegraph* reported that the CPM leader and Minister, Nirupam Sen, setting himself up to meet the farmers in Singur. The report covered the minister's statement 'explaining the compensation package, under which land will be acquired at 30 per cent over the market rate with an additional 10 per cent thrown in for those who sell voluntarily.'⁶⁶ It also made a cursory reference to the Tata Motors officials facing protest by farmers. And then, the statement by the Minister on how it makes more sense to sell the lands rather than cultivating it was highlighted. The minister also said, 'If the farmer gets Rs 1 lakh for the same land by selling it, he will earn Rs 7,000 a year as interest without any sweat. "Tell me which is more acceptable to you?' It stated:

Last Thursday, some farmers had protested before visiting Tata officials. Sen told the gathering: "If Tata Motors is not allowed to set up its unit here, it will send a wrong message to the entire world. Imagine how disastrous it will be for Bengal." He narrated how the car factory would match up to international standards and create jobs. "Though some of the land to be acquired is two crop, the compensation package would be quite hefty." Sen explained that it might make more sense for farmers to sell their land instead of cultivating it. A farmer earns Rs 9,940 a year from a two-crop land measuring a bigha by selling his produce of paddy. After expenses of Rs 5,500, he makes a profit of Rs 4,440 a year.⁶⁷

Another report which shows how farmers were indeed ready to give their land for the Tata project also projected the protestors as 'disgruntled farmers' and supporters of the Trinamool Congress. It stated:

⁶⁶ Sen sells Tata car project to farmers, *The Telegraph*, 31st May 2006

⁶⁷ *ibid*

Observers said unity among members of the front's peasant wings is essential to counter the continuing protests by some farmers owing allegiance to the Trinamul Congress. The disgruntled farmers will submit a memorandum to the Singur block development officer tomorrow. Baora said there is no division of opinion among the front members on the acquisition of land. "The peasant leaders today rallied behind the government's move to acquire land for the Tata project paying a hefty compensation." He added that farmers owning multiple-crop land are also coming forward to give up their holdings because they want industrialization.⁶⁸

In another report, published in *The Telegraph* on 4th June, 1996, on the issue of the CPM's statement saying that 'farmers would not part with farmland until the government's compensation package meets their demands',⁶⁹ the report highlighted the fact that, 'Under the package offered, land will be acquired at 30 per cent over the market rate with an additional 10 per cent for farmers who hand over their land voluntarily.'⁷⁰

The Telegraph, again, in its editorial on 6th June 2006, titled, Land Rites, writes about how, 'In economic terms, farming is hardly the best use of land. Even farmers who depend on land for their livelihood are compelled to do so because they know no better use of land. Land being the most limited of economic resources, its most profitable use must be at the heart of all plans for economic development.'⁷¹ The editorial argued that the government, headed by Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, has won the mandate on an economic agenda and also wrote 'Any opposition to the use of agricultural land for industrialization, therefore, is devoid of basic economic logic. It is also unfair to the farmers' own economic mobility.' The editorial refrained from any discussion on the issues before the farmers and the complex arrangement of crop sharing and also the fact that the new industry set up in the farming land would hardly benefit the farmers in terms of a regular occupation for livelihood. The editorial, instead, argued that, 'Mr Nirupam Sen, is right in rejecting the demand that the people be given jobs in the industrial units

⁶⁸ Front's farmer leaders fall in line, *The Telegraph*, 1st June 2006

⁶⁹ CPM pushes land deal, *The Telegraph*, 3rd June 2006

⁷⁰ *ibid*

⁷¹ Land Rites, *The Telegraph*, 6th June 2006

which come up on their land. The jobs created in any such project obviously depend on the nature of the industry. Unfortunately, most of the dissenters over the Tata project are driven only by populist motives.⁷² The editorial held that the Chief Minister ‘must not allow such spoilers to cloud Bengal's new economic hopes.’⁷³

The Times of India, also, on 2nd June 2006, reported that the protesting farmers were essentially being backed by Trinamool Congress. It stated, ‘Despite the West Bengal government’s assurance of compensation, hundreds of farmers backed by Trinamool Congress on Thursday gheraoed the BDO office against the acquisition of land for Tata’s Rs 1 lakh car project in Hoogly’s Singur area.’ The newspaper also reported of a ‘threat’ by the Tata Company to move out of the state if the government failed to hand over 997 acres of land. That was on 27th September 2006. The report features the statement of the Managing Director and read as follows: ‘Ravi Kant (its Managing Director) said the company would have no alternative but to relocate its small car project to another state if the West Bengal government failed to hand over the committed 997 acres at Singur by the year end.’⁷⁴ The report featured the West Bengal industry minister Nirupam Sen’s statement saying that land will be transferred to Tatas soon.

Interestingly, the report, however, abruptly in its last paragraph mentions the design of new Tata car where it states. ‘The styling of the rear engine of the small four door car has been frozen and the three prototypes are currently being tested in Pune’⁷⁵ The report, also among other news in a box within, mentions, ‘The 4-5 seater will be

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ Tatas threaten to move small car project out from West Bengal, *The Times of India*, 28th September 2006

⁷⁵ *ibid*

proper 4 door car with a rear mounted engine.⁷⁶ This aspect of the report makes it appear as an advertisement to the new Tata car. It must also be remembered that Tata is one of the biggest advertisers in the media in India.⁷⁷ Continuing on these lines, the *Times of India*, on 11th December 2011 published a report informing that the CPM backs Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the West Bengal Chief Minister in his decision to continue the project in Singur. It also stressed that the ‘CPM patriarch, Jyoti Basu, also stood by Buddhadeb and urged the Trinamool Congress Chairperson Mamata Bannerjee to break her fast.’⁷⁸

The Hindu too in its reportage viewed the land struggle as the struggle between the ruling and the opposition parties in West Bengal. In an article published on 12th December 2006, written by Marcus Dam, he analyses the Singur struggle as a political posturing by the opposition leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee. It argued how the Buddhadev Bhattacharjee’s government won the election on the development agenda. It stated:

It might be incidental that the project was among the first announced by the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee Government hours after being sworn in seven months ago. But there can be no denying that it set the tenor for the Chief Minister's agenda of development in the State, epitomising his drive towards industrialisation, which, he points out, has the public mandate.⁷⁹

The article also highlighted how the opposition to the project has led to growing anxiousness in all sections of the society and that there could be a setback to the industrial regeneration process. To quote again:

What is being witnessed is the "politicisation of industrial investment" as local business circles put it. The Chambers of Commerce and Industry Associations, in a joint statement, expressed "a

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ According ADex Analysis, Tata Motors Ltd was the top automobile advertiser in print during January-July '09, while Bajaj XCD 135 DTS-Si topped the list of new automobile brands advertised in print during this period. High advertising share of automobile brands was seen on metro newspapers during the first half of 2009.

⁷⁸ *The Times of India*, 11th December 2006

⁷⁹ Dam, Marcus, Singur and political posturing, *The Hindu*, 12th December 2006

growing anxiety amongst all sections of concerned stakeholders in the society that the thrust towards industrial regeneration [in the State] could receive a severe setback."⁸⁰

The Telegraph, on 2nd December, 2006, reported with a catch headline from a statement by Mamata Bannerjee where she asked her supporters, Tata ne Atta? Meaning Tata or Wheat? implying that if farmland is being acquired, it will hamper agriculture. The headline of the story was , Decide: Tata or atta or Mamata.⁸¹ The report was part of an attempt to present the bandh declared by Trinamool as a failure. It stated:

Police said all the 257 bandh supporters arrested in Calcutta during the day had been picked up from "certain pockets" of the south, like Hazra, Kalighat and Ballygunj, Mamata Banerjee's strongholds. "In the rest of the city, there was hardly anyone trying to enforce the bandh," they added. Where were the Trinamul supporters who usually pour out on the streets in response to their leader's strike call"⁸²

It is important to also point out that the report also while referring to an incident of Trinamool Congress members getting physical in the state Assembly stated, 'Singur is no longer an issue, the unprecedented destruction in the Assembly is.'⁸³

The Hindu reported on Buddhadev Bhattacharjees agreement for a CBI probe into the death of a girl whose body was found in Singur. The report starts with 'Buddhadeb appeals to Mamata to withdraw her 48-hour statewide bandh call, but she sets a deadline. Says no going back on Singur project. There was no forcible land acquisition".⁸⁴ The report repeated the appeal to Ms. Mamata Bannerjee to withdraw her 48 hour strike.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ ibid

⁸¹ Decide: Tata or atta or Mamata, *The Telegraph*, 2nd December, 2006

⁸² ibid

⁸³ ibid

⁸⁴ Buddhadeb agrees to demand CBI probe, *The Hindu*, 20th December 2006

⁸⁵ The report stated: West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on Tuesday conceded a demand of the Trinamool Congress and the Congress to seek a CBI probe into the death of a girl in Singur. The body was found on Monday. He also appealed to Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee to withdraw her call for a 48-hour statewide bandh from December 21 in connection with the killing. Ms. Banerjee, in response, said if the State Government did not return the Singur land back to the owners within 24 hours, her party would go ahead with the bandh. The Bharatiya Janata Party has announced its support to the bandh.

The Hindu published an article, on 22nd December 2006, again by Marcus Dam, titled, ‘Desperate causes and fraught methods, where he criticized Mamata Bannerjee’s ‘decision to call a bandh was as much a desperate act of a leader running out of ideas as was the decision to put it on hold.’⁸⁶ It criticized her un-willingness to engage with the Chief Minister over issues which are important considering the state’s industrialization drive.⁸⁷

The Economic Times published an editorial titled, The Singur Test: Make Rehabilitation a Model exercise. The editorial saw the agitation in Singur as an attempt by Mamata Bannerjee to gain political mileage. It writes, ‘The way Trinamool led the protest against the acquisition of farm land in Singur, West Bengal, for a Tata Small car factory have been unfolding, there is little doubt that the ruckus, in part, is no more than a desperate bid by Mamata Bannejee to give her warring politics of lumpen kitsch a last shot in the arm. If the Assembly elections were anything to go by, such obstructionist politics had clearly lost its yen.’⁸⁸ The editorial justified the acquisition under ‘The Land Acquisition Act, 1894’ which ‘makes acquisition by the state for public good property legal.’⁸⁹ The editorial refused to take into account the fact that Tata is private company on whose behalf; the state government has acquired land. It also presented a one sided picture where the concerns of the farmers who had not consented to give away their land were not represented.

⁸⁶ Desperate causes and fraught methods, *The Hindu*, 22nd December 2006

⁸⁷ The report stated: Ms. Banerjee's hunger strike no longer engages public discourse in the manner that was expected. She spurned repeated appeals to call it off following the Chief Minister's expressed willingness to discuss with her issues related to the Singur project. Although she has backed out of the bandh, she is disinclined to talk on a subject that has assumed importance in the context of the State's industrialization drive.

⁸⁸ The Singur Test, *The Economic Times*, 5th December 2006

⁸⁹ *ibid*

The Indian Express too appeared to be in favour of the car factory in Singur's farmland. The reports and its editorial were clearly showing the struggle as against the project from the Trinamool Congress. On 21st January 2007, *The Indian Express* reported how Trinamool Congress had led a protest in the Singur Tata plant. The title of the report, Mamata cries foul, slams 'trust breach' and it stated, 'As Tata Motors set the ball rolling for its small car project in Singur, the Trinamool Congress on Sunday staged a feeble protest as party supporters tried to set a few fencings afire at Singur. The police later chased them away. The incident occurred in Beraberri area of Singur.'⁹⁰ The report highlighted how the Trinamool led a very weak protest in the Tata plant. It also featured Mamata Banerjee's contention that the state government had breached her trust by allowing starting the construction of the Tata motors plant.⁹¹

The Indian Express on the same day published an editorial titled, Singur SEZ, on 22nd January 2007. The editorial praised the West Bengal government for their decision to go ahead with the project even in the wake of protest from the farmers. It held that even though Singur was not a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) project but the experiences will help the West Bengal government to grapple with future issues arising out of acquisition for SEZs. It stated:

It is good that the state government has not balked at the challenge, and has chosen to go ahead with the project. Two aspects of the project hold significance for the local communities — the landholders who have sold their property as well as the residents of Singur curious about how the altered political economy would impact their lives. The effect could be far-reaching. The Singur project is, remember, not a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). But as the government grapples with

⁹⁰ Mamata cries foul, slams 'trust breach', *The Indian Express*, 22nd January 2007

⁹¹ The report stated, Mamata Banerjee accused the state government of breaching trust. Banerjee said she was hurt that Tata Motors initiated work despite promises by the Centre and the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government that work in the area would not begin without consent of local farmers.

the issues of SEZs — of rehabilitation, land acquisition and local interfaces — the experience at Singur will certainly be illuminating.⁹²

The editorial argued that the project is not only for the larger common good but was also beneficial for the sites in which they are set up. It stressed that ‘Tata Motors officials say they have already employed, in the first 24 hours of construction activity, 50 villagers and hope to increase this number to 2,500. In all, they expect 10,000 locals to be connected with the project.’ It further goes on to say that the critics will always romanticize the toils of a marginal farmer. It stated:

A terrible injustice could be wrought by critics of such projects who seek to oppose by romanticising the toils of the marginal farmer. Making ends meet on such small tracts is a daily challenge, and the economy of small scales gives the farmer no buffer when drought or flood occurs. Taking industrialisation and manufacturing to new venues could mean giving marginal farmers and landless labourers a way to get integrated into, and benefit from, mainstream economic activity.

The editorial did not represent the concerns for which the farmers were in opposition to the acquisition. It is, no doubt, that the acquisition was legally made under the Land Acquisition Act 1894 but the role of the media in a democracy is to highlight the issues pertaining to the poor, who are underrepresented. The media is expected to be a platform for viewpoints and provide a rational assessment. Apart from not discussing any issues from the protesting farmers, the editorial takes its stand.

The Calcutta High court Judgment on 18th January 2008 on the Singur issue and its reportage:

Meanwhile, the Calcutta High Court gave its ruling on the case against the land acquisition on 18th January, 2008 to declare the acquisition of land in Singur as valid under the law. *The Telegraph* reported the judgment in its front page. The report was

⁹²Singur Sez it, *The Indian Express*, 22nd January 2007

titled, ‘Public purpose tag on Singur- Nano plant zips past legal hurdle’ and it reported how the High Court ruling had been a morale boosting shot for the Chief Minister’s ‘industrialization drive and lifted the last vestiges of a cloud on the Tata small-car plant that will make the world’s cheapest car, the Nano.’⁹³ It also highlighted how the judgment was categorical that the Singur land acquisition “was made for the public purpose of employment generation and socio-economic development of the area”. *The Times of India* also reported on the issue highlighting the judgment and how it is a boost to ‘the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government paving the way for the Tata nano project to roll out from Singur.’⁹⁴ *The Hindu*, in a small report, informed about the Calcutta High Court Judgment stating, ‘The Calcutta High Court on Friday dismissed all 11 petitions that challenged the land acquisition at Singur in West Bengal for the Tata Motors’ small car plant. Other matters pertaining to the project were also dismissed. Ruling that the land acquisition was valid, a Division Bench, comprising Chief Justice S.S. Nijjar and Justice P.C. Ghose, said it was made for employment generation and the area’s socio-economic development.’⁹⁵

In two editorials, *The Times of India*, one in August 2008 and another in September 2008, dealt with the Singur struggle. On 25th August 2008, the editorial titled, Don’t say no: Throwing out Nano would be a recipe for Bengal’s stagnation, the *Times of India* argued as to why West Bengal should take seriously the threat by Ratan Tata to pull out of the state owing to political parties protesting against it. It added that the ‘Local political parties are protesting the allotment, which they say are without the consent of

⁹³ Public purpose tag on Singur- Nano plant zips past legal hurdle, *The Telegraph* 19th January 2008

⁹⁴ Singur Land acquisition legal-HC, *The Times of India*, 19th January 2008

⁹⁵ Pleas against Singur project dismissed, *The Hindu*, 19th January 2008

the owners. When Ratan Tata, Chairman of the Tata Motors says publicly that he is considering pulling out of Bengal because of constant harassment and violence by protesting parties, his threat must be taken seriously.⁹⁶ It also points out that Bengal has a rich industrial history and blames the leftist agitations as a cause for its dent in investments and how the present Chief Minister has ‘reversed the past policy and is trying to attract industry to the state’. It also writes that the Nano project as a base ‘would be a good launching pad for restoring the state’s industrial glory.’ Apart from that, it argued how, ‘decades of anti industry agitprop has worn out the state and people are tiring of it’ and advised Mamata Bannerjee to focus more on the aspects of compensation and rehabilitation. It stated:

Decades of agitprop have worn out the state and the people are tiring of it. Taking a hard stance on the Nano will not help at her hastening. The urban constituency after all is an important one for her. Most farmers in Singur whose land have been acquired nearly 10,000 of the total 12,500 have accepted the compensation paid to them. Bennerjees stature would rise if she were to play a farsighted role in negotiating satisfactory compensation for all stakeholders, while removing road blocks to Bengals industrial revival.⁹⁷

The other editorial in *The Times of India* on 9th September, titled, ‘Driving out of Singur- Left Mamata agreed but Tatas decide to wait, talked about the negation process involving the Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Mamata Bannerjee and the Governor of West Bengal Gopal Gandhi. The editorial argued how the ‘Singur project is a test case for the state government’s commitment to the industrialization of West Bengal. The government, even if a tad bit late, has realized the need for proper relief and

⁹⁶ Don’t say no: Throwing out Nano would be a recipe for Bengal’s stagnation, *The Times of India*, 25th August 2008

⁹⁷ *ibid*

rehabilitation of affected people. The slew of measures now suggested including pension for peasants who have given land, could become a model for project elsewhere.’⁹⁸

The Hindustan Times reported on 6th September 2008, with the headline ‘Everybody loses if Nano leaves Bengal’. The report discussed Ratan Tata’s threat to pull out of Bengal in the wake of the opposition to the Nano project. It presented the viewpoint that if Tatas move out of Bengal everyone will lose. It stated:

Tata Motors chairman Ratan Tata’s final threat of pullout from Singur came at a time on Tuesday when all the dramatis personae were making frantic face-saving efforts. The message from Tata Motors reached the media and the state government almost simultaneously when Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was with Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi, urging him to take personal initiative. The governor reportedly agreed to consider his request. At around the same time at Singur, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee announced that “land for land” would be an acceptable solution, indicating a major climb-down. But the message from Tata Motors suddenly created a situation where everybody stood to lose. If the Tatas really leave Singur, Mamata will have to carry the burden for years to come.⁹⁹

The news report wrote ‘Sen’s frustration was genuine. If the Tatas shift the project to another state, it will be a terrible loss of face for Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and the CPI-M, which is desperately trying to come out of its anti-industry image.’ It also wrote ‘The farmers and the non-farming population in Singur probably will have to pay the highest price if the Tatas really leave.’¹⁰⁰

Tata Decides to Move out of Bengal on 3rd October 2008

Amidst these and the agitation persisting, Tata Motors announced its exit from Bengal and also its decision to shift to Sanand in Gujarat on October 3, 2008. The decision of Tata Motors moving out of Singur is presented in *The Telegraph* as a ‘Bullet into Bengal’s soul’ in its front page. Mamata Banerjee pulled the trigger, says Tata.’ The

⁹⁸ Driving out of Singur- Left Mamata agreed but Tatas decide to wait, *The Times of India*, 9th September 2008

⁹⁹ Everybody loses if Nano leaves Bengal, *The Hindustan Times*, 9th September 2008

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

report presented Ratan Tata's version of moving out of Bengal and how it is a great setback for the symbol of industrial resurgence in Bengal. The report stated:

Bengal's symbol of industrial resurgence, the Nano, died a violent death today, the trigger pulled by Mamata Banerjee, Ratan Tata said. After a meeting with chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Tata said: "Two years ago, I said if somebody puts a gun to my head, you would either have to remove the gun or pull the trigger. I would not move my head. I think Ms Banerjee pulled the trigger." It was not as if Bhattacharjee, industries minister Nirupam Sen and chief secretary Amit Kiran Deb had not expected such an outcome when they walked into the meeting with Tata and two of his aides. But the chief minister, especially, and Sen tried their best and failed to persuade Tata to give Singur one more chance.¹⁰¹

The report then goes on to explain the meeting that had taken place between the Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Industry Minister Nirupam Sen and Ratan Tata. It wrote how the Chief Minister tried to convince Ratan Tata but he could not persuade. The report presented the Chief Minister's efforts in retaining the Tata factory in Singur and lamented that it had become impossible to convince Ratan Tata.¹⁰² The report ended where it writes about the persistent pleas from the Chief Minister and how he was 'Sad and pained.' It stated, 'Confronted with persistent pleas from the government, Tata said he had made up his mind, though the process of making the decision left him "sad and pained". The pain will be immeasurably greater on this side.'¹⁰³ *The Telegraph* also published an editorial titled, EXIT, PURSUED BY POLITICS, in which it argues how the politics of strike and agitation has led the Tatas to move out of the state. It stated Ratan Tata's version of why he left Bengal, 'Mr Tata did not mince his words about why

¹⁰¹ Bullet into Bengal's soul- Mamata Banerjee pulled the trigger, says Tata, *The Telegraph*, 4th October 2008

¹⁰² It stated: Although Tata was unmoved by Bhattacharjee's persuasion, he generously praised the role of the chief minister. "We still have a great deal of respect for the leadership of Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee." When the meeting began, for the six men seated around the rectangular glass-top table in the chief minister's office on the first floor of Writers', the next one-and-a-half hours were more a ritual of taking leave with a nod, smile and a handshake. Bhattacharjee and his team retained their poise when Tata, at one point, leant forward and delivered the dreaded line. "The government did not exactly flinch," a source in Writers' said. "It had conditioned itself. The content of scores of calls and letters exchanged between the two sides over the past few weeks sort of presaged the dreadful end."

¹⁰³ *ibid*

he was forced to leave, and why West Bengal will remain stagnant. He said emphatically that it was the politics of agitation, rallies and demonstrations that compelled him.’ The editorial ends with posing a question to the people and civil society of Bengal which stated and asked people if they are ready to pay the cost that industrialization entails. It also brought in the cultural symbol of the Bengali people -- Durga Puja -- and said ‘West Bengal has got an apposite puja present’ referring to the Tatas moving out of the state.

The editorial stated:

The circumstances demand that the people of West Bengal — members of civil society, the common people and the political leaders — ask themselves two very simple questions. Do they want industrialization? Are they prepared for industrialization in terms of the costs it entails? The existing situation would suggest that, at the moment, the answers to both questions are in the negative. Perhaps West Bengal has got an apposite Puja present.¹⁰⁴

The Hindu put the same news in a simpler write up. It informed, ‘Tata Motors announced its decision on Friday to pull out from Singur in West Bengal in the interests of the Nano small car project’s success and viability and in the light of the Opposition’s continued and heightened agitation there. Work at the project site had begun in January 2007.’¹⁰⁵ The report explained the reasons enunciated by the Tata Motors to move out of Bengal and Mamata Bannerjee’s statement calling it a political pact between the CPM and the Tata group.¹⁰⁶

The Times of India gave a full front page coverage to the story with the headline, ‘TA-TA TO SINGUR, HI TO SANAND? Blames Mamata, Rejects Buddha’s Plea To Stay On’. The report started with how, ‘West Bengal’s worst fear has come true. Ratan

¹⁰⁴ Exit pursued by Politics, *The Telegraph*, 4th October 2008

¹⁰⁵ Tatas pull out of Singur, *The Hindu*, 4th October 2008

¹⁰⁶The report stated: Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, who has been spearheading the agitation at Singur for return of land taken “forcibly” from farmers for the project, described the decision as “a joint game plan of the Tatas and the CPI(M).” She termed the pullout a “political” one and said the pact between the company and the government to set up the project was not being brought out in the open “for it had political intent.”

Tata announced on Friday he was leaving Singur, taking with him the Nano car project and the state's dream of an economic revival and leaving it with a tattered image in the investor's eye.¹⁰⁷ It also explained how the Nano project will also take with it all vendors despite the huge shifting costs, leaving a '1,000-acre black hole in the lush green Singur farmlands where Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had hoped to reap a huge political dividend as well.'¹⁰⁸ It also reported Ratan Tata's statement blaming Mamata Bannerjee for moving out of Bengal. It said:

Our reason for leaving West Bengal is entirely because of the continued aggression and agitation by the Opposition, led by Mamata Banerjee, with total disregard for the rule of law, and not because what state government has done or not done," he said at a press conference after a two-hour meeting in Bhattacharjee's office. "If someone puts the gun on my head, I say either you remove the gun or pull the trigger. Ms Banerjee has pulled the trigger, Tata said.¹⁰⁹

In yet another report besides this, *The Times of India* informs about the Gujarat government's approval of the Tata Nano project there. It also presented Narendra Modi as an industry friendly Chief Minister as well as Gujarat as an industry friendly state when it mentions the Chief Minister is ready to hand over 2200 Acres of land (double amount than the land allotted in West Bengal) by just the 'stroke of a pen'. To quote from the report:

Tata's pullout came on a day TOI broke the story about land belonging to Gujarat Agriculture University (GAU), Anand, at Chharodi and Charal villages of Sanand taluka in Ahmedabad district having been offered to Tata Motors. On Friday, GAU's vice-chancellor MC Varshneya was called by an official of the chief minister's office. While neither side was willing to disclose details, it is learnt that Narendra Modi government wants to transfer a portion of the 2,200-acre tract with the stroke of a pen, once Tata gives the nod.¹¹⁰

In its editorial, *The Times of India* argued how 'The Tatas' decision is a huge blow to West Bengal and in particular chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's

¹⁰⁷ *The Times of India*, 4th October 2008

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*

¹¹⁰ Will Nano be Gujarat's Gaurav?, *The Times of India*, 4th October 2008

ambitions of sparking an industrial revival in the state. The Nano was no ordinary project. It is supposed to be a car for the masses and the symbol of a new and innovative India. Not surprisingly, the rest of the world is keenly following the Nano's progress. The departure of the Tatas from Singur will send all the wrong signals to future investors.'¹¹¹ The editorial blamed Mamata Bannerjee's agitationist politics as a cause for the Tatas moving out of the state.¹¹²

The reportage of at least two of the newspapers taken for this study, i.e. *The times of India*, *The Telegraph* presented that the process of land acquisition as a necessary process of industrialization which have short term problems but are mostly beneficial in the long run. The Telegraph projected the deal offered to the farmers as a good deal, without even having any representation from the farmers' side. For example, on 31st May 2006, the newspaper reported how the compensation amount is thirty percent above the market rate. The Telegraph also projected all those who opposed the Singur project as supporters of the Trinamool Congress and this logic also persisted in its description of the agitators as 'disgruntled farmers'. The Telegraph report on 1st June, 2006 seemed to suggest that it was merely a fight between the ruling and the opposition parties. The Telegraph, in order to justify the acquisition also writes how 'Farming is hardly the best use of land'¹¹³ and also argues that 'Land being the most limited of economic resources, its most profitable use must be at the heart of all plans for economic development.'¹¹⁴ *The Indian Express* too, in its editorial on January 2nd 2007, wrote how 'It is good that the state government has not balked at the challenge, and has chosen to go ahead with the

¹¹¹ Ta-ta Singur The Nano won't roll out from West Bengal, *The Times of India*, 4th October 2008

¹¹² It wrote how, methods followed by opposition parties can only spell disaster. Politicians like Banerjee have failed to realise that the opposition is not meant to play spoiler; they have a constructive role too.

¹¹³ *The Telegraph*, 1st June 2006

¹¹⁴ *ibid*

project. Two aspects of the project hold significance for the local communities — the landholders who have sold their property as well as the residents of Singur curious about how the altered political economy would impact their lives.¹¹⁵ On the issue of land acquisition for industry, the newspapers had taken a view that it is best for everyone without giving adequate representation to the concerns of the people protesting against the acquisition. Most of the newspapers also projected first the possible moving out of Tata from Bengal as a ‘Everybody loses if Nano leaves Bengal’ (The Hindustan Times report 6th September 2008 being a case in point). The reports in the newspaper pointed out how the Tata project would benefit the local population who could be engaged in the factory. The report however fails to bring out on how working in a factory needs skills which the farmers were not equipped with and the fact that this certainly would hinder their chances of getting employed. These issues hardly found mention either in reports or in the editorials.

Yet another of the facets of the reporting on Singur was the projection of capitalism getting accepted by the left as necessary. It was highlighted in many of the news reports. The Economic Times, on 5th December 2006, came out with the headline, Communist CM stands up for Capitalist Tata. It also carried a picture of women in a farm with a sickle in their hand with the caption, ‘Whose symbol?’ The report, however, was about ‘Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on Monday expressed his resolve to hand over land to Tata Motors at Singur in December itself even as the Trinamool Congress chief, Mamata Banerjee, went on an indefinite fast, spurning the chief minister’s offer for talks.’¹¹⁶ In the same context, to mention of an editorial on 6th December 2006, in The Economic

¹¹⁵ *The Indian Express* 22nd January 2007

¹¹⁶ Communist CM stands up for Capitalist Tata, *The Economic Times*, 5th December 2006

Times, this also makes a similar attempt to first show how left politics had been always about anarchy. It writes:

History repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” For West Bengal, the tragedy was the violent politics of the 1960s and ‘70s, which led to a flight of capital. The farce is being played out now with Mamata Banerjee and a motley crew of NGOs and Naxalites attempting to derail CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharya’s dream project. There is a delicious irony in the Left’s angry protestations about Mamata’s anarchic politics, for she can justly claim to have learnt the techniques from observing the masters.¹¹⁷

The editorial, apart from making the left look irrelevant, also brought in the aspect of mocking the supporters of the Singur agitation, particularly Mamata Bannerjee and Medha Patkar. It stated:

One might suspect the current goings-on are a rather brilliant spoof on the Left’s past agitations. Medha Patkar, who has been reportedly trying to sneak into Singur, last in an auto-rickshaw, has been playing the role of her sidekick to perfection. It’s not known why she has not tried the obvious burqa. And then there are “sinister elements”, “Naxal-supported intellectuals”, who are allegedly manipulating things from behind the scenes.¹¹⁸

This aspect is important in the context of liberalization, where the media, among the beneficiaries of the shift to Market economy presents particular a particular pattern of development as the ideal. The Singur Tata Motors plant was presented as the only way to kickstart the “stagnant” economy of the state. It was presented as the most important steps taken by the Left Front government; and in this process, the media sought to block or black out the concerns of the land losers and most significantly the crucial aspects of the rehabilitation process. The media, however, heavily relied on the compensatory element as against the human costs of displacement. And also by projecting the struggle as a standoff between the ruling government and the opposition, the question of agency of the farmers was totally ignored in the press.

¹¹⁷ Mamata’s agitation, a spoof? History Repeats Itself, *The Economic Times*, 7th December 2006

¹¹⁸ *The Economic Times*, 6th December 2006

The Nandigram struggle:

The Nandigram struggle, referred here, is the protest of farmers in the village of Nandigram in West Bengal against the acquisition of land for setting up a Special Economic Zone. The Nandigram episode happened at a time in West Bengal, when the Singur agitation was already going on against the acquisition of land for the Tata Motors plant. The land proposed to be acquired in Nandigram was to be used in setting up a chemical hub by the Selim group from Indonesia under the Special Economic Zones (SEZ).¹¹⁹

On 31 July 2006, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya signed a deal with the representatives of the Selim Group. The deal signed between the company and the West Bengal Chief Minister 'specified that the Indonesian company would set up, among a slew of other infrastructural projects, a chemical hub SEZ at Nandigram as part of the proposed Petrochemicals and Petroleum Investment Region (PCPIR). The projects, it was said, were to bring in investments worth Rs 400 billion to investment-starved West Bengal.'¹²⁰

The farmers in Nandigram rebelled in early January 2007, when they learnt that the West Bengal government had signed a deal with the corporate group. The Nandigram area had supported the left parties and the protest happened at a time when the Left front was ruling the state . The protest started in Nandigram following the Haldia Development

¹¹⁹ The Special Economic Zones Act, 2005, was passed by Parliament in May, 2005 which received Presidential assent on the 23rd of June, 2005. The Special Economic Zones are areas where business and trade laws are different than the rest of the county. These areas are governed by financial policies with regard to investments, taxation, customs and labour regulations and companies investing are offered tax holidays. They may also be granted a period of lower taxation for a period of time.

¹²⁰ Sarkar, Tanika, Sumit Chowdhury, The meaning of Nandigram: Corporate land invasion, people's power, and the Left in India, Focaal journal, vol.2009,p. 54

Authority issuing a notice indicating a plan ‘to acquire about 14,500 acres of land in twenty-seven mouzas in Nandigram Block 1 and in two mouzas in Khejuri10 Block 2. It was also made clear that 12,500 acres in Nandigram would be acquired immediately, because the construction work would soon begin for the mega chemical hub by the Selim Group and a shipbuilding-cum-repairing unit by the Pawan Ruia industrial group.’¹²¹ Soon after the news broke out in the area, the people gathered at the local panchayat office. Police also reached the spot. The sight of the police angered the villagers. An account of it is discussed by Tanika Sarkar and Sumit Choudhury, where they write as to how the villagers got angry over the presence of the police. The police used *lathi charge* at the crowd which led to further escalation of violence from both the sides. Then, the police fired at the villagers, injuring several in the crowd. The authors quoted an eye witness:

Five police vans went past the rally towards the panchayat office. People’s ire turned into a blaze. ‘Why are the police here? Turn the rally around. Let’s go the panchayat office.’ ... In no time, the number went up to 2,000. The crowd was bent on going to the panchayat office—after a lot of persuasion, complying with the local leader Nanda Patra’s advice, the rally was turned around through the village road towards the Haldia ferry ghat. ... five police vans came back. ... the lathi charge began. The crowd was taken aback ... within a short time it regrouped. It began to lob hard mud balls ... at the police. The police, in turn, hurled stone-chips meant for road repairs. Soon, the whole area turned into a battlefield. The police burst teargas shells but couldn’t stop the crowd. ... The police fired.¹²²

Violence again erupted in Nandigram, on 3th January 2007, between CPM cadres and the villagers. In this village, which hitherto was a CPM stronghold, local leaders pulled themselves away from the party and engaged in a form of form of civil war between the party cadres and the villagers? The villagers formed the Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee to fight against the acquisition of their farm lands. ‘Between January and March Nandigram was a self governing fortress where state agencies had no

¹²¹ ibid

¹²² ibid

place.¹²³ During the period, the government also imposed an economic blockade to Nandigram to coerce the villagers into submission. On 14th March 2007, the administration decided to crackdown on the villagers and deployed more than 2400 policeman in the area. ‘Officially, 14 farmers died in the firing, but over 100 were declared "missing". A similar attempt in November by the cadres of the CPI(M) finally led to the "recapture" of Nandigram.’¹²⁴ The region again saw violence when the BUPC decided to launch a protest in the form of two rallies against the March 14th massacre. Even while the he rally was in progress, ‘masked gunmen appeared from behind the bushes and started firing indiscriminately, killing several people.’¹²⁵

In order to understand the opposition of the farmers in Nandigram, it is necessary to note that the people in the Nandigram area were predominantly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. They grew paddy, three times a year, and also engaged in cultivating other vegetables. The area was neglected by the state governments which had ‘turned a blind eye to the longstanding demands of the local farmers for electricity so that modern irrigation could be introduced.’¹²⁶ Since the people were mainly skilled only in agriculture, the compensation amount would hardly allow the villagers to sustain their future livelihood. Apart from the livelihood issues, the opposition also stemmed from the collective need for the ties of village community offers and ‘solidarity in times of seasonal or exceptional need, periodic crises, for collective celebrations and festivals that keep alive their human identity. The chemical hub would have destroyed their villages and reduced them to landlessness, to far inferior, low-grade, and transient jobs in the new

¹²³ *ibid*

¹²⁴ 2007-Nandigram violence: A state of failure,(India Today, December 24, 2009)

¹²⁵ Sarkar, *Op.Cit*

¹²⁶ *ibid*

concerns. It would have dispersed the people, organically tied to one another, to far flung locations, among streets of distant cities.¹²⁷ These factors had led the villagers to oppose the SEZ coming up in their lands.

The reportage of the Nandigram incident:

The Protest since January 3rd 2007

The Telegraph, on 4th of January 2007, focused more on the internal tussle in within the CPI, a partner in the ruling coalition, and published its report, titled, ‘Battle within: CPI plunges into land protest’.¹²⁸ It informed how the CPM and the state government, now, have to fight with an ally in Nandigram over land acquisition. Since violence broke out in the region, the newspaper published a picture of a policemen injured in the incident. The report showed no sign of villagers being injured and also no news about the incident, otherwise, was reported in that day’s newspaper. The newspaper report, apart from the internal tussle within the CPI, did not deal with the incidents of violence. It reported the stand of various leaders of CPI and the Trinamool Congress’s stand on the issue.¹²⁹ The *Telegraph* focused more on presenting the incidents as violence being perpetrated by the villagers. On 5th January 2007, it published a news report in its front page reporting how the CPM office was torched in the village. It stated, Nandigram continued to bristle for the second day, with a CPM office torched, ditches cut across roads and culverts

¹²⁷ *ibid*

¹²⁸ Battle within: CPI plunges into land protest, *The Telegraph*, 4th January 2007

¹²⁹ The report stated: CPM patriarch Jyoti Basu had cautioned against any hasty move by bureaucrats involved in land acquisition. The atmosphere should be made congenial for acquisition with the help of the CPM and its mass organisations, he said. The Trinamul Congress-led Save Farmland Committee, which has been spearheading protests over Singur, said Nandigram saw an outburst against the government’s move to “grab the land of poor farmers”. “The government has not learnt anything from Singur. That is why it has initiated the process of grabbing agricultural land at Nandigram,” said MLA Partha Chatterjee. From a nursing home, Mamata Banerjee has ordered her supporters to visit Nandigram tomorrow.

destroyed to block access to villages. But the large police reinforcements, the report went on to add, sent after yesterday's pitched battles with villagers stayed put at the Nandigram police station, about 8 km from the action, under orders not to "interfere" and stoke the fire.¹³⁰ Then, on 9th of January 2007, The Telegraph reported from Nandigram, as to how, 'fearing attacks from villagers whose land is to be acquired for a special economic zone (SEZ), nearly 250 CPM members have fled Garchakraberia, Sonachura and Rajaramchak in Nandigram.'¹³¹ The Newspaper report pointed out as to how the villagers have damaged the CPM party office¹³² and other damages done to public property. In all these reports, the newspaper did not report on the issue of police using force or the instances of villagers getting injured during the clashes. It, however, portrayed how the villagers had turned violent. It even published a photograph of a policemen injured during the clash but similar representation of the protesting villagers who were injured during the clash was not even mentioned.

The Indian Express reported on the incident of firing in Nandigram injuring seven people. The report also informed about the angry villagers' response. It stated:

At least seven persons were injured as police opened fire in Nandigram in East Midnapore, following mob violence related to acquisition of land for a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Among the injured were some Trinamool Congress supporters. A mega SEZ for chemicals is being planned at the site. Two police vehicles were set on fire by an angry mob that vandalised the local gram panchayat office. The incident occurred early noon today, under the Kalicharanpur gram panchayat — an area in the jurisdiction of the Nandigram police station, East Midnapore.¹³³

The Times of India reported the clash between the police and the villagers. It reported the incident of police firing but on 8th of January, 2007, in a report titled, 'Post-

¹³⁰ SEZ zone seethes, govt stalls - Naxalite twist with JNU link, *The Telegraph*, 5th January 2007

¹³¹ Land backlash takes life of its own, *The Telegraph*, 9th January 2007

¹³² It stated: the mob set fire to the CPM local committee office in Rajaramchak yesterday, the party's office in Sonachura and the Citu office were put under lock and key.

¹³³ More protests in state over SEZs, *The Telegraph*, 4th January 2007

Singur, Bengal SEZ row erupts Buddha Unfazed As Violence Over Land Acquisition

Claims 6'. The report stated:

First Singur, now Nandigram. West Bengal continues to be on the boil over the state government's moves to push reforms and usher in outside investment. A series of sporadic clashes over the last four days culminated in a bloody clash here between alleged supporters of the ruling CPM and those opposing land acquisition on Sunday morning, leaving at least three people dead and two seriously injured. The unofficial death toll is said to be six.¹³⁴

The Times of India on 9th of January, 2007, published a report titled, 'BENGAL BANDH: Villagers stockpiling arms', and reported how more than three hundred protesters were arrested across the state while trying to enforce a bandh on 8th of January. Even though the title suggested that the villagers were stockpiling arms, there was no such reference in the news report. Then in *The Times of India* in its editorial dated 8th February 2007, wrote about how reforms are important in India at that point of time and how it was the best of its times due to a good climate in investment. It stated:

India has never had it so good: 8 per cent growth seems a given, with more on the cards, provided the government does not apply the brakes. If the stock market is doing well, so are manufacturing and services. Inflation should be seen as a potentially short-term consequence of high growth, which has led to demand outstripping supply in the case of foodstuffs in particular. The way out is more supply-side reforms, not less.¹³⁵

The editorial spoke of the imperative for speeding up reforms, which, according to it will benefit the farm sector. The editorial suggested that that incidents like Nandigram, was the result of 'less home work on the part of the government' giving reforms a bad name. Without delving into any of the issues involved such as the concerns of the farmers, the editorial also proposed that, 'Sonia's task lies in investing reforms with credibility, not in derailing reforms. By jogging the status quo in food retail, her party might win the support of farmers for generations to come. It is not difficult to

¹³⁴ Post-Singur, Bengal SEZ row erupts Buddha Unfazed As Violence Over Land Acquisition Claims 6, *The Times of India* 6th January 2007

¹³⁵ Braking Point Ham-handed implementation gives reforms a bad name, *The Times of India*, 8th February 2008

ensure that industrialization makes winners out of everyone. The nation is poised to make another beginning — when will the political imagination change?’¹³⁶ The editorial also implied how the opening up of retail, which meant corporate entry into the farm sector, as a gain for the farmers. The development of the corporate sector was presented as the gain for the farmers. It is important to point out that the media seemed to present the picture of development as bringing in more reforms, a term meaning fewer interventions from the government and more privatization.

The Hindustan Times also reported the incident of firing in Nandigram and highlighted the support of Trinamool Congress to the farmers.¹³⁷ The report also writes how the Trinamool Congress in the area had been active in mobilizing villagers to resist the land acquisition and thus the struggle is presented as a political fight rather than a genuine protest.

The 14th March 2007 incident of police firing

All the newspapers, taken up for this study, published the incident of police firing in Nandigram on 14th March 2007. *The Times of India* published two reports on the front page on 15th of March 2007. The first report was with the headline, ‘12 Killed As Police Open Fire On Villagers In Nandigram’, and described, ‘The quest for FDI acquired a bloody hue on Wednesday. A 5,000-strong police force marched into Nandigram—the

¹³⁶ *ibid*

¹³⁷ The report stated: NANDIGRAM WITNESSED violence for the second consecutive day on Thursday as angry villagers protesting against plans to set up a special economic zone (SEZ) there raided a local CPI(M) party office and ransacked it. The Left government in West Bengal signed an agreement in July last year with Indonesia's Salim Group for the setting up of the SEZ in Nandigram in East Midnapore district. Opposition party Trinamool Congress has been protesting against the setting up of SEZs in the state, alleging that the projects would affect farmers who will have to part with their land. The party has motivated villagers in the areas proposed for the projects to resist any move to acquire land.

country's symbol of problems associated with land acquisition for industry— and fired on protesting villagers and activists, leaving at least 12 dead and over 50 injured. The official death count is 11.’¹³⁸ The report also informed that the Chief Minister had already announced that there will be no acquisition in Nandigram ‘but the actual notification has not been withdrawn yet. Apparently, fearful of this and scared of police reprisals, protesting villagers had blocked off entire areas by digging roads and erecting barricades. The police had ostensibly come to clear up the area and restore “law and order” when they were met with fierce resistance. Women and children were reported to have formed a human shield to fend off the advancing policemen.’¹³⁹ The report tried to answer a few questions like if the notification was already withdrawn, why the firing was done. It stated, ‘The notification has not yet been withdrawn. Those opposed are still fearful of police reprisal. They block off entire areas. Police reach there, meet with resistance. Women and children form human shield. Tear-gas lobbed. Someone fires. Police start firing.’¹⁴⁰ *The Times of India* editorial titled, ‘Farms vs Factories: CPM needs to develop dual vision’ was critical of the Chief Minister and wrote how such knee jerk reactions cannot win any trust for the industrialization programme. It stated:

In light of the massive toll inflicted by police firing in Nandigram — 12 are reported killed and over 50 injured — chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's offer to withdraw the notification for land acquisition and shift the SEZ project elsewhere looks more like a ruse meant to distract villagers who had barricaded the area. Such deception, together with the knee-jerk reactions of police in firing on villagers, cannot win trust for any industrialisation programme.¹⁴¹

The editorial also pointed out the incoherence in the left's approach to liberalization,

¹³⁸ The quest for FDI acquired a bloody hue on Wednesday, *The Times of India*, 15th September

¹³⁹ *ibid*

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*

¹⁴¹ Farms vs Factories: CPM needs to develop dual vision, *The Times of India*, 16th March 2007

where it had done land reforms and tried to create an impression of turning West Bengal into a ‘a bucolic paradise, and industrialists or foreign investors are irrelevant to its economic progress.’¹⁴² It also pointed out how land reforms in Bengal have led to more problems to industrialization.¹⁴³ The editorial implied its pro market stand when it argued that ‘Unfortunately economic illiteracy is not a monopoly of the Left alone, it is shared by populist politicians across the ideological spectrum. Industry and agriculture aren’t necessarily opposed but can complement each other. But since politicians prey on division, they are likely to take a schismatic view.’¹⁴⁴

The Hindu also carried the news in its front page on 15th March 2007, and reported how the police opened fire, killing eleven persons and leaving 34 including 14 policemen injured in the strife-torn Nandigram area in West Bengal on Wednesday. It also reported how ‘violence erupted as the mob hurled stones at the police moving into the Sonachura area, Bhangabera and other parts. As lathicharge, bursting of teargas shells and firing of rubber bullets failed to disperse the protesters, the police resorted to firing. One person was killed when a bomb he was carrying exploded.’¹⁴⁵ The construction of this report, in terms of its language, spelt out the verdict that the resisters were responsible for the deaths as the police then had no other option!

¹⁴² *ibid*

¹⁴³ Land reforms are all very well, but they can work only up to a certain point. What happens when land is distributed widely, but holdings get increasingly fragmented due to an explosion in population? Unless industry comes up to absorb excess agricultural labour, living standards will decline. Let alone industry, even agricultural policy can’t be reduced simply to land reform — roads, literacy and rural electrification are all deficient in Left-ruled Bengal.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*

¹⁴⁵ 11 Killed in Nandigram Police firing, *The Hindu*, 15th March 2007

The Telegraph also carried the news in its front page, with the headline, ‘Red-hand Buddha 14 killed in Nandigram re-entry bid’.¹⁴⁶ The news report was a detailed account of the incident in Nandigram leading to the firing. But the report did suggest that the police had to fire in self defence. It first reported, ‘With the force advancing, a chant rose from the villagers, asking the police to “go back”. It then added:

The police, led by deputy inspector-general (Midnapore range) N. Ramesh Babu, told the villagers over the public address system to move back but were greeted by crude bombs and brickbats. Sound of shots was also heard. Teargas shells were burst and rubber bullets fired but the villagers regrouped and surged back, this time without the chain of women shielding them.¹⁴⁷

The report then also featured a statement by the Director General of Police that they had to open fire in self defence. It stated, “The police had to open fire in self-defence. Our force had guns not to fight the enemy but to restore peace in Nandigram,” Director-General of Police, A.B. Vohra said.’¹⁴⁸ *The Telegraph* however published another report, on 16th of March 2007, where it describes the plight of the suffering villagers in Nandigram. The report titled, ‘Bullet in belly’ but on runaway list, and describes the tragedy that had engulfed Nandigram. It brings out the victims perspective to the story. It stated:

Sandhya Maiti has been wiping away her tears but will not accept that her 30-year-old daughter could be dead. Since yesterday afternoon, the 55-year-old has been shuttling between Nandigram and Tamluk, 60 km away, visiting the hospitals there, scanning the patients’ list and looking with trepidation at the bodies lying on the cold floor. But Kalyani isn’t there.¹⁴⁹

The Telegraph newspaper as we have analyzed in this chapter, had reported on the Singur agitation too with an element of empathy towards the concerns of the villagers during the same period. This was seen in case of the Nandigram violence too, especially

¹⁴⁶ Red-hand Buddha 14 killed in Nandigram re-entry bid, *The Telegraph*, 15th March 2007

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*

after the March 14th 2007 incident of police firing. The difference of Singur and Nandigram incidents was that, the acquisition in Singur was already done whereas in Nandigram, the protest escalated soon after the notification was released. So, the media is critical of the government for handling the protest and also the fact that the Selim group's stake in the project had not yet started. *The Telegraph* also published an editorial titled, HORROR OF IT, in a very critical tone of the Chief Minister, and writes how the Chief Minister cannot 'console himself that the people who died were victims of the cause of industrialization in West Bengal. But that consolation will not answer the question: was the bloodshed necessary? The absolute answer to the question is in the negative since no cause, however noble or worthwhile, can justify the killing of innocent people.'¹⁵⁰

The Hindu published an editorial where it wrote on the partisan politics involved. It said: 'The anti-Left Front alliance spearheaded by the Trinamool Congress, in which naxalites, the Jamiat ulema-e-Hind, and other extremist elements have made common cause, was protesting the proposal to create a Special Economic Zone in the area, although Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has repeatedly declared there would be no forced land acquisition in Nandigram'. The editorial also argued that land acquisition may not have been the real cause of the violence but there are issues that arise out, whenever there is a farmland acquired for industry and infrastructure. It referred to an article published in *the Hindu* and argued that 'the acquisition of farmland for industry tends to come up against "a coalition of anti-development crusaders, groups concerned over the dislocation of farm families, those worried about the impact on agricultural, particularly food, production, protectors of farmers' interests, assorted do-gooders, and

¹⁵⁰ The anti-Left Front alliance spearheaded by the Trinamool Congress, *The Hindu*, 16th March, 2007

plain political opportunists.”¹⁵¹ The editorial was also critical of the Governor, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, who aired his displeasure and sadness over the Nandigram violence.¹⁵² The editorial also implied, though subtly, that these are mistakes that a Chief Minister may commit by ‘mishandling a crisis.’¹⁵³ The editorial also implied how reforms must be carried out without being critical of the Chief Minister and called the Nandigram violence as “mishandled crisis”.

The Kudankulam Anti nuclear Movement

The anti nuclear movement in India functions at two levels. At one level, it is a collective campaigning specifically against nuclear weapons. This anti nuclear movement evolved after the Pokhran II, in May 1998, when a group of civil society groups organized themselves against the government’s decision to embark upon the nuclear weapons program after the tests conducted on May 11 and 18, 1998. Some of the organizations that have opposed government’s nuclear policies include, The National Alliance For Anti Nuclear Movement (NAAO) and Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP). But the anti nuclear movement in Kudankulam belonged to another league though some of its elements belonged to the opposition to the weapons program as well. The Kudankulam movement is based on issues of livelihood, displacement and the safety at a local level and opposing the setting up of a Nuclear Power Plant on the coasts in Tamil Nadu and is ‘rooted in the livelihood of the people. The threat of displacement, loss of

¹⁵¹ *ibid*

¹⁵² More disconcertingly, a usually sagacious Governor, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, stepped out of line in publicly airing his philosophical and tactical differences with the State government while expressing high-minded anguish over the Nandigram deaths.

¹⁵³ What Chief Minister Bhattacharjee needs to do is not to get provoked by the opposition he must take a cool, objective, and just stand on all matters arising out of Nandigram and learn lessons from a mishandled crisis.

livelihood, alienation from their own surroundings and the harmful radiation from nuclear power plants are catalysts for this strand of the movement’.¹⁵⁴

A brief History of the Kudankulam Nuclear power plant:

The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu was the outcome of an agreement between India and the Soviet Union, as it then existed, in the year 1988. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the delay in the construction of the plant. The construction of the nuclear plant began in the year 2000 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited(NPCIL) had started the work on the Nuclear plant in Kudankulam and around ‘929 hectares of land for the project and another 150 hectares of land for the township was acquired.’¹⁵⁵ One of the requirements in setting up the nuclear plant in Kudankulam was that the shall not be any people living within a radius of 16 Kilometres; this condition of the Tamil Nadu Public Works Department, issued in 1988, was left in the limbo for many years.

About 80 per cent of the employable workforces in Kudankulam were rendered jobless; fishing in the high seas had been the source of livelihood for around 60 per cent of the people in the project affected area according to an *Indian Express* report.¹⁵⁶ In the initial phase of the project there was considerable support for the plant as it was perceived by the people as a scope for employment and work contracts were given to the

¹⁵⁴ Srikant, Pratibadla, Kudankulam Anti-Nuclear Movement: A Struggle for Alternative Development? (Bangalore: The Institute for Social and Economic Change,2009), p.3

¹⁵⁵ ibid

¹⁵⁶ Moorthy, D.N., Living with nuclear power, *The Indian Express*, 16th February 2000

local people. But the opposition started with the stage progressing to the installation of the reactors in the plant.

With the installation of the reactors, displacement of the people turned into a reality and this led to the anti-nuclear struggle gathering momentum. The PMANE, under S.P. Udaikumar, argued that, 'the region is rich in Thorium and Monaziteviii due to which there is natural radiation that is 40 times higher than the normal level'.¹⁵⁷ It also argued that Kanyakumari, being a region where natural radiation is very high, the coming of a nuclear plant and the radiation from their would worsen the situation in the region. Added to this, the preponderant dependence of the people here on fishing fed to the apprehension among the fishermen of radiation affecting the food chain because of the nuclear plant's proximity to the sea.

The fishing community, since 1999, began protesting against the nuclear plant in Kudankulum under the Banner of Tamil Nadu Fishing Workers Union. They protested against ignoring the concerns of the fishing community. Then, again in 2007 March, 'nearly 2,000 people including, 1,000 women and children, participated in a fast at Edinthakarai against the nuclear power plant. Street plays were enacted at the venue to strengthen awareness among the public.'¹⁵⁸ The disaster in Fukushima Nuclear power plant¹⁵⁹ in 2011, meanwhile, gave a fresh impetus to the movement. The movement against the Nuclear plant in Kudankulum under the PMANE, was a united struggle against the plant by various interests either of liveihood, displacement and security.

¹⁵⁷ Pratibadla, *Op.Cit.*p.3

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*

¹⁵⁹The disaster was initiated primarily by the tsunami following the Tōhoku earthquake on 11 March 2011.

Reportage of the Anti Nuclear struggle in Kudankulum:

The editorial in *The Times of India* titled, ‘Misguided Activism’, argued how India is in dire need of energy and termed the agitation as mere whipping up of passions and also attributed the concerns to fear mongering following the Fukushima disaster. Interestingly, the Times of India had not reported the agitation at all in the 11 days since it had begun. The editorial can also be seen in the context of how the media can distort dissent as being misguided and activism as fear mongering. The editorial states:

Energy-hungry India’s ambitious plan to raise nuclear capacity to 63,000 MW by 2032 makes sense. But meeting the target won’t be easy, going by demonstrations against nuclear power projects countrywide. The latest agitation over Tamil Nadu’s Kudankulam plant – agitators there have just ended an 11-day fast – shows yet again how easily passions can be whipped up. Why nuclear energy appears open to mischievous fear-mongering isn’t hard to see. These mega-ventures, involving big bucks and foreign collaboration, need to be built and maintained with top-grade safety standards. However rare, when mishaps do occur as in Japan’s Fukushima, they serve as fodder for anti-nuclear power lobbies besides provoking knee-jerk local protests.¹⁶⁰

It also termed the struggle as NGO backed and without addressing any concerns over the demands of the people and projected the agitation as guided by ‘myopic activists with ideological axes to grind.’ The main concern in the editorial was the need for energy in the fast developing India and termed the resistance as *luddite*. To quote again from the editorial:

The aim, ultimately, is to have our nuclear power programme take off. Fast developing India can’t rest content with Luddite responses to technology, as frequently manifested in misguided activism be it against transgenic crops or nuclear energy. Our power consumption is set to increase by leaps and bounds. Environment-friendly energy use being critical to our high growth path, we require alternatives to polluting fossil fuels. Renewables – coming with their own set of headaches concerning use of land and other resources – can’t do the trick alone. We need a diversified energy basket, which includes an emissions free source like nuclear power generated to benefit people on a mass scale.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Misguided activism, *The Times of India*, 22nd September 2011

¹⁶¹ *ibid*

There were, however, a few write-ups on the concerns on Nuclear safety in *The Indian Express* and *The Hindu*. One such article in *The Indian Express* went with the title, ‘Do we need a nuclear power rethink?’ The article was an op-ed article written by A Gopalakrishnan, a former chairman of the Indian Atomic Energy Regulatory Council and a known campaigner against nuclear power plants. He highlights the lacunae in the process of getting clearances of safety for atomic plants in India. He writes how the process of getting clearance of safety regarding earthquake safety is faulty where, ‘the Nuclear Power Corporation of India's (NPCIL's) strategy is to have their favourite consultants generate the kind of seismicity data that suits the NPCIL and there is practically no independent verification of their data or seismic design methodologies.’¹⁶² It also suggested how the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) should be made independent of Department of Atomic Energy, (DAE), so that it can take independent verification of the data. It must be stated here that an article in the op-ed, need not necessarily be the same as the newspaper’s stand; it, however, reflects that the newspaper considers the views as important for a debate on the issue. The same paper, in an editorial on 21st September 2011, titled, Kudankulam duty, also written on the backdrop the hunger strike against the Kudankulam nuclear power project, argued how the protest should be handled and how the protest should not be allowed to develop into ‘the sort of travelling-protest, anti-American, anti-globalization mela that attracts activists-errant from across the country.’¹⁶³ The editorial stated:

Over 100 people had been on an indefinite fast for nine days when she wrote; the area, after all, was affected by the devastating Christmas time tsunami of 2004, and the news of the effect, earlier this year, of the Pacific tsunami on the Fukushima nuclear reactor hit close to home. It will be in

¹⁶²Do we need a nuclear power rethink?, *The Indian Express*, 18th May 2011

¹⁶³ Kudankulam Duty, *The Indian Express*, 21st September 2011

nobody's interest for this protest to develop into the sort of travelling-protest, anti-American, anti-globalization mela that attracts activists-errant from across the country.¹⁶⁴

It also pointed out how 'Nuclear energy, as was proven beyond doubt, during the endless discussions that marked the passage of the US-India civil nuclear cooperation agreement in 2008, is essential to India's future. It is a major component of the unavoidable diversification of our energy requirements,'¹⁶⁵ it stressed. It also urged that a negative feeling about nuclear energy must not be allowed to build up and therefore the central government must come up with an active leadership to allay fears.¹⁶⁶

The Indian Express, in October 2011, also reported news with the headline, Kudankulam: NPCIL sees foreign hand.¹⁶⁷ The report informs how the Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL) chief, S K Jain, sees foreign activist leading the anti-nuclear agitation in Kudankulam.¹⁶⁸ The report was entirely based on the NPCIL chief's interaction with the journalists on the sidelines of the foundation day celebrations of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in Mumbai. Even though the newspaper published the report of a foreign hand by quoting the NPCIL chief, the role of the media ought not to stop there. When the allegation comes from a person who is one of the important stake holders in the nuclear plant, the role of the media is also to investigate and refute claims if necessary. Mention may be made of similar allegations in the

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶⁶ The report stated: A negative feeling about nuclear energy, such as that surrounds land acquisition currently, cannot be allowed to build up. But in order to ensure that it does not do so, active leadership will be needed. Those living next to a nuclear plant need to feel assured that it is safe; safer, for example, than the Fukushima reactor, able to survive whatever the natural world might throw at it — as well as the malicious works of man.

¹⁶⁷ Kudankulam: NPCIL sees foreign hand, *The Indian Express*, 29 October 2011

¹⁶⁸ It stated: Foreign activists are playing a major role in the protests against the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu, which was scheduled to go critical in the next two months, Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL) chief S K Jain said on Friday.

Narmada Bachao Andolan, where the newspaper report, wherever they appeared, also published the version of the activists engaged in the protest.

The Hindu published articles which gave space to how the nuclear power plant poses real threats. A lead article on November 12th 2011, authored by two physicists, Suvrat Raju and M.V. Ramanna, titled, ‘Why Kudankulam is Untenable’, Brought to the fore how ‘atomic energy has failed to live up to its promise, and the idea that it is linked to progress and economic success is now both clichéd and historically inaccurate.’¹⁶⁹ The article pointed out how nuclear energy has promised to be producing more energy, has in fact, failed to materialize. It writes how the Department of Atomic Energy ‘projected 43,500 MW of nuclear generating capacity by 2000, whereas what materialised was a mere 2,720 MW. Last year, the contribution from Nuclear plants generated in the country was a mere 2.8 per cent.’¹⁷⁰ On the allegation of a ‘foreign hand’, it writes that it has to do with nuclear expansion and not the local protest that have come up in the plant site and also pointed out that the protest of the villagers and their concerns were ignored.¹⁷¹ Most importantly, it pointed out how the company, which is supplying reactors to be protected by a special inter-governmental agreement, has been allowed by the terms of the agreement to prevent the victims to sue the company in the event of an accident. It also pointed out how certain companies were withholding supplies to the

¹⁶⁹ Ravi, Suvrat, Kamath, M.V. Why Kudankulam is untenable, *The Hindu*, 12th November 2011

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*

¹⁷¹ It stated: So the “foreign hand” is partly behind the nuclear expansion, not the local protests that have sprung up at every site earmarked for a nuclear plant. The conspiracy theory being peddled by the NPCIL amounts to dismissing genuine local concerns out of hand. The end result of this policy is visible in Kudankulam. The villagers, who have been opposed to the project since the beginning, were ignored and ridiculed till they finally escalated their protest in desperation. The public money that has been spent on the Kudankulam plant is imperilled not by the intransigence of the local residents, but by the failure of the government to heed their concerns earlier.

Residents have a right to be worried. Nuclear accidents can have very destructive public health consequences. The impacts of Fukushima can be gauged only over the long term but are certain to be grave.

plant owing to even very mild liabilities on their part. It highlights how the concerns of the local people in the plant are genuine and busted the government's claim of cent percent safety.¹⁷²

The Hindu also highlighted how the allegation of foreign hand behind the protest in Kudankulam was an aberration and that the local concerns were predominantly behind the protest. In a report titled, 'In Kudankulam, a protest fuelled by local fears, not foreign hand', brings in the factors leading the community based on fishing and their fears and their observance of a relay hunger strike. It writes, 'the protesters, mainly fisher-folk, seem to be driven by a variety of concerns. Safety is one. Then there are fears that the reactor will adversely affect their livelihood.' The report was from the protest site where the voices of them were represented in the report. It stated:

"I am from a family of fishermen. We strongly feel that our livelihood would be affected adversely once the plant starts functioning," Rani said. Josephine, another Idinthakarai resident was furious when she heard that Mr. Kalam had declared that the project had all the required safety features. "Don't we have the right to demand that our livelihood should not get affected? What we are fighting for is a matter of life and death. We, the womenfolk of this coastal belt, are prepared to lose our husbands in this struggle. We will fight it out till the project is abandoned," she said.¹⁷³

The protest in Kudankulam again intensified in 2012 in the wake of nuclear fuel being loaded into the plant. Nupur Basu writes about how an aircraft flying very low, keeping a vigil on the people protesting against the nuclear plant.¹⁷⁴ She writes how the

¹⁷² The report stated: There is a very simple indirect test by means of which even a non-expert can evaluate the question of nuclear safety. If there was really a "0% chance" of an accident, why would nuclear vendors work so hard to indemnify themselves? Atomstroyeksport, the vendor of the Kudankulam plant is protected by a special intergovernmental agreement, which would prevent victims from suing it in the event of an accident. Companies like Westinghouse are holding back on reactor sales to India, since the new liability law includes some very mild liability for suppliers. When nuclear companies are unwilling to stake their financial health on these claims of "100% safety," how can the government ask local residents to risk their lives?

¹⁷³ In Kudankulam, a protest fuelled by local fears, not foreign hand', *The Hindu*, 11th November 2011

¹⁷⁴ Suddenly an aircraft which was keeping a vigil on the crowd reportedly swooped dangerously low. A frightened Sahayam lost his balance and fell on the rocks. On being rushed to hospital in Nagercoil, he was

regional media in Tamil Nadu missed the story and also that the death of one person due to police firing on 10th September 2012 went un-reported. Basu also pointed out how the media failed to ask a few basic questions, which ought to have been asked, on the death due to the extremely low flying aircraft killing a protester. The questions are:

The report should have raised questions regarding Sahayam's tragic death that was caused by a fall due the scare of a low-flying vigil aircraft. Why was the aircraft flying so low? Is this how the Indian state should be scaring its poor fishermen who are legitimately protesting against a nuclear power plants in the world's largest democracy--with technology from the sky?¹⁷⁵

The National press too reported the story of Sahayam as an instance of killing in police firing and reduced it to a mere incident of one person killed in police action. *The Time of India* on 11th September, 2012, reported how 'one person was killed in police firing in Tuticorin as anti-nuclear protesters turned violent on Sunday after police foiled their repeated attempts to lay siege to the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (KNPP) plant here against loading of uranium fuel.' The report also stated, how, 'The police action followed after authorities failed to persuade the protesters who, for the second day, defied prohibitory orders and stayed put at the seashore, about 500 metres away from the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant.'¹⁷⁶ *The Hindu* too reported the killing of one person in police firing as, 'Pitched battles at Kudankulam; one killed in Tuticorin police firing'. The report read: 'The hitherto-peaceful agitation against the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project in Tamil Nadu turned violent on Monday, with protesters attacking policemen,

declared dead from a head injury. Sahayam was father of four children, three daughters and a son. His wife now has four children to feed and educate, without a source of income on shore or at sea.cited from Basu, Nupur, Kudankulam's nuclear holy cow, The hoot. Retrieved from: <http://www.thehoot.org/media-watch/media-practice/kudankulam-s-nuclear-holy-cow-6375>

¹⁷⁵ ibid

¹⁷⁶ *The Times of India*, 11th September, 2012

and police resorting to lathi-charge and the firing of teargas shells.’¹⁷⁷ The reports missed how the aircraft was used to scare the protesters that day and due to which a life was lost.

The television channels also discussed about the nuclear plant and its safety. One such was a panel discussion in the wake of the protest in 2012 on NDTV, in its prime time.¹⁷⁸ The programme was meant to discuss the protest that day and the topic was ‘Are fears real or motivated’. One of the striking features of the debate was the selection of the members of the panel: Two lawyers of eminence -- Prashant Bhushan and Dushyant Dave -- along with two journalists, Krishna Prasad and Gnani Shankar along with the ruling Congress party spokesperson Manish Tiwari. The programme, even though, set out to discuss if the protests are real, it soon went into a debate as to whether the agitation was receiving foreign funds and also on the safety aspects of the project.

The Pricol Workers strike:

Pricol is an auto component manufacturer and is based in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The Coimbatore factory has two units, in places called Perianaickenpalayam and Malumichampatti. In 2007, the workers in the Pricol factory formed their independent union which the management refused to recognize. The management also transferred six of its employees to its Uttaranchal factory. The workers responded to this by way of a strike and the management reacted to it by ordering the dismissal of 64 of its workers and declared a partial lockout in its units. This led to the beginning of strike and protest in the Pricol factory there. The state government intervened in the matter, ‘ordering Pricol

¹⁷⁷ *The Hindu*, 11th September 2012

¹⁷⁸ Kudankulam protests: Are fears real or motivated?, NDTV, Published on 12 Sep 2012, retrieved from:

to lift the ‘partial lockout’ and asked workers to stop the strike till the dispute was heard in the industrial tribunal.’¹⁷⁹

The Pricol factory, prior to this, had five trade unions which ‘negotiated a 5-year wage settlement deal with management that included a wage increment of Rs 150 each year with the condition that the labour cost should not exceed 13.34% of the company’s costs, and if it did then the increment would be reduced to Rs 75.’

The grievances of the workers:

The workers in the Pricol factory had issues of wage increment and better working conditions. According to an article in the Wire, the wage level of a worker who had been in employment for 25 years in the factory stood at Rs. 8,522 per month in the year 2007. Apart from such low wages, the workers were subjected work pressure such as very short time for breaks. The severity of it can be gauged from the fact that, ‘workers claimed they had to keep their water bottles next to their feet so that they did not have to leave their workstation to drink water as the production demands were high.’¹⁸⁰ One of the other issues was that the 1000 vendors supplying auto parts to its factories and the workers were on contractual service. The state government of Tamil Nadu also intervened ‘in June and prohibited the firm from employing temporary workers in core operations and ordered it to hike wages, implicitly validating the demands of the workers’ in 2009’.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Dutta, Madhumita, A Factory Killing Verdict That Makes Little Sense, The wire, retrieved from: <https://thewire.in/17938/a-factory-killing-verdict-that-makes-little-sense/>

¹⁸⁰ ibid

¹⁸¹ ibid

From March 5th 2007, the workers in the Pricol plant at Coimbatore resorted to an indefinite hunger strike protesting against low wages, difficult working conditions, employment of temporary workers and apprentices and also seeking recognition of the Kovai Mavatta Pricol Thozhilar Sangam, a union affiliated to All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), linked with the CPI (ML-LIBERATION). This hunger strike was called off in May 2007 following the State Government's orders on 28th May 2007, under section 10 (b) of the Industrial Disputes Act, under which the state government agreed to hold talks on all the issues.

The workers, again in 2009, planned a strike again following dismissal some employees citing low productivity. This led to a renewed unrest in the Coimbatore plant where allegedly, the newly appointed Human Resource Manager of the company got killed in the Perianaickenpalayam unit; the murder was attributed to the workers on 21st February 2009 and it occurred on the shop floor. In December 2016, the session's court in Coimbatore sentenced eight autoworkers of Pricol Limited to a 'double life' term in prison. 'The two life sentences – one under IPC 302 (for murder) and another under IPC 449 (trespass in order to commit offense) came at the culmination of the trial which began in 2011',¹⁸²

The Newspaper reportage of the March 2007 strike and the killing of the HR personnel in September 2009

The Pricol workers strike during the period was covered by *The Hindu* since it began in 2007. Other newspapers such as *The Indian Express*, *The Times of India* and *The*

¹⁸² *ibid*

Economic Times reported the Pricol issue only in 2009, i. e. after the death of the Human Resource manager on the shop floor. *The Hindu* which is headquartered in Chennai gave coverage to the workers strike.

The Hindu reported the strike in Pricol since March 20th 2007. The report titled, Fast by Pricol workers, though very brief, informed as to how a ‘ section of workers of Pricol Limited who are on strike observed one-day fast on Monday. While the strike entered the 15th day on Monday, about 115 of the agitating workers, including women, observed fast. Their main demand is withdrawal of transfer orders on six employees of the company. Talks will be held on March 20 between the management and the workers in the presence of the Joint Commissioner of Labour.’¹⁸³ Again, on April 4th 2007, *The Hindu* reported on the picketing by the workers in pricol. It informed how the ‘Workers on strike at Pricol Limited here staged a picketing inside the campus and at the entrance of the company on Tuesday. Four striking women workers allegedly doused themselves with kerosene and threatened to commit suicide in a bid to resist arrest or eviction.’¹⁸⁴ The report then presented the police version where it informs how a mild lathicharge was used to clear the ‘the crowd of onlookers outside the factory premises and to ensure smooth flow of traffic.’¹⁸⁵ In yet another report titled, ‘Pricol Workers plea’¹⁸⁶, on April 6th 2007, *The Hindu* informed of the striking workers having sought government intervention under section 10 of the Industrial Disputes Act and fix the terms and conditions for both the parties. The report also published the statement of Kumaraswamy, State president of the All India Central Council of Trade Unions, condemning police

¹⁸³ Fast by Pricol Workers, *The Hindu*, 20th July 2007

¹⁸⁴ Picketing by Pricol workers, *The Hindu*, 4th April 2007

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*

¹⁸⁶ Pricol Workers plea, *The Hindu*, 6th April 2007

action on workers.¹⁸⁷ There was, however, no reportage on the police action against the workers.

The Hindu also wrote about the calling off of the strike on May 27th 2007 following the state government's intervention under section 10 (b) of the Industrial Disputes Act. The report briefly stated , 'Since, the order deals with almost all the demands of the workers it was decided to call off the strike, said S. Kumarasamy, the State President of the All India Central Council of Trade Unions.'¹⁸⁸

The reportage in *The Hindu* was mostly briefings on the protest. There was no in-depth reporting regarding the issues of the workers during the period of the strike in 2007.

The HR manager who died in a scuffle between the management and the workers on the shop floor was covered by most of the National newspapers. The death of the HR personnel drew attention of the press but the treatment of the story failed to bring in the systemic problem with the labour issues.

The Times of India, on 23rd September 2009, reported with the headline, 'Workers kill company VP in Coimbatore'. It stated, 'Labour unrest at Coimbatore-based auto instruments maker, Pricol, took an ugly turn on Tuesday with the company's vice-president (human resources) Roy J George succumbing to injuries he sustained after he

¹⁸⁷ Stated from the report: According to Kumaraswamy, State president of the All India Central Council of Trade Unions, the workers also condemned the police attack on April 3. The strike, which started on March 5, continued on Thursday. The Coimbatore District General Engineering Workers' Union, affiliated to the AITUC, has appealed to the State Government to order an impartial judicial inquiry into the labour unrest and the subsequent developments at Pricol on April 3. It demanded withdrawal of cases against the agitating workers.

¹⁸⁸ Pricol workers call off strike, *The Hindu*, 27th May 2007

was allegedly assaulted by a section of agitating workers.’¹⁸⁹ *The Indian Express* also reported the incident, where it informs that ‘A group of agitating workers of an auto parts manufacturing company in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu on Tuesday, lynched the Vice President (Human Resource) of the company to death. Six workers barged into Pricol Limited and attacked employees of the company’s human resource department including Vice-President Roy J George got badly hurt. George, 47, succumbed to serious head injuries in hospital.’ The report, without any representation of the workers or a brief background to the struggle, stated the management’s version where it stated, ‘In a statement, the company stated that its utilisation capacity was slipped to ten percent and some workers were not letting the others work. George was trying to initiate a dialogue with the agitating workers to bring the operations back on track.’¹⁹⁰ *The Hindustan Times* also reported the incident with the headline, ‘Coimbatore lynching: Centre seeks report into incident’. The report which is written with inputs from PTI informs about the Central government seeking a report ‘on the murder of Roy. J. George, a senior executive with auto-parts maker Pricol, near Coimbatore.’¹⁹¹ The report also featured how the workers attacked the executive following dismissal of 40 striking employees.

It stated:

Angered by the dismissal, more than 40 striking employees allegedly attacked George and three other executives with sticks and iron rods at the company’s Periyanaicenpalayam unit on Monday night, police said. Nine workers were arrested. Pricol supplies auto parts to car manufacturers including Ford India and General Motors India. It is also a vendor for domestic auto majors like Tata Motors and Maruti Udyog Ltd.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*

¹⁹⁰ Company official killed by sacked labourers in Coimbatore, *The Indian Express*, 23rd September 2009

¹⁹¹ Coimbatore lynching: Centre seeks report into incident, *The Hindustan Times*, 23rd September 2009

¹⁹² *ibid*.

The Economic Times also reported the incident with the title, ‘Pricol HR executive succumbs in labour strife’ without providing background information on the strike. The report also informed, ‘In a ghastly turn of events, a conflict between workers and management of Pricol, an auto components manufacturing company, in the city proved fatal. A senior company executive was allegedly killed in an attack by a section of the workers at its Periyanaickenpalayam unit here.’ It also informed how due to labour unrest, ‘the 614 company had announced shifting its production to its facilities in the north citing continued labour unrest at its Coimbatore plant.’¹⁹³

As it has been pointed out earlier, except *The Hindu*, other newspapers did not report the Workers strike from its start. The death of the Human Resource Manager got coverage in the other newspapers. It may be pointed out that *The Hindu* being a paper published from the south of India is a factor for reporting on the incident. However the fact that there were no editorial or op-ed articles on the issue was found even in *The Hindu* is indeed a comment by itself.

The Maruti Workers strike at Manesar 2011-2012

Maruti Suzuki's Manesar plant is situated in Gurgaon, which falls within the National Capital Region of Delhi. Maruti Suzuki India Limited is India's largest car-maker and it began production in 1983 in Gurgaon. The new plant at Manesar was set up in 2006. The workers in the Manesar plant agitated to form a union in order to press for better working conditions. The workers carried out a 13 day long strike from 4th to 17th of June 2011, at the plant against the management's decision to not allow the formation of the Maruti

¹⁹³ *ibid.*

Suzuki Employees' Union and against the existing trade unions in the plant. The Haryana government also rejected the demand on three grounds. The three reasons were 'One, the employees resorted to an illegal strike to meet the demand. Two, some of the signatories had a dual membership. Three, some of the signatures did not match with the registered workers' signatures.'¹⁹⁴ The strike saw the participation of more than 2000 workers but on 6th June the management sacked 11 office bearers of the Maruti Suzuki Employees' Union. The government of Haryana also declared the strike as illegal and 'issued prohibitory orders banning the strike, making it illegal. The government then referred the case to a labour court under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

The strike, however, was able to achieve a measure of success and a few of the demands of the striking workers were met initially. Jyotsna Singh and Sawney Nakul, in an article in the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) reported:

- (1) The 11 workers who had been fired were reinstated with on-job enquiry pending. Being leaders of the movement, their termination would have meant a major suppression of the movement.
- (2) Permanent workers on strike were to lose salary for the days of strike multiplied by two, amounting to a salary loss of 26 days. Contract workers and apprentices lost 13 days of pay. This would be kept on review for the next two months, to be revised in the event of any indiscipline. Earlier, the management had announced a pay cut equivalent to a multiple of eight of the striking days, a whopping 104 days of salary.
- (3) The agreement was signed by the labour commissioner and the leaders of the movement, who had been initially threatened with termination of services.
- (4) The company assured that no vindictive action will be taken against the striking workers¹⁹⁵

Following the agreement, the workers were reinstated but were soon subjected to suspension, charge sheets, warning letters and a round of victimization started. The union was not recognized by the management. On several grounds of sabotage in the factory, as many as 23 workers were dismissed and 26 workers were suspended. Highlighting the vindictive attitude of the management the EPW published an editorial wherein it held:

¹⁹⁴ Singh, Jyotsna, Sawney Nakul, Maruti Workers Speak about Their Strike, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 46, No. 33 (August 13-19, 2011)

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*

Then around the end of August the management alleged that some cars had been sabotaged by the workers. The workers themselves have stoutly denied this and pointed out that the entire factory floor as well other parts of the premises are covered by security cameras making it easy for the management to identify which worker has sabotaged the production process. No evidence has been given but the management has gone ahead and dismissed 23 workers and suspended another 26 at the time of writing; almost all of them being those who have been active in forming the union. Last week, workers coming for the morning shift found that a few hundred policemen had pitched tents inside the factory and the management asked each worker to sign a "good conduct" bond which required the workers to effectively deny themselves the right to form unions and raise their demands. (A recently retired secretary (labour) to the Government of India said last week that these bonds were illegal.) These and similar other illegal demands were rejected by the workers. Since they refused to sign the bond, the workers were denied entry into the factory. What is happening in Maruti's plant in Manesar right now appears to be an illegal and pre-planned lockout by the management.¹⁹⁶

The demand for a new and independent union emerged from several of the workers grievances related to the working conditions in the plant, hiring of temporary workers and low wages. The workers in the Manesar Plant of Maruti Suzuki were subjected to inhuman conditions like 'Workers are not allowed to drink water or urinate during work, and asked to postpone it till the tea and lunch breaks of seven and 30 minutes respectively. A long queue during breaks means less time for eating, drinking, and urinating.'¹⁹⁷ The workers in the plant used to get limited holidays. Since most of the workers in the plant were migrant labourers from different states of Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, the limited number of holidays left them with almost no occasion to meet their families. Moreover, in case the number of holidays when exceeded by the workers 'would cost them Rs 1,500/day, while five days would mean a loss of Rs 9,000. This penalty where the salary was a mere Rs 18,000 a month for a permanent worker'¹⁹⁸ rendered their conditions difficult. The demand for the workers right must be seen in the context of the economic growth in the liberalization period. In this case, the Haryana government had sided with the company management as was evident from the non-

¹⁹⁶ Workers' Struggle at Maruti, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 46, No. 37 (September 10-16, 2011)

¹⁹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*

recognition of union following the negotiations involving the company management and the agitating workers.

Then, on 18th July 2012, one of the agitating workers, Jiya Lal, had an argument with the floor supervisor leading to his suspension. A report in *The Wire* explains the events leading to the violence in which a General Manager named Awanish Kumar Dey got killed. The report stated:

While the management alleged that Jiya Lal had assaulted the supervisor, the workers on floor maintained that the supervisor had abused Jiya Lal with casteist slurs. The union began negotiating with the human resources team at the plant. It is alleged by the management and the investigation that when the negotiations broke down without a compromise, violence broke out with workers attacking the staff, including senior officials, with iron rods and other objects. The workers strongly object to this position and claim that a lot of private security was already present inside the premises and they instigated the violence. In the melee, fire broke out in the campus and gutted down a section of the factory. The General Manager (HR), Awanish Kumar Dey, lost his life and about 90 others were treated for minor injuries.¹⁹⁹

The ‘Gurgaon sessions court acquitted 117 workers of the workers who were charged of this murder and convicted 31 workers in the sensational Maruti Suzuki riots case; those convicted included all the main office bearers of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union.’²⁰⁰

The Maruti Strike happened at the National Capital region in 2011-2012. Most of the national media houses are based in New Delhi. It is pertinent to see how the media reported on the strike as it involved one of the biggest auto manufacturing companies in the country.

¹⁹⁹ Venkat T, Srividya Tadepalli, Thomas Manuel, *The Life of Labour: Maruti Suzuki Violence in Manesar – a Retrospective*, *The Wire*, 19/03/2017 retrieved from : <https://thewire.in/117439/maruti-suzuki-violence-judgement-case-details/> Date:18/12/2017

²⁰⁰ *ibid*

The reportage of the Maruti Manesar Strike in 2011-12

The strike between 4th and 17th June, 2011 was reported in *The Times of India* on 7th June 2011, with a report, ‘Car co’s chief hints at political conspiracy’²⁰¹ as its title. The report presented the Maruti Suzuki Chairman, R C Bhargava, where he sees a political conspiracy behind the strike.²⁰² The report also observed that, ‘The Gurgaon-Manesar belt—which was the cradle of the auto revolution in India—has seen some of the country’s worst labour troubles. Increasing trade union activities—many times blamed on the CPI-affiliated All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) —has made the area infamous for troubled management-labour relations.’²⁰³ Thereafter, the blame is put on the CPI backed AITUC, and the report mentions AITUC president of Gurgaon, supporting the cause of Maruti workers. But the report, without delving into any of the issues or demands of the workers, writes how labour trouble is a constant feature of that area. The report stated:

Suresh Gaur, the Gurgaon district president of AITUC, said the trade union body will “take up the cause” of Maruti’s striking workers. “Even though the unions at Maruti are independent, we have decided to take up their cause. AITUC believes in the welfare of workers and this is not liked by managements of companies.” Maruti, Hero Honda and Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) are present in the belt. Many component suppliers are also present there. However, labour troubles have been a constant feature in the area, forcing many companies to scout for alternate locations when expanding. Bhargava said the recurring labour troubles could affect future investment prospects in the region. “People have to understand that if the industry feels difficult to do business, then the losers will be the workers. The industry always has the option to move. But where will the workers move?”²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Car co’s chief hints at political conspiracy’, *The Times of India*, 7th June 2011

²⁰² Maruti Suzuki chairman R C Bhargava on Monday hinted at a political conspiracy behind the strike at the company’s Manesar plant. Bhargava, who has been associated with the car major right since its inception, said political parties—which want a foothold in Maruti—could be behind the agitation. Terming the strike as illegal, he claimed that it took place “without any notice or charter of demands”, and a month before union elections are due.

²⁰³ Car co’s chief hints at political conspiracy’, *The Times of India*, 7th June 2011

²⁰⁴ *ibid*

The Indian Express reported the strike on 5th June 2011, in the business page. It reported, 'The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India on Saturday said work at its Manesar plant was affected this afternoon when a section of workers went on a strike.'²⁰⁵ The report also had the workers version where the non-recognition of the newly formed union was not recognized by the management leading to the strike. It stated:

Sources among workers said the striking employees were demanding the recognition of a new union formed by those working at the Manesar plant in Haryana."There is an old union under the Maruti Suzuki Kamgar Union, which is mainly dominated by those working at Maruti's Gurgaon plant. We had formed a new body named Maruti Suzuki Employees Union, mainly by workers at the Manesar plant, and have been asking for recognition from the management," said a source. The management was not recognising the new body, the source claimed.²⁰⁶

The Indian Express also reported the sacking of 11 employees in the Manesar Plant. The source of the report is PTI. The report presented the statements of the company Chairman, R C Bhargava's statement, about how the services of 11 persons were terminated for reasons of inciting workers. It stated:

Car maker Maruti Suzuki India today sacked 11 workers employed at its Manesar facility, which has been crippled by a strike since Saturday."The services of 11 persons, who were inciting workers to go on an illegal strike and created an atmosphere where safety of people were in danger, have been terminated," Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) Chairman R C Bhargava said. He said the workers had gone on strike without any notice but added the management is continuing the dialogue with the striking workers.²⁰⁷

The report then analysed, from the company sources the loss that had been suffered by the company due to the strike and also the demands for the recognition of the new union.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Workers strike at Maruti's Manesar plant, *The Indian Express*, 5th June 2011

²⁰⁶ *ibid*

²⁰⁷ Maruti Suzuki sacks 11 striking workers, *The Indian Express*, 6th June 2011

²⁰⁸ The strike comes at a time when MSI has seen slowing down of sales in the recent past as the auto industry grapples to overcome challenges of rising fuel prices and interest rates. In May, MSI's domestic sales grew by just .9 per cent to 93,519 units from 90,041 units in May, 2010. On Saturday, about 2,000 workers employed at the plant struck work from the second shift of the day. Striking workers are demanding the recognition of a new union Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU) -- formed by those working at the Manesar plant, besides retaining contract labourers for the two upcoming new units inside the complex. Refraining from any disciplinary action against the 11 office bearers of the new union is another demand.

The Hindu published the same copy of news as the Indian Express, a PTI copy on 6th June 2011. It should be mentioned here that Manesar region falls within the National capital region of New Delhi and therefore if the media houses did not decide to send its own reporters to the site, it shows how the issues of workers interests are deemed little importance.

The Indian Express reportage during the strike focused more on how the strikes are leading to losses every day for the company. For example, the reports on 7th June 2011, about 'The strike by workers at the country's largest car maker Maruti Suzuki India's (MSI) Manesar plant entered its fourth day on Tuesday and production continued to be completely affected. "The situation is the same as yesterday," a company spokesperson said.'²⁰⁹ The report also featured how the strike was causing a loss to the 1,800 units and names of the various models of the cars rolled out from Maruti's stables were listed out. The report, however, had nothing to say on the concerns of the workers. The story did appear as an advertisement.

Around 2,000 workers at the plant had gone on strike since Saturday, resulting in a production loss of about 1,800 units till yesterday and the value of the loss is estimated to be around Rs 100 crore. The Manesar plant rolls out about 1,200 units every day in two shifts. The factory produces hatchbacks Swift and A-Star and sedans DZiRE and SX4.²¹⁰

Again, on 7th June 2011, *the Indian Express* reported how the strike would hurt the sales and also how the company is already making losses due to the strike. The report makes no mention of the workers' demands. The report quotes the Chairman of the company, and brings up the car models that the factory produces and the how the customers are waiting for the new models.

²⁰⁹ Strike at Maruti's Manesar plant enters 4th day, *The Indian Express*, 7th June 2011

²¹⁰ Ibid

The Manesar plant rolls out about 1,200 units every day in two shifts. The factory produces hatchbacks Swift and A-Star and sedans DZiRE and SX4. While diesel versions of Swift and DZiRE at present have an waiting period of 3-4 months, customers are waiting for up to one and half months to take the delivery of SX4. The A-Star is MSI's flagship export model. "Export is also likely to be impacted if the strike prolongs... The stalemate still continues," Bhargava said.²¹¹

The Hindustan Times also reported on the strike at Manesar. In a report published on 8th June 2011, the newspaper too published a PTI sourced news and informed about how the production has come to a halt in the Manesar plant. It then brought out the company's losses due to the strike and that 'The factory produces hatchbacks Swift and A-Star and sedans DZiRE and SX4.' *The Hindustan Times* also published another report highlighting the loss that company is facing due to the strike with a report titled, 'Maruti strike enters 4th day, revenue loss hits Rs. 100 cr'²¹²

The Times of India published a report titled, 'Gurgaon-Manesar belt hotbed of disputes' on 11th June 2011. The report brings out how the Gurgaon, Manesar is home to many auto factories and also a hot bed of disputes. The report, instead of delving on the issues leading to frequent strikes in the region, talks about how proximity to Delhi was a reason to the dispute. To quote:

Why is this happening? "It is proximity to Delhi. The political influence of workers by different parties has been quite high compared to other auto hubs in the west and south," said a Hero Honda veteran, no longer attached with the company. Since stakes are high and the companies are big, a foothold in them is an attractive proposition for central trade unions. CPI-backed All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is often blamed by many companies for disputes. "Agitations are affecting investments," say experts. Abhey Yograj, chairman of consultancy Tecnova India that advises companies on investments, said the belt has now lost its value due to the recurring strikes. "This is a very serious issue and is a discouraging factor for foreign investments," Yograj said. His company has advised companies like Michelin, Harley Davidson and Volkswagen. Another veteran, who once headed one of the belt's biggest companies, said, by targeting a company like

²¹¹ *ibid*

²¹² Maruti strike enters 4th day, revenue loss hits R100 cr, *The Hindustan Times*. The report stated: The workers strike at Maruti Suzuki India Ltd's Manesar factory entered its fourth day on Tuesday with no signs of a reconciliation as neither the workers nor the management are willing to back down. Around 600 workers struck work on Saturday afternoon demanding recognition of their newly formed union, Maruti Suzuki Employees Union. The company said it would not allow any other union besides the one it already has (Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union) though it indicated it was open to restructuring the same to cater to the needs of the workers at Manesar. Production remained crippled on both shifts on Tuesday.

Maruti and Hero Honda, unions get a wider impact. "So many companies are linked to them. If there is a strike in either of these companies, their suppliers are also instantly impacted and hit badly." He added that strikes are a frequent feature.²¹³

The report had no representation from the workers side. It also didn't focus on the issues leading to the strike, the working conditions in the factories. Instead, the report writes, 'The auto industry appears to be a favourite whipping boy for labour unions, as can be seen by numerous strikes at various companies.'²¹⁴

At this stage, the Haryana Government declared ban of the Maruti strike. *The Indian Express* writes, 'The Haryana government today passed prohibitory orders on the strike at Maruti Suzuki's Manesar facility, but unbending workers said they were prepared for "any action". Police swamped the plant, as the agitation threatened to spiral into other facilities in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt.' The report featured a statement by Arvind Kumar, organizing secretary of the Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU), on how the management is using repression like 'the campus canteen has been shut and supply to water coolers disconnected since Saturday, when the strike began, pushing workers to extreme hardship in the hot weather.' The report also gave space to the General Secretary of Honda Motorcycles and Scooters Employees Union where he termed the ban of strike as against the rights of the workers.²¹⁵ *The Hindustan Times* and *The Times of India* also reported the Haryana government's move to refer the case to labour court. *The Hindustan Times* reported that 'the Haryana government on Friday banned the ongoing strike at Maruti Suzuki India Limited's Manesar plant as the district

²¹³ Gurgaon-Manesar belt hotbed of disputes, *The Times of India*, 11th June 2011

²¹⁴ *ibid*

²¹⁵The report stated: "The government's order (banning the strike) is against the rights of the workers. The government and the company are in the Act together. We will support the strike and have given the management two days' time. A decision will be reached by tomorrow," Harjit Grover, general secretary of the Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India (HMSI) Employees Union, said.

administration issued prohibitory orders and moved additional forces to the factory premises.²¹⁶

The Hindustan Times and *The Indian Express* too reported the strike everyday informing about the day of the strike, and the reports from the strike informs about the production loss for the company. For example, on the 13th day of the strike, *The Indian Express* report writes,

The crippling strike at the country's largest car-maker Maruti Suzuki India's Manesar plant entered its 13th day on Thursday, with production completely shut down. In the morning, shares of Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) were trading 1.28 per cent down at Rs 1,195 apiece on the Bombay Stock Exchange. "The situation is the same as yesterday... There is no change," a company spokesperson said. The company has lost production of 11,400 units till yesterday, valued at about Rs 570 crore.²¹⁷

Similarly, the *Hindustan Times* report read:

The strike at Maruti Suzuki's plant in Manesar town of Haryana continued for the 13th day Thursday as talks between the workers and management failed to resolve the deadlock over the creation of a second workers' union. "Talks are on. We are engaged in constructive discussion with the workers. We have proposed certain new initiatives from our side which we expect should break the deadlock," a senior Maruti Suzuki official told IANS. The production halt at the Manesar plant has cost the automobile major a volume loss of around 12,600 cars, including 600 units on the first day of strike June 4, according to the official.²¹⁸

The television channels too reported the strike during the period. In a CNN-IBN news broadcasted on 14th June 2011, the 10th day of the strike, the focus was more on how the consumers of the Maruti car will now have a longer waiting period due to the strike. Like many of the newspaper reports, where the focus was on the car models which the factory produces, the news report on CNN-IBN too had visuals of the different car models from Maruti Suzuki, with the following voice over:

If you are waiting to buy the favourite Maruti car, you may have to wait a little longer. The waiting period for diesel models like the Swift hatchback desire, SX4, and Astar is normally 2 to 3

²¹⁶ Haryana bans Maruti strike, *The Hindustan Times*, 11th June 2011

²¹⁷ The Strike enters 12th day, *The Indian Express*, 16th June 2011,

²¹⁸ Day 13 of workers strike, *The Hindustan Times*, 16th June 2011

months. but now it may take longer due to the workers strike that had been on the last 10 days at the company's Manesar plant.²¹⁹

The correspondent went on to say that 'the pressure on Maruti India to deliver diesel cars has been further aggravated due to the strike for the past 10 days at this plant Manesar. Remember this plant alone delivers 1200 cars a day and that production has come to zero.'²²⁰ Then the reporter talks about the strike and the demand of the workers. The two demands, for which the strike was called, according to the reporter, are the 'recognition of the independent union for the Manesar plant and to reinstate 11 of the sacked workers.' The report stressed on the losses the company had to bear because of the strike. The report clearly shows how the losses to the company and the consumers' interest found precedence over the demands of the workers. The introduction and the end of the report that went on up to 1 minute and 40 seconds were on the consumer demands for various car models of the company and how the consumer is "suffering" for having to wait for a longer period. The workers' demands found only a cursory mention.

In a similar report, on the 12th day of the strike, NDTV Profit, reported the strike. The tagline was, Maruti strike enters 12th day, loss at Rs 340 cr. This report too started with how much loss was incurred by the company owing to the strike. The anchor at the desk begins by saying, 'the workers strike at Maruti Manesar plant is still on and production at the plant had come to a standstill.' 'Maruti admits', it said, 'that it suffered loss of Rs. 350 crores till date because of the strike.' Then the report informs how for 'the last 11 days the plant has not produced a single unit. Production of over 10,000 vehicles has been lost during the period and the company has lost nearly Rs. 340 crores of

²¹⁹ Strike at Maruti's Manesar plant enters day 10, CNNIBN Published on 14 Jun 2011, Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXzNAWUQAqE>

²²⁰ *ibid*

revenue. The workers, continue to stick to their stand, the maruti management and the labour department had a series of meeting to discuss options to end the end of working hours Tuesday, the stalemate continues.²²¹

The report informed about the Haryana government's request to stop the strike for a day and then about the Maruti management's offer to the workers, which include 1) that the 11 sacked workers to face disciplinary action and if they are exonerated, they can be reinstated. 2) that three days' salary cut for everyday of the strike against the rule of eight days salary cut per day of strike. 3) That multiple unions shall not exist. The report then says, 'the strike has been called illegal, the big question will be whether the government will force the protesting workers out of the location even though they have been peaceful with their protest.'²²²

As it has already been mentioned, the strike came to an end on 17th June 2011 following an agreement with the workers. But following the strike the management dismissed 23 workers and 26 others were suspended following which the company asked the workers to sign a 'good conduct' bond in August 2011.

Newspapers like *The Times of India* reported how the, 'Production at Maruti Suzuki India's Manesar plant was completely affected on Monday, with the company preventing workers from entering the factory without signing a 'good conduct' bond following alleged "sabotage" resulting in quality issues that arose last week.' The report then focused on the loss of revenue for the company.²²³ *The Indian Express* also focussed

²²¹ Maruti strike enters 12th day, loss at Rs 340 cr, NDTV Profit Published on 15 Jun 2011, Accessed from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWtOOF7pUcg> Date: 19/12/2017

²²² ibid

²²³ Labour trouble again at Maruti's Manesar unit, *The Times of India*, 30th August 2011, the report stated: As per the estimates, the firm has suffered production loss of about 1,200 units, valued at around Rs 60 crore. Heavy security has been deployed at the plant as the company management decided to make the workers sign the bond after suspending 10 workers, while five were dismissed and another six trainees

on how the suspension of 16 permanent workers has led to a discontinuation of services and how it affected production.²²⁴ Similarly, *The Hindu* report also focused primarily on the same lines on how the company decided to ‘stop production at its Manesar (Gurgaon) plant till all the 950-odd regular workers signed a ‘good conduct’ bond in view quality issues in production. The report then brings in the management’s statement on how the company is facing losses due²²⁵ to the production issues arising out of the workers’ intransigence. The report stated:

MSIL officials said they had been facing serious production issues, including meeting targets and quality control in the past few weeks. On August 24, 1,230 cars were planned to be produced, but only 437 units were assembled. Out of which, just 96 cars could pass quality check. “The situation has reached to a stage where it was directly harming customers’ interest and trust. The management cannot allow workers sabotage production,” said a senior MSIL official. Heavy security has been deployed at the plant. Since the unrest began in June, MSIL has so far suspended 18 workers and dismissed five.²²⁶

The report then brings out how the workers ‘alleged that the management was taking the steps to take revenge for going into a 13-day strike in June this year demanding recognition of a new union — Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU) — at the plant that has a total of about 2,500 workers, of which 950 are regular employees.’

Meanwhile, the incident which received a lot of media attention happened on 18th July 2012; an argument between a set of workers and a floor supervisor, Jiya Lal led

were discontinued from services. “There was no production today because the workers were not allowed to enter the facility as they have refused to sign the bond,” a company spokesperson said. The shares of the company ended at Rs 1,080 apiece on BSE, down 0.02 per cent from the previous close. Alleging sabotage by some workers, the company management decided to enforce ‘Good Conduct Bond’ for workers, which seeks an assurance from the workers that they will not resort to go slow, sabotage to production or indulge in activities which would hamper the normal production in the plant.

²²⁴ Maruti suspends 16 permanent workers, *The Indian Express*, 30th August 2011, Maruti Suzuki India today said it has suspended 16 more permanent workers and discontinued the services of 12 trainees as the stand-off between the management and workers at its Manesar plant intensified, completely affecting production for the second day. “Production has not started yet, but there are indications that it will resume today with alternate arrangements like contract workers and hiring technicians,” a Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) spokesperson said.

²²⁵ Maruti stops production at Manesar plant, *The Hindu*, 30th August 2011

²²⁶ Ibid.

to the worker being suspended and violence subsequently ended in the death of a Human Resource Manager, Awanish Dey at the shop floor.

It must be stressed here that the death of the Human Resource Manager ought to have been probed by the law enforcing agencies; as for the media, its role ought to go beyond such probes and locate the event in its context and in perspective. In doing this, the media ought to delve into the reasons behind the discontent among the workers, where the power lies with the large corporations. It was also necessary for the media to delve into the structural problems that the workers are victims of. Apart from the formation of the trade unions, there were issues of working conditions, wage parity and victimization of the workers and none of these were highlighted.

The Hindu, seemed to have done this in some parts. A report titled ‘Violence at Maruti symptomatic of simmering worker discontent’, on 21st July 2012, tried to highlight the issues agitating the workers. The report started with how the plant of Maruti suffered a loss of \$500 million in terms of production due to the strike and then went on to delve into how the Union that was created failed to deliver. It stated:

If last summer’s agitation hinged on the need for a union to fight for better working conditions, this year, the conflict appears to be a rising frustration that the union, created at great personal cost to the workers, was failing to deliver.²²⁷

The Hindu published an editorial with the title, ‘Message from Manesar’²²⁸ on 23rd July 2012. The editorial pointed out that, ‘There can be no two ways of looking at the horrific violence unleashed by workers at the Manesar plant of Maruti Suzuki that resulted in the death of a manager of the company. It was ghastly and shocking and

²²⁷ Violence at Maruti symptomatic of simmering worker discontent, *The Hindu*, 21st July 2012

²²⁸ Message from Manesar, *The Hindu*, 23rd July 2012

deserves to be condemned in unequivocal terms.²²⁹ It further delved into the causes of the labour unrest earlier in the plant to say, ‘protests for more than four months last year, culminating in a 33-day lockout following a dispute over employment of contract labour, wages, the creation of a new union and speed-ups.’ The editorial also brought to the fore as to how workers are frustrated in the context of the consumer culture and the role of the multi-national companies discouraging unionization. It stated:

Across Indian industry, the traditional management-labour face-off has acquired a new edge in recent times as companies grappling with a complex business environment do their utmost to rein in costs, including wages. Workers have been frustrated and this has to be seen in the context of the consumer culture that has taken hold of the country. The attempt by some companies, especially multinationals, to discourage unionisation has added to the volatility of industrial relations, and their preferred tactic is to employ workers on contract so as to have a hold over them.²³⁰

The Indian Express reported the issue and focused more on the killing and presented the story based on sources from the Maruti group. It published three reports on the same day. In its front page, the report titled, ‘Maruti GM died in Manesar attack, tooth helps identify charred body’ talked about the violent death of the General Manager and the investigation being carried out by the police. It informed, ‘Police said they had registered a case of murder, rioting and arson among other charges, and arrested 99 people for the violence. Hundred company officials were injured and at least 50 vehicles damaged.’²³¹ Another report titled, ‘Maruti managers attacked with car parts’ dealt with how the workers turned violent on that day inside the plant. It reported the different versions of the Managerial staff about their ways of escaping violence. The third report, on the same day, with the title, ‘Maruti says attack was planned, police take 99 into

²²⁹ *ibid*

²³⁰ *ibid*

²³¹ Maruti GM died in Manesar attack, tooth helps identify charred body, *The Indian Express*, 20th July, 2012

custody', presented the allegations of the Maruti management verbatim declaring that the attack was planned. It stated:

Maruti Suzuki officials said the attack was planned. Virendra Prasad, a company official who suffered head injuries, said: "It all started with a worker punching a supervisor. Following this, the management decided to suspend the worker, but the union was adamant that the worker be taken back."²³²

The Times of India too reported the incident with the title, '1 killed as trouble re-erupts at Maruti plant in Manesar'. The report informed that 'at least one person died and around 40, including three Japanese executives, were injured as labour trouble erupted at Maruti Suzuki's plant. Production at the plant had to be stopped after workers went on a rampage and set fire to the company's office in Manesar, 15km from Guragon.'²³³ The report also wrote about the damage being done to the factory premises. Then it mentions about the factory producing Swift Desire car. It stated:

The Manesar plant, which produces Maruti's key Swift hatchback model, among others, was in the middle of severe labour disputes last year, leading to three crippling strikes as well as production losses running to over a thousand crore of rupees. The company, that had managed to find a settlement only towards the end of the year, was successful in moving out some of the labour elements that were leading the agitation as many of them resigned and moved out suddenly.²³⁴

The story presented the side of the management. No trade union leaders or the demands were presented in the news report. *The Times of India*, in its editorial page, wrote in the section of "Snap Judgement" about the Manesar incident. In the very brief editorial, on 21st July 2012, it wrote about improving industrial relations to restore investor's confidence. There was no mention of the labour issues. It stated:

The recent violence unleashed by workers of the Maruti factory at Manesar, which killed a senior management officer and seriously injured many others, needs to be strongly condemned. Such incidents deter investors and derail ongoing industrialisation efforts in the region. The Haryana government must ensure the offenders are punished. At the same time, proactive steps must be taken to improve industrial relations and restore investor confidence.²³⁵

²³² Maruti says attack was planned, police take 99 into custody', *The Indian Express*, 20th July, 2012

²³³ 1 killed as trouble re-erupts at Maruti plant in Manesar, *The Times of India*, 20th July 2012

²³⁴ *ibid*

²³⁵ Editorial, Snap Judgment, *The Times of India*, 21st July 2012

The Times of India on 23rd July published a report titled, ‘Naxalite hand in Maruti violence? Maoist Influence Over Trade Union Feared, Intelligence Agencies Begin Probe’. The report informs how ‘the bloody and systematic attack on the senior management at Maruti’s Manesar plant may have been the result of Naxal influence, according to sources within the government. Intelligence agencies have been asked to investigate whether Naxals are infiltrating trade unions in the Gurgaon- Manesar belt, which has witnessed serious labour trouble in the past few years, added the sources.’²³⁶ The report presented a version, where mere doubt is reported as an attempt to term the violence as an attempt by Naxal on account of the brutality of the killing. The report failed to address the series of events which led to the violence. The report cites sources, without clearly establishing their veracity given the intensity of the charge/conclusion, even though the Maruti officials or the police investigating the case had not made any statement over the issue. It states:

The sheer brutality of the attack at Maruti’s Manesar plant has not only shocked corporate veterans, but also sent alarm bells ringing within the government. A senior Maruti official died in the fire after both his legs were broken and more than 90 others were injured, many seriously. This appears to be much more than ordinary labour unrest or trade union activity, the sources said.

It is imperative to mention here that the role of the media is also to highlight the brutal killing of the General Manager by the workers but the responsibility of the media is also to highlight the other aspects that must have led to the violence. It also has to delve into the possible reasons for the outbreak of anger among the workers. The reports, instead, presented an image of a gun holding man and the communist symbol with the caption ‘spreading danger’ and is clearly an attempt to portray the dissenting workers as dangerous and is a distortion of dissent. *The Times of India* also published another report,

²³⁶ Naxalite hand in Maruti violence?, *The Times of India*, 23rd July 2012

unconnected with the Manesar incident, with the sub heading of ‘Farmers agitate over Haryana land acquisition.’ The report is about a farmer’s agitation against land acquisition and subsequent police firing.²³⁷ Placing these two reports adjacent to each other can be perceived as an attempt to put dissent in the same manner.

The Times of India also published an editorial on the 23rd of July 2012, with the title, ‘Barbaric violence’.²³⁸ The editorial starts with how ‘it’s a failure on the part of the workers’ union to allow it to get out of hand like this. There is evidence that the violence was pre-meditated. The full force of law should be brought to bear on its perpetrators.’ It then talked about the poor state of industrial relations that could hurt the state of Haryana, and even India’s status as an investment destination. West Bengal has been ruined by labour militancy; Haryana must take care not to follow suit. Companies have the option of shifting to more industry-friendly states, if not ship out of the country altogether.’ Without delving much into the labour issues, the editorial talked about ‘striking a balance between protection of labour rights and the needs of industry – in a fast integrating world which dictates that supply chains of major companies become more and more flexible in response to cyclical fluctuations in global demand – is imperative.’²³⁹

In the previous chapter, it was analysed how the press played an important role of highlighting the demands of the workers. The reportage of the period also saw, how the

²³⁷ The report stated: Haryana’s plan to set up a multi-modal logistics hub in Bawal as part of the ambitious Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) has kicked up a fresh storm. On Sunday, police fired at farmers protesting against the acquisition of 3,000 acres and around 20 persons including 10 policemen were injured. Protesters blocked the Delhi-Jaipur highway for almost eight hours from 1 pm to 9 pm and a portion of the highway was dug up by an earth mover causing massive traffic jam. Farmers called a truce after their leaders met administration and senior police officers late on Sunday evening. “The highway has been opened. The administration has agreed to release five farmers who have been arrested and chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda will meet them soon. The farmers have suspended the protest,” political analyst Yogendra Yadav, who mediated the meeting between the administration and farmers, told TOI.

²³⁸ Barbaric violence, *The Times of India*, 23rd July 2013

²³⁹ *ibid*

newspaper pages became a platform for both the government and the trade union leaders' opinions being simultaneously published together. The newspapers, then, also busted government's claims through their reportage and reported the incidents from the ground. Several newspaper reports were highlighted which published government claims as well as reports from the ground indicating the reality. In one instance, mention must be made of a cartoon by Laxman during the railway strike of 1974, in *The Times of India*, showing a couple reading a newspaper on the complete shutdown of the railway services in the country while the All India Radio (a government controlled media, which the strikers often referred it as All Indira Radio) in the background talking about how the strike is a failure. Here, the husband forbids his wife from switching off the radio, as it is nice to hear the commentary that trains are running even while in reality it was just the opposite. That was a striking contrast of the government owned media and the independent press in India. In many ways, the press exposed the persistent propaganda of the government. Newspapers also attacked the propaganda machine of the government.

In another instance, a similar cartoon (See appendix) with Smt. Indira Gandhi speaking to the mic in All India Radio, with the caption All Indira Radio, suggesting the nature of the government owned media was published in the paper. Similarly, the government's decision to arrest the Railway trade union leaders as a preventive measure was criticized by all the newspapers taken up for this study. *The Economic Times* editorial went further to add that even if the government manages to stop the strike, the strike would be a hollowed victory. It stated 'confident that it can break the strike, the government seems to give the unfortunate impression of wanting to bend the strikers to

their knees as well. This would be a hollowed victory.’²⁴⁰ ‘The very fact that the strike was notified and the negotiations were under way and it was then the Government swooped into the union leaders. These ill-timed arrests are responsible for the breakdown of talks’.²⁴¹

In case of the railway strike, the editorials in most of the newspapers highlighted how the government used its repressive powers and stalled the democratic process of negotiations. The Bombay textile workers strike, which lasted for more than a year, was also covered by the press with empathy towards the striking workers and highlighting the plight of the workers owing to the prolonged strike. Newspapers like *The Economic Times* highlighted the plight of the workers and provided space for both the workers and mill owners to present their views. Similarly, the firing on the mine workers at Rajhara in Madhya Pradesh in 1977 was covered by *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*. Mention may be made of the editorial in *The Indian Express* where; the government’s attempt to brush aside Shankar Guha Niyogi was criticized as an attempt to muzzle dissent. Referring to the government’s high handedness it wrote:

Trained in the exercise of absolute power, the organs of the administration probably do not know how to act otherwise. The bogey of “violence” and dubbing any one raising a voice of protest as a “naxalite” are usually convenient alibi.²⁴²

In the liberalization phase, it can be said how the media focused more on the cost and benefit analysis of a protest. As it has been mentioned in case of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the reporting in *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* in the initial years, i.e. in 1989, the reports highlighted the protest and the issues and problems of displacements along with the protest against big dams. However, in the wake of

²⁴⁰ *The Economic Times*, 15th May 1974

²⁴¹ *ibid*

²⁴² Police Firing, *The Indian Express*, 6th June 1977

liberalization, especially after the Supreme Court's final judgment in the Sardar Sarovar Project in 2000, the focus was on the need for more electricity and irrigation projects for the 'emerging economy', the media too gradually focused more on compensation and highlighted the benefits from the projects for the economy. In Singur and in the Nandigram protests, also the media portrayed the protest as a political fight between the ruling and the opposition party. It has also been analyzed how the media projected the interest of the private company Tata as the interest of West Bengal. In the Kudankulam anti nuclear power protests too, it has been analyzed how media highlighted the protest in the wake of a cost benefit analysis. The attempt to project the protest as being foreign funded was reported and except *The Hindu*, other newspapers did not probe further. In the same context, the television channels and their discussion also engage in panel discussion where the panelist belong to political parties or well known personalities rather than the people on whose behalf, the discussion is conducted.

The Maruti workers and the Pricol workers strike were manifestation of labour disputes arising out of the right to form union for collective bargaining of the demands and rights of the workers. Both the incident involved corporate interest and the interest of the workers. The media coverage of the Pricol workers strike was very less in the print media and only gets coverage over the death of the HR manager in 2009. The strike in Manesar gets covered where as it has been pointed out in the newspaper reports, how the reportage in most of the national newspapers revolved around the losses the company incurred during the strike period. The newspaper reports also highlighted how car consumers are facing inconvenience over delay in supply of the car. It can also be observed how the protests were seen as a result of naxal influence over the workers rather

than addressing the systemic flaws in the working the modern factories owned by corporate groups. *The Hindu* however focused on workers demand, in case of the Manesar strike and subsequently the death of the Manager was put in the context of growing frustration among the workers.

Thus it can be observed how the privately owned press highlighted the issues and concerns of the workers in the pre-liberalized era. The same press focused more on the interest of economy and private interest is presented as interest of the people.

The next chapter will try to analyse the distortion of dissent by the media. It will be analysed in the context of liberalization, if the media conforms to the interest of the corporate system that sustain it by providing it with revenues. It will largely draw from the movements discussed in this chapter to explain the context in which media distorts dissent.

Chapter 4

Distorting Dissent

The Right to Dissent, indeed, is integral to a democracy. Free expression of ideas, even where it is against the ruling ideas, is hence crucial in the formation of public opinion on various social, economic and political matters. The democratic experiment in India rooted in the history of the anti-colonial struggle is steeped in the tradition of dissent by the Indian people against the foreign rulers. We have discussed, in Chapter 1, how the press played an important role in proliferating the nationalist sentiments of the Indian people. The press exposed the discrimination and exploitation by the foreign rulers. The press became a tool for expressing dissent and at the same time highlighted the social evils that engulfed the Indian society at that time.

The making of the independent Indian state, thus, was guided by the constitutional scheme wherein Article 19 (1) (a) in particular and the rest of Part III of the Constitution in general rendering dissent and equality as Fundamental Rights of the people. It is also important to note that the Constitutional scheme envisaged a harmonious construction of the Fundamental Rights with the Directive Principles of State Policy (enlisted in Part IV of the Constitution), an idea that was stressed by the higher judiciary over the years since November 26, 1949. Again, in Chapter 1, we have discussed how article 19 1(a) safeguards the right of the citizens to express themselves but subject to 19 (2), which allows for reasonable restrictions to be imposed on all fundamental rights, including that of freedom to speech and expression.

The judiciary in India has upheld these restrictions that can be imposed but the courts have also held that the government's interference against the right to free expression is also subject to constant scrutiny.

In independent India, the Supreme Court has upheld the right of citizens to have dissenting views. It has thwarted the State's attempt at muzzling dissent in the name of reasonable restrictions; the most important of such interventions being the restrictions imposed by the Supreme Court on the scope of Section 124 A(Sedition) of the Indian Penal Code, a draconian legislation that was an arm of the colonial rulers against free expression by the nationalists.

Mention may be made of *Kedar Nath Singh Vs the State of Bihar*¹ in 1962 where Kedar Nath Singh was accused of sedition under section 124 of IPC.² The Supreme Court argued that, 'disloyalty to Government established by law is not the same thing as commenting in strong terms upon the measures or acts of Government, or its agencies, so as to ameliorate the condition of the people or to secure the cancellation or alteration of those acts or measures by lawful means, that is to say, without exciting those feelings of enmity and disloyalty which imply excitement to public disorder or the use of violence.'³

The judgment made a clear distinction between disloyalty to the government and

¹ Kedar Nath, who was a member of the Forward Communist Party in Bihar, who accused the Congress of corruption, black-marketing and tyranny and targeted Vinobha Bhave's attempts to redistribute land. He also talked about a revolution that would overthrow capitalists, zamindars and Congress leaders.

² Section 124, Sedition, of the IPC states: Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law in [India], shall be punished with 104 [imprisonment for life], to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine.

³ 1962 AIR 955 1962 SCR Supl. (2) 769 Accessed from: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/111867/> date: 15/12/2017

commenting against the measures of the government without inciting public disorder by acts of violence. To quote from the judgment:

That the security of the State, which depends upon the maintenance of law and order is the very basic consideration upon which legislation, with a view to punishing offences against the State, is undertaken. Such legislation has, on the one hand, fully to protect and guarantee the freedom of speech and expression, which is the *sine quo non* of a democratic form of Government that our Constitution has established. This Court, as the custodian and guarantor of the fundamental rights of the citizens, has the duty cast upon it of striking down any law which unduly restricts the freedom of speech and expression with which we are concerned in this case. But the freedom has to be guarded against becoming a licence for vilification and condemnation of the Government established by law, in words which incite violence or have the tendency to create public disorder. A citizen has a right to say or write whatever he likes about the Government, or its measures, by way of criticism or comment, so long as he does not incite people to violence against the Government established by law or with the intention of creating public disorder. The Court, has, therefore, the duty cast upon it of drawing a clear line of demarcation between the ambit of a citizen's fundamental right guaranteed under Art.19(1)(a) of the Constitution and the power of the legislature to impose reasonable restrictions on that guaranteed right in the interest of, inter alia, security of the State and public order.⁴

In another judgment in the same area of law, the Supreme Court, in 1989, involving a film *Ore Oru Gramathile* which dealt with the issue of reservation, underscored the right to dissent in a far more forthright manner and even where the dissent was against the policy directions of the state. This was a case involving a challenge against the screening of a Tamil feature film, though approved by the Central Board of Film Censors (CBFC) with a “U” certificate (meaning Universal viewing), before the Madras High Court, on grounds that the ‘reservation policy of the government has been projected in a biased manner’⁵ and ‘that the film would create law and order problem in Tamil Nadu.’⁶ The Madras High Court, in this case, ordered revocation of the CBFC certificate.

However, on appeal, the Supreme Court held that, ‘In democracy it is not necessary that everyone should sing the same song. Freedom of expression is the rule and

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ 1989 SCR (2) 204 1989 SCC (2) 574 Accessed from: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/341773/> Date: 18/12/2017

⁶ *ibid*

it is generally taken for granted. Everyone has a fundamental right to form his own opinion on any issue of general concern. He can form and inform by any legitimate means.⁷ The judgment also argued that except under Article 19(2), there is no way that such freedom can be denied and most importantly freedom of expression is a liberty that is guaranteed against the state. It stated:

If the film is unobjectionable and cannot constitutionally be restricted under Article 19(2), freedom of expression cannot be suppressed on account of threat of demonstration and processions or threats of violence. That would tantamount to negation of the rule of law and surrender to black mail and intimidation. It is the duty of the State to protect the freedom of expression since it is a liberty guaranteed against the State. The State cannot plead its inability to handle the hostile audience problem. It is its obligatory duty to prevent it and protect the freedom of expression.⁸

In both these cases, we see the state tried to curb the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression and the judiciary upholding the right of the citizens to have contrary views and even in a sense recognized the right to hold contrarian views against the state. Therefore, it can be argued that the Indian democratic system allows non-violent dissenting voices which also accords legitimacy to democracy in India. It is, in this context, this chapter will analyse if the media had played its role that is expected in a democracy. The role of the media in a democracy is that it 'should be the voice of the people, representing to authority the citizenry's views and expressing the agreed aims of the society. In short, the primary democratic tasks of the media are to inform, scrutinize, debate and represent.'⁹ It is of as much importance, in this context, that the independent press, a legacy of the long drawn freedom struggle, was inherited in the post independence period too and the legatee in this regard happened to be the media that was essentially owned by private businessmen and industrialists. In other words, the matrix of

⁷ ibid

⁸ ibid

⁹ Curran, James, What Democracy Requires of the Media, in *The Press*, Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson(Eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005),p.120

freedom and private ownership of the media went side by side; the state-owned media, on the contrary was not all that free even while under a state led by those who fought for freedom.

It calls for mention here that the Nehruvian state too sought to control the press through various ways. Newsprint control was one of the means to unfreedom of the press and the newspapers had to constantly fight against the government on this field. The government controlled the import of newsprint, which was among the commodities that was entirely bought from abroad at the time of independence, under the Import Control Order of 1955.¹⁰ The aim of the government was to nurture smaller newspapers, when it brought in the Daily Newspaper (Price and Page) order 1960, and based on the recommendations of the First Press Commission; this order, however, was challenged by the Marathi newspaper *Sakal* and the Supreme Court struck down the order as discussed in Chapter 1, thus elongating the scope of Article 19(1) (a) with specific reference to the press. Yet another example of this kind was the challenge by Bennet Coleman (The Times of India group) against The Newsprint Policy of 1972-73, which devised a quota system of newsprint based on circulation figures. In both the cases, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the newspaper and expanded the scope of press freedom in India (these cases have been discussed in detail in Chapter 1). There were also other controls such as problems in importing print technology.

Another experience of restrictions on press freedom was during the internal Emergency of 1975-77 and this belongs to another league, altogether.

¹⁰ The import of newsprint was regulated by Import Control order, 1955, issued under the Imports and Exports Control Order Act 1947. Restrictions were placed on acquisition, sale and consumption of newsprint within the country regulated by the Central Government under Newsprint Control India 1962, promulgated under the Essential Commodities Act 1955.

The control mechanism through government's hold on import of newsprint or rationing this ingredient was rendered things of the past with the economic liberalization in India.¹¹ The press became free from the controls of the government.

This Chapter will attempt to see how the media represented dissent in the wake of neo-liberalism, when there is a change in the priorities on the part of the state vis-à-vis the economy. The Chapter is divided into two sections. Section one delves into the paradigm shift in the economy owing to the neoliberal reforms in the early 1990s. The second section will highlight how the media distorted dissent with the newspaper reportage of the case studies taken up for the study.

The Paradigm Shift in the Economic Policy since the 1990s

In Chapter 1, we have discussed the break with the Nehruvian 'protection' economy and its implications in the various walks of every-day life of the people. We have also discussed how the state, in the wake of neoliberalism, sought to restructure the polity to suit the needs of global finance capital. Such a shift brought in a system where a democratically elected government becomes a custodian to ensure the free market rather than formulate its policies to safeguard the interests of the people who elected them. Free market capitalism means less intervention by the government in the market. But it does not mean the government has no role to play in the economy. The role of the state gets altered where it facilitates the processes in the economy and maintains market relations and market exchange. C. P. Chandrashekhar, an economist, writes that the neo-liberal

¹¹ Under the liberalization policy of the Government, newsprint was put under Open General License (OGL). This made Standard and glazed newsprint freely importable to the registered newspapers. The order remained in force during 1995 and 1996. Thereafter in the changing scenario of liberalized economy, a new policy was introduced by Ministry of Commerce which states that import shall be permitted without an import license. Cited from: A BRIEF HISTORY AND FUNCTIONING OF THE RNI OFFICE, The Press In India 2014-15, Register of Newspapers in India.

philosophy ‘seeks to legitimize itself by packaging its ideology with new views of justice, new ways to define development and new policies to give development a human face.’ In his view, neoliberal policies are presented as unavoidable if the growth that generates surpluses to distribute is to be achieved; but distribution itself, it is argued, must be dealt with independent of growth. In the process, government interventions and planning in favour of the majority is reduced to the implementation of a few programmes aimed at making market determined strategy more inclusive.’¹²

He, therefore, argues how larger development planning agenda has been undermined. One of the assumptions on which neoliberalism rests is also that there is no alternative to the status quo and that humanity has reached its end. Incidentally the period when India decided to liberalize its economy, the idea of the “end of history”¹³ emerged; this suggests that there can be no superior alternative to the status quo and that the idea of liberal democracy has emerged. Francis Fukuyama in his 1989 essay, *The End of History*, argued how the liberal democracy would actually mean ‘no to an “end of ideology” or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.’¹⁴ The essay, written before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, provided for a world view where, ‘Everything seemed to suggest that only liberal capitalist democracy allowed people to

¹² Chandrashekhar, C.P., *Development Planning*, in *Handbook of Alternative Theories of Economic Development*, eds. Erik S. Reinert, Jayati Ghosh, Rainer Kattel, (USA: Edward Elgar Publication, 2016) , p.531

¹³ An idea developed by Francis Fukuyama in an essay called “end of History” published in 1989. In the essay he writes about the period as, “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”

¹⁴ Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History*, *The National Interest*, 1989, p.1. It may be noted that Fukuyama expanded this argument into a book, with the same title a few years later.

thrive in an increasingly globalized world, and that only the steady advance of laissez-faire economics would guarantee a future of free, democratic states, untroubled by want and oppression and living in peace and contentment.¹⁵

It was in the same context that Thomas Friedman, a proponent of neoliberalism, propounded the idea of a flat world, in a book titled *The World is Flat* at about the same time. Friedman tries to explain the emergence of the new economic order where the world has been leveled by globalization in the new form in the 21st century. He uses the metaphor of the world turning flat, meaning, in this new economic system of commerce, wherein all competitors have equal opportunities. He described the post cold war period, following the fall of Berlin Wall and the collapse of Soviet Union as:

If I am right about the flattening of the world, it will be remembered as one of those fundamental changes-like the rise of the nation-state or the Industrial Revolution-each of which, in its day, noted Rothkopf, produced changes in the role of individuals, the role and form of governments, the way we innovated, the way we conducted business, the role of women, the way we fought wars, the way we educated ourselves, the way religion responded, the way art was expressed, the way science and research were conducted, not to mention the political labels we assigned to ourselves and to our opponents.¹⁶

The Economic liberalization in the early 1990s brought in economic and political changes which began to materially and discursively construct a “new India”. Rupal Oza writes that the changes have also meant that the country shed its image of a complicated bureaucracy and project itself as a fresh beginning. The political and the economic changes ‘forced the country to shed its image of a cumbersome bureaucracy of the “license-permit-raj” in favour of a vibrant new economy that welcomed foreign

¹⁵ Stanley, Timothy, Lee Alaxender, It's Still Not the End of History, The Atlantic, (September 2014), Accessed from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/09/its-still-not-the-end-of-history-francis-fukuyama/379394/> Date: 18/12/2017

¹⁶ Friedman, Thomas, *The World Is Flat 3.0* (New York: Picador, 2007), p.49

investment.’¹⁷ The economic reforms of 1991 hold significance in the shift away from the Nehruvian ‘protection’ economy to a capitalist economy.

One of the important changes in the post-liberalization period was the economy getting dominated by private capital, both domestic as well as foreign. The politicians also altered their relations with private capital. Atul Kohli writes, ‘the most important lesson for India’s politicians has been that, if they want to promote economic growth, they cannot afford to go against the interest of private capital. The private capital is now the main motor of capital accumulation.’¹⁸ Therefore, he stressed, the state needs to ensure conditions for the smooth functioning of the society. In the liberalized economy, the power of the business groups also operates at different levels. At one level, the decision makers have to take into account, the business preferences of the private business groups.

To bring in Atul Kohli again, ‘this is because the performance of the economy is an important determinant of the legitimacy of any set of rulers.’¹⁹ The impact of this, according to him, can also be found in the change of social and political values. The dominance of the market can be seen as an emerging tendency. The dominance of such an ideology may not be uniform but its presence can be felt, when, apart from the other political parties, the Indian communist parties, particularly in West Bengal can be seen courting capital to facilitate growth if we take examples of Singur and in Nandigram.

Prabhat Patnaik, in a similar manner, terms the advent of neoliberal policies wherein the state adopts only such measures as finance desires that promotes its interests,

¹⁷ Oza, Rupal, *The Making of Neoliberal India: Nationalism, Gender, and the Paradoxes of Globalization*, (USA: Taylor and Francis group, 2006), p.11

¹⁸ Kohli, Atul, *Poverty Amid Plenty in New India*, (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.19 (Kindle Version)

¹⁹ *ibid*

as a negation of democracy. He explains, how in neoliberalism, a paradigm shift can be observed where irrespective of different political parties, there is the dominance of finance capital. To quote:

In a democracy the state is supposed to pursue policies that benefit the people, who are sovereign and on the basis of whose electoral verdict the government is formed. But if the government elected by the people must follow policies that are not in the interests of the people but in the interests of finance capital, then we have a negation of democracy. What is more, as long as the economy remains open to capital flows, that is, committed to the neoliberal paradigm, no matter who comes to power, the same policies must be followed to prevent a capital flight and to keep the economy solvent. Hence, when it comes to economic policies that crucially affect their lives, the people's choice in elections becomes irrelevant, for no matter who they vote for, they get the same policies, whose essence is to keep finance capital happy.²⁰

In the previous chapter (Chapter 3), we have analyzed the peoples' struggles on the issues of displacement induced by "development projects" in the case of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the struggles in Singur and Nandigram and the Kudankulam Nuclear Power project and labour struggles in the Pricol factory and in the Maruti Factory at Manesar. In the struggles against development induced displacement, it can be seen that the approach of the state is marked by thinking that legitimating the development model with the argument that it ultimately benefits the market and thus the people. The state can be seen as a facilitator in the process of furthering the interest of the market. The chief concern of this thesis is on the influence of the paradigm shift from a Nehruvian economy to a neoliberal economy on the media. We have seen in chapters 2 and 3 as to how the media reported the various struggles of the people in the pre and the post liberalized India. In Chapter 2, we have seen that the media played a positive role in highlighting the various issues of the workers. The media, however, in the post liberalization phase represented the movements with a different approach and presented the struggles on the

²⁰ Patnaik Prabhat, Ways of neoliberalism, Frontline, Volume 29 - Issue 25 :: Dec. 15-28, 2012, Accessed from: <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2925/stories/20121228292501000.htm> Date: 18/12/2017

basis of benefits to the market. It will be erroneous to attribute this shift to mere profit driven motives of the media; the legacy of a free press, after all, belonged to the private media houses in India both before and after independence.

The nuances, however, may be nearer to what Sukumar Muralidharan writes: ‘The quarter century beginning 1991, when India entered into a policy of economic liberalisation and integration with the global economy, generated its own dynamics in terms of the journalistic function.’²¹ These dynamics include the change in technologies which brought in the Television, with the advent cable and satellite, along with digital technology such as the internet. The changes ‘were accompanied by the removal of restrictions on unfair competition in the media industry and disappearance of all social controls.’²² In the wake of neo-liberal reforms, the idea of a journalism that ‘they (journalism) had the public pulse and were professionally committed to giving a voice to all – was no longer sustainable in the context of the strong assertion of ownership rights over the press.’²³

The next section therefore seeks to delve into how the media represents the peoples’ struggle for land, and labour rights when neo-liberalism became the reigning ethos of policy. The newspaper and television reports of the struggles, taken as case studies, are used to highlight how the media conforms to the demands of the market and if it becomes a voice of the market. It will also be analysed if, in the process of media representation, the dissent is being distorted.

²¹ Muralidharan, Sukumar, The Business of News, Himal South Asian, October 2016, Accessed from: <http://himalmag.com/the-business-of-news-sukumar-muralidharan/> Date: 18/12/2017

²² ibid

²³ ibid

Distorting Dissent and Manufacturing Consent

In this section an analysis of the news reports from newspapers and television stories, done hitherto and in Chapter 3 in particular, will be used to prove that the media subscribed to a particular view of development where development meant exclusively the model based rooted in the neoliberal principles which can be defined as a political ideology that adopts a free market in a deregulated political system (discussed in Chapter 1). The case studies that will be discussed in this part are the dams across the Narmada, the Kudankulam Nuclear power project, the land acquisition in Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal to establish how the media negotiates between peoples struggle and the demands of the market, condemning the former and celebrating the inevitability of the latter.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan is perhaps one of the longest peoples' movements which began in the late 1980s and the struggle for compensation and rehabilitation is still continuing. The newspaper reports from *The Hindu* has already been analysed in Chapter 3 to see how the protest was represented over a period of time and marked by changes between the pre liberalization and the liberalization period. The news reports from September 1989, particularly the earliest rally in Harsud, clearly suggest the paradigm set by the media: The very first paragraph of the news story that the 'At a rally against the "development policies" of the Government the pledge was administered by Baba Amte. The Government was asked to alter its development policies radically or else face the peoples' wrath.'²⁴ It also writes, 'In what is probably the biggest ever rally organised by environmentalists and political activists against the development policy, the message to

²⁴ Hands of Villages, says rallyist, *The Hindu*, 29th September, 1989

the Government was clear — people will no longer accept projects that upset their life system unthinkingly.’

The report, apart from explaining the nature of protest, also dedicated a small segment titled, ‘Development projects opposed’ where it further clarifies what development that the rally seems to have targeted. The report quotes the speeches made at the rally, where it further clarifies that the rally is a collective opposition to development projects where only the privileged are mainly benefitted while the poor are dispossessed.²⁵ It writes, ‘it has been seen in such projects, that the actual gain falls short of the projected estimate and the promised deliverance from social injustice and economic inequality has rarely materialised.’

It is clearly evident that the news report, apart from informing about the rally in Harsud, which indeed was the event reported, also explained in detail that principal opposition is not only to the Sardar Sarovar dam but also the overall development model. *The Times of India*, while reporting on the Harsud rally, also highlighted how the project would affect the people and argued that, ‘It is also a well known fact that the track records of the state governments of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh do not inspire any confidence. In the past, it has been proved beyond doubt that the displaced families have always been worse off, as compared to their positions before the project.’²⁶

²⁵ The report stated: The rally asserted a "collective opposition to all developmental projects which cost far more than the benefit or which benefit mainly the privileged enjoyed at the cost of the poor and the dispossessed. Repeatedly it has been seen in such projects, that the actual gain falls short of the projected estimate and the promised deliverance from social injustice and economic inequality has rarely materialised." "Instead, they have degraded the environment destroyed peoples' livelihood and caused great social and cultural disruptions."

²⁶ WB to help Narmada oustess, *The Times of India*, 6th September 1989

It is also important to point out how the social activists, Medha Patkar and Baba Amte, were referred to as “social crusader(s)” in *The Hindu* reports,²⁷ which lends a positive image of the leaders. *The Hindu*, in another report on January 24th 1991, describes the fight of the Narmada Bachao Andolan as a struggle to defend the right to life. The report, by a special correspondent, writes, ‘In essence their struggle is their fight to defend their right to life instead of avoiding confrontation, the Government has been violating their fundamental rights, including their right to march in a peaceful protest. In Delhi, a number of people and organizations have been observing a relay hunger strike in sympathy with the seven persons on fast on the borders of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.’²⁸ The report, it can be said, as an instance where the dissent has been contextualized and explained how a particular model of development, which only benefits the affluent, is the target. The media here presents the larger picture of development which will help the reader to understand the issues involved in the protest.

It has been discussed in chapter 3 as to how the newspapers like *The Hindu* and *The Hindustan Times* focused on the plight of the people affected by the project following the Supreme Court order allowing increasing the height of the Dam. The editorial in *The Hindu*, following the Court order, is once again an instance of bringing into focus the contradiction between development and democracy. It stated:

The contradiction between democracy and development has once again reached a high point with the activists of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) embarking on a silent fast since July 4 at Domkhedi village in Maharashtra. Further plans to step up their campaign with a mass rally through the Narmada river valley in the last week of this month assume particular significance in the context of the next hearing of the NBA petition in the Supreme Court.²⁹

²⁷ See *The Hindu*, 28th September 1990.

²⁸ Baba Amte rejects Minister's invitation, reiterates demand, *The Hindu*, 25th January 1991

²⁹ Renewed Momentum on the Narmada, *The Hindu*, 21st June 1999

It also held that the NBA must engage itself with the immediate humanitarian grounds as it has been able to put the ‘development debate on the public agenda.’³⁰ In the previous chapter it has been pointed how the other newspapers like *The Times of India* and *The Economic Times* had also brought into focus the issues of rehabilitation and compensation. On the question of development, the newspapers argued how in the long run, everyone is benefited from such projects. *The Times of India* editorial ‘Dam and Blast’ on 2nd August 1999 argued that ‘the factors in favour of building the dam -- the very real water needs of the farmers of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan -- are largely accepted as outweighing the adverse effects, though technical specifications regarding the height and size of the dam could be reworked to overall advantage.’³¹

The Economic Times, a business paper, similarly in its editorial focused more on the benefits that big dams entail and that adequate compensation was an important part of it. It emphasized that how ultimately; such projects will bring benefits for all. It wrote, ‘it must be kept in mind that in addition to whatever direct compensation they are offered for being displaced, they would also ultimately benefit from the prosperity that such projects have historically bestowed upon entire regions.’³² The same editorial also argued to oppose such a project is “anti development” and suggested that matters should end with better compensation.

To quote from the same editorial:

³⁰ The editorial stated: It is the immediate humanitarian dimensions that must currently engage the NBA, which has effectively placed the development debate on the public agenda.

³¹ Dam and Blast, *The Times of India*, 2nd August 1999

³² Don’t Stop it, *The Economic Times*, 3rd August 1999

If, however, the agitators feel that the compensation being offered is inadequate, they must fight for a better package. However, to start from the assumption that nothing can compensate for displacement is to adopt an inherently anti-developmental posture.³³

In the previous chapter, we have pointed out, how following the Supreme Court judgment in October 2000, the editorials and news reports began to make cost benefit analysis of the Narmada project as the focus to conclude that the benefits of the dam exceeded than the cost.

The Singur agitation

The Singur agitation was about land acquisition for the Tata Nano Project. In 2006, protests erupted in Singur in West Bengal against the government's initial steps to acquire land for the private industrial project. In the previous chapter, it has been analysed how the protest was reported in the newspapers. The Singur agitation also brought into focus the question of development. The struggle in Singur can be seen as a struggle where the state, along with corporate interests lay on one side and the unwillingness of the farmers to part with their land on the other hand. The agitation was supported by the then leader of the opposition, Mamata Bannerjee. It has been discussed in Chapter 3, in detail, how the press presented it essentially as a dispute between the ruling Left front government and Mamata Bannerjee.

It has been pointed out as to how the newspapers presented dissenting farmers as the opposition's tool and as a fight between the ruling left front and the opposition party. This was clearly an instance of how the media distorts dissent by failing to adequately explain the meaning and context of the protest in Singur. One of the other ways in which the Singur protest was distorted was by focusing on the negative consequences of the

³³ *ibid*

protest. *The Telegraph*, for example, in its editorial on 6th June 2006, titled, Land Rites, enumerated how ‘Land being the most limited of economic resources, its most profitable use must be at the heart of all plans for economic development. Any opposition to the use of agricultural land for industrialization, therefore, is devoid of basic economic logic. It is also unfair to the farmers' own economic mobility,’ it stressed.³⁴

It went further and in its overwhelming support for the cause of ‘development’, dismissed even demands of employment for the project affected people. It emphasised the industry ministers’ contention and wrote, ‘Mr Nirupam Sen, is right in rejecting the demand that the people be given jobs in the industrial units which come up on their land. The jobs created in any such project obviously depend on the nature of the industry. Unfortunately, most of the dissenters over the Tata project are driven only by populist motives.’³⁵ The newspaper took a position speaking forthrightly on behalf of the interests of the private company rather than the people agitating against the dispossession of their land in Singur.

Other newspapers, including *The Times of India* too presented the struggle as a fight between the Trinamool Congress and the ruling Left front. For instance, 2nd June 2006, report stated: ‘Despite the West Bengal government’s assurance of compensation, hundreds of farmers backed by Trinamool Congress on Thursday gheraoed the BDO office against the acquisition of land for Tata’s Rs 1 lakh car project in Hoogly’s Singur

³⁴ Land Rites, *The Telegraph*, 6th June 2006

³⁵ *ibid*

area.³⁶ *The Economic Times*, also published by The Times of India group, Bennett Coleman and Co., in an editorial on December 2006 wrote:

The way Trinamool led the protest against the acquisition of farm land in Singur, West Bengal, for a Tata Small car factory have been unfolding, there is little doubt that the rucus, in part, is no more than a desperate bid by Mamata Banerjee to give her warring politics of lumpen kitsch a last shot in the arm. If the Assembly elections were anything to go by, such obstructionist politics had clearly lost its yen.³⁷

Similarly, *The Indian Express* heaped praise on the state government in being decisive in going forward with Singur project in spite of the protests. It wrote:

It is good that the state government has not balked at the challenge, and has chosen to go ahead with the project. Two aspects of the project hold significance for the local communities — the landholders who have sold their property as well as the residents of Singur curious about how the altered political economy would impact their lives. The effect could be far-reaching. The Singur project is, remember, not a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). But as the government grapples with the issues of SEZs — of rehabilitation, land acquisition and local interfaces — the experience at Singur will certainly be illuminating.³⁸

The perspective on development, insofar as the Indian Express was concerned gets further clarity when it writes:

A terrible injustice could be wrought by critics of such projects who seek to oppose by romanticising the toils of the marginal farmer. Making ends meet on such small tracts is a daily challenge, and the economy of small scales gives the farmer no buffer when drought or flood occurs. Taking industrialization and manufacturing to new venues could mean giving marginal farmers and landless labourers a way to get integrated into, and benefit from, mainstream economic activity.³⁹

The editorial takes a clear position where it opined what it considers to be “mainstream economic activity” while the farmers whose livelihood depended on the land and those espousing their causes are branded as “romanticizing the toils of the marginal farmer.’

³⁶ *The Times of India*, 2nd June 2006.

³⁷ The Singur Test, *The Economic Times*, 5th December 2006

³⁸ Singur Sez it, *The Indian Express*, 22nd January 2007

³⁹ *ibid*

Like the Narmada Bachao Andolan, where following the Supreme Court judgment in the year 2000, it had been pointed how the newspapers presented the dam as necessary for development and focused more on compensation, similar arguments were presented in case of Singur too. In a tone of advice to Mamata Bannerjee, *The Times of India's* editorial writes, 'The urban constituency after all is an important one for her. Most farmers in Singur whose land have been acquired -- nearly 10,000 of the total 12,500 -- have accepted the compensation paid to them. Bennerjee's stature would rise if she were to play a farsighted role in negotiating satisfactory compensation for all stakeholders, while removing road blocks to Bengal's industrial revival.'⁴⁰

Similarly, *The Hindustan Times* too in its reporting focused more on the importance of the project for industrialization. The headline on 6th September 2008, 'Everybody loses if Nano leaves Bengal' indicated how important the newspaper held the project.

The reportage following the Tatas' decision to leave Singur also indicated how the media presented how the politics of strike had led to huge losses of Bengal. *The Telegraph* also puts it in dramatic headline stating, 'Bullet into Bengal's soul- Mamata Bannerjee pulled the trigger'.⁴¹ Another attempt at distorting dissent in the Singur agitation was the also the attempt by a newspaper to present the protesters and their supporters by polarizing it as an attempt against development by left wing NGOs and Naxalites. Mention here should be made of the editorial in *The Economic Times* where it writes 'The farce is being played out now with Mamata Banerjee and a motley crew of

⁴⁰ Don't say no: Throwing out Nano would be a recipe for Bengal's stagnation, *The Times of India*, 25th August 2008

⁴¹ Bullet into Bengal's soul- Mamata Banerjee pulled the trigger, says Tata, *The Telegraph*, 4th October 2008

NGOs and Naxalites attempting to derail CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's dream project. There is a delicious irony in the Left's angry protestations about Mamata's anarchic politics, for she can justly claim to have learnt the techniques from observing the masters.'⁴²

It also wrote about the involvement of Medha Patkar in a derisive language: 'Medha Patkar, who has been reportedly trying to sneak into Singur, last in an auto-rickshaw, has been playing the role of her sidekick to perfection. It's not known why she has not tried the obvious burqa. And then there are "sinister elements", "Naxal-supported intellectuals", who are allegedly manipulating things from behind the scenes.'⁴³ The language in the editorial is clearly an attempt to brush aside the opposition as "Naxalites", even though the means of protest were peaceful. This indicates a way in which the focus is on the negative impact of the agitation and is presented as a political polarization rather than demands from the grounds. It can be seen as an attempt by the media to distort dissent.

The struggle in Nandigram was another instance where development projects became the centre of contention. It has been discussed as to how the state used repressive measures to end the struggle. *The Telegraph*, which publishes from Kolkata, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, projected how the violence is being started from the side of the villagers. The newspaper also highlighted, through a photograph, of a policemen being injured by the villagers but remained silent on the villagers being injured in the January 2007 violence in Nandigram.

⁴² Mamata's agitation, a spoof? History Repeats Itself, *The Economic Times*, 7th December 2006

⁴³ *ibid*

The Times of India, which also published a report on the violence in Nandigram, ended up misleading its readers with the headline ‘BENGAL BANDH: Villagers stockpiling arms’⁴⁴, and reported how more than three hundred protesters were arrested across the state while trying to impose a bandh on 8th of January. Even though the title suggested that villagers are stockpiling arms, there was no such reference in the news report. If we look at the narrative around development, *The Times of India* editorial, a day after police firing in Nandigram, focuses on how the process of development should not be halted. The reasons cited were:

India has never had it so good: 8 per cent growth seems a given, with more on the cards, provided the government does not apply the brakes. If the stock market is doing well, so are manufacturing and services. Inflation should be seen as a potentially short-term consequence of high growth, which has led to demand outstripping supply in the case of foodstuffs in particular. The way out is more supply-side reforms, not less.⁴⁵

It did express concern over the incident of firing on the farmers but also argued that, ‘Sonia’s task lies in investing reforms with credibility, not in derailing reforms. By jogging the status quo in food retail, her party might win the support of farmers for generations to come. It is not difficult to ensure that industrialisation makes winners out of everyone. The nation is poised to make another beginning — when will the political imagination change?’⁴⁶ In a similar manner, *The Hindu*, in an editorial, slammed the opposition and wrote:

The anti-Left Front alliance spearheaded by the Trinamool Congress, in which naxalites, the Jamiat ulema-e-Hind, and other extremist elements have made common cause, was protesting the proposal to create a Special Economic Zone in the area, although Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has repeatedly declared there would be no forced land acquisition in Nandigram.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ BENGAL BANDH ‘Villagers stockpiling arms, *The Times of India*, 9th January 2007.

⁴⁵ Braking Point Ham-handed implementation gives reforms a bad name, *The Times of India*, 8th February 2008.

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ The anti-Left Front alliance spearheaded by the Trinamool Congress, *The Hindu*, 16th March, 2007

The commentary in favour of the “development agenda”, went on to urge the Chief Minister to carry on his agenda of development. It stated, ‘What Chief Minister Bhattacharjee needs to do is not to get provoked by the opposition he must take a cool, objective, and just stand on all matters arising out of Nandigram and learn lessons from a mishandled crisis.’⁴⁸

The Anti Nuclear Protest in Kudankulum

In case of the Kudankulum Nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu and the protest against it, as has been dealt with in the previous chapter, we find that the newspapers presented a view to suggest that such plants are necessary for the development. *The Times of India* editorial termed the agitation as, ‘Misguided activism’. In the midst of the agitation on September 2011, it stated:

Energy-hungry India’s ambitious plan to raise nuclear capacity to 63,000 MW by 2032 makes sense. But meeting the target won’t be easy, going by demonstrations against nuclear power projects countrywide. The latest agitations over Tamil Nadu’s Kudankulum plant – agitators there have just ended an 11-day fast – shows yet again how easily passions can be whipped up.’⁴⁹

We have also seen, in Chapter 3 as to how the other newspapers such as *The Indian Express* had taken a similar editorial stand. *The Indian Express* wrote how the protest should be handled and how the protest should not be allowed to develop into ‘the sort of travelling-protest, anti-American, anti-globalization mela that attracts activists-errant from across the country.’⁵⁰ *The Hindu*, however, in the case of the Kudankulum anti nuclear agitation, gave ample scope for analytical viewpoints in their op-ed columns, which was discussed in the previous chapter.

⁴⁸ ibid

⁴⁹ Misguided activism, *The Times of India*, 22nd September 2011

⁵⁰ Kudankulum Duty, *The Indian Express*, 21st September 2011

If we examine the reportage and editorial comments on the various protest movements around the issue of development, it becomes clear that the issue of industrialization and its demands are presented as primary concerns of the newspapers. The undercurrent of all the discussions indicate where the news reports and the editorials seems to subscribe to the idea of development which should not hinder the status of the development model envisaged in a neoliberal order, particularly after 1991, when the Government recorded its shift towards a Market economy.

If we see the reportage in the Narmada Bachao Andolan during the late 1980s, it explicitly conveyed viewpoints questioning the very development model where only the privileged are benefitted while the poor are dispossessed. This attitude however underwent change in the reportage in the year 2000, following the Supreme Court Judgment, and it has been pointed out how the focus, by this time, was more on compensation and most importantly the benefits of the project for the economy was the underlying assumption.

The reportage and editorial positions around the Singur and Nandigram agitations also suggest an uncritical endorsement of the development model. In the reportage, there were also attempts to paint the opposition as Naxalites by the media. In the Kudankulam anti nuclear protest, for instance, was slammed as ‘Misguided activism’ and the fears of the people was interpreted through the prism of energy requirement alone and relegating the concerns of the people to redundancy. ‘Energy-hungry India’s ambitious plan to raise nuclear capacity to 63,000 MW by 2032’ we were told, ‘makes sense’. The argument ran that ‘meeting the target won’t be easy, going by demonstrations against nuclear power projects countrywide. The latest agitations over Tamil Nadu’s Kudankulam plant –

agitators there have just ended an 11-day fast – shows yet again how easily passions can be whipped up.’⁵¹

It can therefore be argued that the press, on these issues, had taken a position where a particular form of development and interest of the market is projected as non negotiable. In doing so it presented the protests as either political and in certain cases even calling them “naxalites”. It may be contrasted with the reportage in the pre-liberalized period, as analysed in Chapter 2, where the government’s attempt to brand Shankar Guha Niyogi as a Naxalite was questioned by the press and termed as an attempt to muzzle civil liberties. For instance, the editorial in *The Indian Express* following the firing in June 1977, wrote:

The starting point of the trouble admitted was the arrest of the workers leader for making “derogatory” speech. It would appear that restoration of democracy and civil liberties changes nothing for the workers if they dare to speak up for their rights and demands. The police will swing into action, arrest the leaders if they make a “derogatory” speech and fired upon workers to maintain “law and order”. Trained in the exercise of absolute power, the organs of the administration probably do not know how to act otherwise. The bogey of “violence” and dubbing any one raising a voice of protest as a “naxalite” are usually convenient alibi.⁵²

The Workers strike in Pricol factory and Maruti Manesar Strike

The workers strike at the Pricol factory in Coimbatore and the Maruti Plant at Manesar presented similar causes for the discontentment among the workers. The demands of the workers included adequate rise in wages, remedying the difficult working conditions, against employment of temporary workers and apprentices and also the non-recognition of the the Kovai Mavatta Pricol Thozhilar Sangam, a union affiliated to All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU). It has been mentioned, in the previous chapter, how

⁵¹ Misguided activism, *The Times of India*, 22nd September 2011

⁵² Police Firing, *The Indian Express*, 6th June 1977

the workers in the Pricol factory had very short break times leading to work pressure. Similarly, in the Maruti Manesar plant, the workers were demanding better working conditions in the plant, against hiring of temporary workers and wage rise. The management also resorted to inhuman measures such as ‘Workers are not allowed to drink water or urinate during work, and asked to postpone it till the tea and lunch breaks of seven and 30 minutes respectively.’⁵³

One of the other similarities is that both the labour unrest results in violence. Apart from the commonality of the issues of grievances among the workers, is also the failure of the industrial relations system to provide a space for articulation and redressal of grievances. The role of the media, in such a situation, is to give space to the voices of the workers. The role of the media is also to investigate the causes of labour unrest and give the context to the readers in understanding the struggles.

In the previous chapter, it has also been pointed out, how a large number of news stories had concentrated on the losses inflicted upon the company due to the strike and also carrying names of the car models produced by the factory almost as advertisements. In the Maruti strike at Manesar during 2011, it had been pointed how *The Indian Express*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Times of India* reports focused on the losses faced by the company during the strikes. One of the striking features of the reportage, in these papers, was the constant use of brand names of the car produced by the factory in their reportage and thus showing concern for the rising segment of the middle class population who were consumers of these products. For example, *The Indian Express* report wrote, ‘The Manesar plant rolls out about 1,200 units every day in two shifts. The factory produces

⁵³ ibid

hatchbacks Swift and A-Star and sedans DZiRE and SX4. While diesel versions of Swift and DZiRE at present have an waiting period of 3-4 months, *customers are waiting for up to one and half months to take the delivery of SX4*. The A-Star is MSI's flagship export model.⁵⁴ (Emphasis in italics added by author). *The Hindustan Times* report, titled, 'Maruti strike enters 4th day, revenue loss hits R100 cr' focused only on the company's losses. It also mentions how the factory produces 'the factory produces hatchbacks Swift and A-Star and sedans DZiRE and SX4.'

There were reports in *The Hindu*, where the causes of conflict in the Maruti factory were brought out. For instance, in a report titled, 'Violence at Maruti symptomatic of simmering worker discontent', following workers unrest in 2012, *The Hindu* dwelled into statements by trade union leaders elsewhere in Gurgaon to suggest that the violence in Maruti is symptomatic of the industry-wide unrest. "Today, it isn't as if every plant in Gurgaon is violent, but no plant is totally peaceful," said Raj Kumar, president of the Autoworkers Union at Rico Auto Industries. "The problem is that the management is unwilling to listen to workers. Today, there are no negotiations... There are only fights."⁵⁵ Apart from the representation of the Management's views, the report in *The Hindu* did give expression to the concerns of the workers.

Other newspapers, such as *The Times of India*, focused on issue of only after the death of the management executive. The reports, apart from the death of the management employee, focused on the losses of the company and projected the labourers as a mob. In the very first sentence of the news report, the workers are termed as mob. It stated:

⁵⁴ Strike at Maruti's Manesar plant enters 4th day, *The Indian Express*, 7th June 2011

⁵⁵ Violence at Maruti symptomatic of simmering worker discontent, *The Hindu*, July 21, 2012

Talking about the labour trouble at Maruti Suzuki's Manesar plant, Gurgaon DCP (East) Maheshwar Dayal said that a mob of around 3,000 people converged on gate number 2 and set fire to an office around 6.30 pm after the second shift. Around 25 fire engines were rushed from Gurgaon to the factory as Manesar, an emerging industrial centre, does not have a fire station.⁵⁶

The same report also focused on the car models that were produced in the factory and the production losses of the company. It wrote 'The Manesar plant, which produces Maruti's key Swift hatchback model, among others, was in the middle of severe labour disputes last year, leading to three crippling strikes as well as production losses running to over a thousand crore of rupees.'⁵⁷ *The Times of India* also reported, following the death of the management executive that the violence was caused by naxalites. The report titled, 'Naxalite hand in Maruti violence? Maoist Influence Over Trade Union Feared, Intelligence Agencies Begin Probe.' The report, without mentioning the source wrote:

The sheer brutality of the attack at Maruti's Manesar plant has not only shocked corporate veterans, but also sent alarm bells ringing within the government. A senior Maruti official died in the fire after both his legs were broken and more than 90 others were injured, many seriously. This appears to be much more than ordinary labour unrest or trade union activity, the sources said.⁵⁸

The same report presented an image of a gun holding man and the communist symbol with the caption 'spreading danger' and this clearly was an attempt to portray the dissenting workers as dangerous. The newspaper's editorial also took a stand in which says that, 'it's a failure on the part of the workers' union to allow it to get out of hand like this. There is evidence that the violence was pre-meditated. The full force of law should be brought to bear on its perpetrators.' It then talked about the poor state of industrial relations and that it could hurt the state of Haryana, and even India's status, as an investment destination. West Bengal has been ruined by labour militancy; Haryana

⁵⁶ 1 killed in fresh labour strife at Maruti plant, *The Times of India*, 19th July, 2012

⁵⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁸ Naxalite hand in Maruti violence?, *The Times of India*, 23rd July 2012

must take care not to follow suit. Companies have the option of shifting to more industry-friendly states, if not ship out of the country altogether.’⁵⁹

The Pricol workers strike, when it began in 2007, was reported only by *The Hindu*. However, *The Indian Express*, *The Times of India* and *The Economic Times* reported on this following the death of the HR personnel in 2009. The headline in *The Times of India* on 23rd September 2009, was, ‘Workers kill company VP in Coimbatore’⁶⁰. While it used the word “kill”, *The Indian Express* termed it as “lynching” in its report⁶¹ to prove the brutality of the death. While there was focus on the death of the management executive, as it ought to be, the reports did not bother at all to look into the causes of the labour unrest in the Pricol plant. Even *The Hindu*, which is published from Chennai and has an edition from Coimbatore, mostly published briefings of the protest in 2007.

In both the strikes, the media presented the strike more from the point of the losses incurred by the industry and this was clearly unlike in the case of the 1974 Railway strike and the Textile Workers strike in Bombay in the pre-liberalization period. In the two cases taken up here in the liberalization period – the Maruti and the Pricol strike, the dominant tendency was to underplay the causes of the strikes and focus more on the negative impacts of the strike. It must be mentioned here that the excessive focus on the negative impact of the strikes does help create a narrative where the workers are

⁵⁹ Barbaric violence, *The Times of India*, 23rd July 2013

⁶⁰ Workers kill company VP in Coimbatore, *The Times of India*, 23rd September 2009

⁶¹ The Report stated: ‘A group of agitating workers of an auto parts manufacturing company in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu on Tuesday lynched the Vice President (Human Resource) of the company to death. Six workers barged into Pricol Limited and attacked employees of company’s human resource department including Vice-President Roy J George got badly hurt. George, 47, succumbed to serious head injuries in hospital.’

presented as irrational, stubborn and as mobs. Strikes are therefore deemed as hindering productivity and causes economic loss. In this way the media does a disservice to the labour struggle and thus distorts dissent.

Conclusion

The history of the emergence and the evolution of the press in India is integral to the rise and growth of nationalism in India. The press, predominantly, served as a communication tool between the leaders of the nationalist struggle and the masses; there were, however, a section of the press that spoke for the colonial rulers and these were identified, even at that time, as the anglo-Indian press. This predominantly nationalist nature of the press in India was seen through by the colonial rulers who sought to muzzle the press with a series of authoritarian and repressive laws. This record of the colonial rulers, indeed, was contrary to the precepts for democracy and freedom back home in England.

The nationalist propaganda was most pronounced in the regional languages press and also its impact on the people in the proliferation of nationalist feelings in the early stages of the freedom struggle. It was a formidable force in propagating the ideas of freedom and against attempts to muzzle free expression of ideas in the press. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was a specific instance of this.

A rupture in this course was evident with the arrival of Gandhi on the scene; since 1916 in general and with the launch of the Rowlatt Satyagraha in 1919, the press in India had taken a pro-active role in the campaign against colonial rule as much as did the rising tide of nationalism with this. This was also when new repressive Laws were enacted to curb the press freedom. These are strong evidence that the British were well aware of the potential for causing unrest in the hands of the press in India. One of the important characteristic of the press in India during this phase was that it was not looked upon just as a profession or a business proposition but treated more as public service.

In the post-independence period, the newly independent government under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, set up a Press Laws and Enquiry Committee in 1947, under the chairmanship of Shri Ganga Nath; the committee submitted its report in 1948. Its recommendations had a significant impact on the process of the making of the Constitution, which was then under way, especially in the provisions involving free speech; it also impacted, far more intensely, on the expansion of this right with specific reference to the press through judicial pronouncements in the many years later.

One of the other important steps taken by the government in the matter of the press was the setting up of the First Press Commission in the year 1952 under the chairmanship of Justice G.S. Rajadhakya. Its brief was to enquire into the state of the press in India, its present and future lines of development and also examine the aspects of control, management and ownership and financial structure of the newspaper, large and small, the periodical press and the news agencies and feature syndicates.

Beginning work on this premise, the Press Commission went on to examine the working of monopolies and chains and their effect on the accurate news and fair views. In a sense, the Press Commission was a comprehensive study of the press in India. Some of the important observations of the commission were:

- There was concentration of ownership in the newspaper industry.
- The influence of advertisers on the press and how it can impact the content of news to conclude that there were instances of news being suppressed in order not to offend the advertisers.
- The role of the government, as an advertiser, and how it can influence news items.

Its report held that the principle of the private advertisers, who can place an advertisement in whichever newspaper they felt according to the possible impact, shall not hold insofar as the government was concerned; the commission held that the government was a trustee of public funds and is, hence, bound to utilize the funds for advertisement without discrimination between different newspapers, to serve the best interests of the public. The basis for advertising, for the government, it stressed, should be based on circulation, readership rather than the attitude of the newspapers toward the government.

The report expressed concern over the existing monopoly in the Indian newspaper industry. It was particularly concerned with the uniformity of editorial policies in the different units of a newspaper within the same group, chain and the greatest uniformity was observed in matters which involved personal and business interest of the owners. The report, in the matter of competition and concentration of ownership, concluded that there is the existence of chains and groups but there is considerable diversity in terms of choice available to readers. All these observations, it may be stressed here, were based on a clinical examination of evidence and after a process of public hearings.

The guiding philosophy adopted by the commission was the socialist ethos that prevailed at that time and one of its recommendations, naturally, was intended to preserve the smaller media houses in order to maintain the diversity of viewpoints. Hence, it recommended that in order to encourage new and small players to enter the newspaper industry, the government shall fix a minimum price at which papers of a particular size (in terms of the number of pages) can be sold. The rationale was to build an institutional mechanism to prevent those media houses with multiple business interests on hand from

setting out on a loss making business, absorbing the losses with revenue from other business (those with ‘deep pockets’ to borrow an expression used by the commission) and thus edge out smaller players in the industry. The price page schedule, recommended by the commission, was thus justified on the grounds that papers with large capital resources have advantages in terms of stable advertisements revenue as compared to new and small players.

The press commission presented a vision in terms of the restructuring of the press and can be seen as a restructuring of the society and the property relations that was very much a part of the socialist dream. Some of the observations of the Commission – such as on monopoly, ownership, and advertisement and so on – seem to have anticipated the problems with the press/media in the liberalization era, then a far cry though, on the newspaper industry.

One of the other aspects of the post-independence period in the context of journalism in India was the role of the higher judiciary in expanding the scope of Article 19 (1) (a) to safeguard press freedom against governmental interventions. It is pertinent to mention here that the Indian Constitution does not explicitly mention about freedom of the press but guaranteed the fundamental rights that included Article 19 (1) (a) from which press freedom flows. The higher judiciary, then, interpreted Article 19 (1) (a) and expanded the scope of freedom of the press in India.

In one instance, when the government attempted to implement the First Press Commission’s recommendation of fixing a minimum price at which papers of a particular size (in terms of the number of pages) can be sold, the Supreme Court set aside the

government's order of Newspaper (Price and Page) Act, 1960 and the Daily Newspaper (Price and Page) Order, 1960.

The order prescribed for fixing the maximum number of pages of a newspaper according to the price charged and also to prescribe the number of supplements that could be issued. The order was passed keeping in view that newspaper managements with abundant financial resources can afford under-cutting the small publishers by both reducing the cover price and increasing the number of pages to help increase circulation and thus enhance advertisement revenue and thus edge out small players in the course. Even though the regulations were aimed at ensuring equal access to infrastructure and redistribution of resources by making the access possible, the apex court viewed that idea to be constitutionally irrelevant and seemed to lean heavily in favour of the established newspapers and their right to free speech. This happened in the *Sakal Newspapers Vs Union of India* case.

The Supreme Court held that though the aim of Government to safeguard small newspapers and to prevent monopoly is "desirable" it made it clear that "for attaining such objective the state cannot make inroads on the rights of other newspapers which Article 19(1) (a) guarantees them." The implications of this judgment, indeed, can be seen from the crisis in the media in our own times most directly than it perhaps was at the time it was delivered; creating an economic environment that would be conducive to the entry of small newspapers and their survival and the prevention of monopolistic control, which certainly becomes very relevant in the liberalization period in India, was indeed not perceived by the apex court in the early 1960s, when the judgment was delivered.

The higher judiciary has, time and again, expanded the scope of press freedom. In the *Indian Express Vs the Union of India*, 1985 and in the *Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India and the Cricket Association of Bengal*, in 1995, the Supreme Court held that any restrictions imposed by the government on grounds other than that provided for by Article 19 (2) of the Constitution were unconstitutional. In one other important judicial pronouncement the Supreme Court in the *Bennet Coleman and the Co. Vs Union of India*, in 1972, where the publisher of *the Times of India* group of newspapers challenged the validity of the Newsprint Control Order fixing the maximum number of pages. The court found it in violation Article 19 (1) (a) and the prohibition imposed on an existing paper from starting a new edition is also a violation of the Constitutional guarantee of free speech and expression. The notable aspect of the judgment was the judicial interpretation of the right to free speech and expression even at the cost of rising monopoly as was mentioned in the First Press Commission report.

At another plane, a far more serious infringement on the freedom of the press, after independence, was during the National Emergency of 1975- 76, declared by the Indira Gandhi government. The period of internal emergency saw various ways in which the state enforced restrictions on the press.

On the very first night of the declaration of emergency, i.e. 25th of June 1975, electricity supply to the buildings on the Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, where most of the newspaper offices were located, was switched off. This was done in order to ensure that the newspapers from the capital were not printed that day and the news of the opposition's rally at Ramlila Grounds and the large-scale arrests of opposition leaders during the night were not reported to the people. The government, in the subsequent days,

installed the machinery for pre-censorship of newspapers. Pre-publication censorship was imposed under Rule 48 of the Defense (and Internal Security) of India Rules. The nature of censorship can be gauged from the fact that even parliamentary proceedings were not allowed to be published in the press.

A large section of the press succumbed to the pressures of the governments which not only included censorship but the lure of government advertisements. Newspapers like *The Indian Express*, *The Statesman*, and several regional newspapers also refused to toe the line of the government; this, however, was not easy and sustainable given the business model of the press industry in India and its dependence on revenue from government advertisements. Many of these newspapers while resisting censorship left blank spaces as a form of protest leaving it to the imagination of the readers about censorship, at least in the week immediately after the Emergency was declared and until this strategy was banned by the censor authorities. Journalists critical of the government along with opposition leaders were arrested. Arrested journalists included Kuldip Nayar, A.D Gorwala, Nikhil Chakravarty and Romesh Thapar. Mention may also be made of B.G. Verghese who was sacked as an editor for being critical of the government, as an effort by K.K. Birla (proprietor of *The Hindustan Times*) to please the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. While a large section of the press succumbed to the pressures, a section of the journalist still attempted to resist the repression.

The emergency also exposed the vulnerability of the press which can be jeopardized even in a democratic setup. It was the repression and experiences during the emergency that the journalist fraternity resisted the attempts to introduce the Anti Defamation Bill of 1988 by the Rajiv Gandhi Government. The bill sought to curb

tendentious writing and placed the onus of proof on the offending papers. It also brought back the tradition of protest against legislation curbing press freedom.

The press, meanwhile in the post-independence period played a crucial role in the nation-building alongside the Nehruvian government. But it must not be looked as a press conforming to the government policies. There was the presence of critical voices in the press. In the context of peoples struggle and demands of the working class, the press was vocal of its criticism of the government. In the case of labour movements in the pre-liberalized period, i.e. the railway general strike of 1974, the Mill workers strike of 1982-83 and the mine workers movement led by Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha, the press played an important role in highlighting the demands of the workers.

An analysis of the newspaper reportage, in this thesis, indicates that the newspaper pages became a platform that presented the opinions of both the government and the trade union leaders simultaneously. The newspapers were vigilant to bust government's claims through their reportage and published government claims as well as reports from the grounds indicating the real ground situation.

The newspapers differentiated themselves from the government-owned media. Interestingly, Laxman's cartoon during the railway strike of 1974, showing a couple reading a newspaper on the complete shutdown of the railway services in the country while the All India Radio (a government controlled media, which the strikers often referred it as All Indira Radio) in the background talking about how the strike is a failure. Here, the husband forbids his wife from switching off the radio, as it is nice to hear the commentary that trains are running even while in reality, it was just the opposite.

Thus the newspapers exposed the propaganda machine of the government in its reportage and other ways. The newspapers, across the spectrum, were critical of the government's decision to arrest the railway leaders while the negotiations were going on. It must be remembered that the railways were considered to be the lifeline of the economy and an all India strike had direct implications on the economy. This was true of the business newspaper, *The Economic Times*, too. Its editorial categorically stated that even if the government manages to stop the strike, the strike would be a hollowed victory. It held that 'confident that it can break the strike, the government seems to give the unfortunate impression of wanting to bend the strikers to their knees as well. This would be a hollowed victory.' 'The very fact that the strike was notified and the negotiations were under way and it was then the Government swooped into the union leaders. These ill-timed arrests are responsible for the breakdown of talks.'

The editorials in the newspapers wrote about the rights of the worker to negotiate their demands and the government's high handedness was criticized in the strongest terms. The other worker's movement was the Bombay textile workers strike which lasted for more than a year was also covered by the press with empathy as was analyzed in the reports. While newspapers like *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express* reported the strike and the concerns of the workers were highlighted.

The newspapers also highlighted the plight of the workers owing to the prolonged strike. The business newspaper *The Economic Times* too highlighted the conditions of the workers and their demands and also provided space for presenting the views of both the workers and the mill owners.

Another workers movement was the mine workers movement in the Bhilai steel plant in Madhya Pradesh. The firing on the mine workers at Rajhara in Madhya Pradesh in 1977 was covered by *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*. Mention may be made of the editorial in *The Indian Express* where the government's attempt to brush aside Shankar Guha Niyogi was criticized as an attempt to muzzle dissent. Referring to the government's high handedness it wrote: Trained in the exercise of absolute power, the organs of the administration probably do not know how to act otherwise. The bogey of "violence" and dubbing any one raising a voice of protest as a "Naxalite" are a usually convenient alibi.'

Meanwhile, the Indian economy gradually began to open up in the late 1980's and the newspapers became vehicles of advertising. The press, in this phase, was no longer depended entirely on government advertisements and hence was freed from the clutches of the party in power. The scene of the media underwent a drastic change in terms of its growth and its ideological positioning with the India opening itself to the free market economy. The press or the media after liberalization became prone to the pressures of the market-driven economy.

The most notable change in the liberalization phase of the media was its concerns for the market. In terms of people's movements on issues around development and workers rights, the media focused more on the cost and benefit analysis of the protest movements. The protest movements against the dams in the Narmada by the Narmada Bachao Andolan, we can see a change in the way the movements reportage changes. It may be pointed out that the reporting in newspapers like *The Hindu* and *The Times of*

India in the initial years, i.e. in the late 1980's the reportage was concerned with the issues and problems of displacements along with the protest against big dams.

However in the liberalization phase especially after the final Supreme Court's judgment in the Sardar Sarovar Project in 2000, the focus was on the need for more electricity and irrigation projects for the 'emerging economy', the media too gradually focused more on compensation and highlighted the benefits from the projects for the economy.

In other protests such as in Singur and Nandigram against land acquisition, the protest was portrayed as a political fight between the ruling and the opposition party. The interest of a private company was presented as the interest of the West Bengal by most of the newspapers taken for the study. In the Kudankulam Anti-nuclear plant protest in Tamil Nadu also the media analyzed the protest and the benefit that the nuclear plant carries for the market. The attempt to project the protest as foreign-funded through the reports was common feature and even done without caring to ensure that these were investigated further to highlight the reality.

The workers' protest in the Maruti plant in Manesar and the Pricol plant, both of which can be seen as manifestation of labor disputes arising out of denial of the workers' right to form a union for collective bargaining of the demands and rights. Both the incidents involved corporate interests conflicting with the interest of the workers. The issues of the workers in Pricol were covered only by *The Hindu*, and other newspaper picks the story only when violence claims the life of the HR manager in 2009.

The strike in the Maruti plant gets coverage but most of the reportage in the national newspapers revolved around the losses the company incurred during the strike

period. Issues such as car consumers inconvenience over the delay in supply of the car find precedence over the demands of the workers in the reportage of the newspapers. Apart from *The Hindu*, other newspapers taken for the study failed to adequately address the systemic flaws in the working the modern factories owned by corporate groups.

The media must be understood in the context of the neo-liberalism where there has been a paradigm shift from the Nehruvian “protection” economy. The very idea of neoliberalism as Robert W. McChesney puts is as “the doctrine that profits should rule as much as of social life as possible, and anything that gets in the way of profit making is suspect, if not condemned.” This doctrine is also reflected in the Indian media as the neo-liberal set up generated its own dynamics in terms of the journalistic function and ownership and advertising concerns began to assert over the press.

The media also in such a scenario end up distorting dissent. The distortion happens in a number of ways. The following are the ways in which media distorts dissents in protest movements:

- The media distorts dissent by failing to adequately explain the meaning and context of the protest.
- The excessive focus on the negative impact of any protest and its presentation as a politically polarized rather than demands from the grounds.
- The focus more on the demands of the market rather than the context of the protest.

Though the press in the pre-liberalized era was owned by the private players but played an important role in the deepening of the democratic institutions in India. The

economic liberalization brought economic benefits to the media but it also increasingly got more dependent on the market in order to earn revenue.

The media also became more profit driven and hence the well being of the market became a concern for the media houses too. The profit motive of the media is also becoming reflective in the functioning of the media houses where leading newspapers like the *Times of India*'s Managing editor, Samir Jain admits that they are in the “business of advertising” and not in the business of news.

One of the major concerns of the First Press Commission was the ownership of large newspapers having advantages over the smaller newspapers also began to appear after the liberalization. Many large newspapers have had predatory pricing, meaning that selling the newspaper at a very low cost and very below the cost of production. This leads to heavy competition, in which the smaller newspapers are driven out of the market. Since the dependence of the media is on revenues generated from the corporate advertising which in turn is owned by big business and hence it promotes an ideology that is tied to capitalism.

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Continued on Page 5 Column 2

You Said It

By LAXMAN



Don't switch it off — it's nice to hear that the trains are running!

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APPROPRIATE CASTABLES FIRE CEMENTS FIRE BRICKS

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

New Delhi Wednesday May 29 1974

GLAMOUR A Fine Shaving A Most Effective Collection CHIFFON SAREES WITH BORDER TO MATCH

Fernandes out of jail All railwaymen held under MISA to be released

New Delhi, May 28—Mr George Fernandes and 22 other leaders of the Tihar jail this evening, looking visibly displeased...

New Delhi, May 28—The Delhi Administration today imposed a 10 per cent cut in power consumption by industrial establishments and other big consumers following a directive from the Central Government.



Delhi industries face 10p.c. power cut

New Delhi, May 28—The Delhi Administration today imposed a 10 per cent cut in power consumption by industrial establishments and other big consumers following a directive from the Central Government.

US will review aid to India

NEW YORK, May 28 (UPI)—The United States has ordered a review of aid to India in response to its displeasure at the detention of a nuclear device by India.

Electoral college continues

New Delhi, May 28 (UPI)—The special Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice Yeshwant Prasad Sharma today continued the process of electing the President of India.

Order on wages rescinded

New Delhi, May 28 (UPI)—The Government today rescinded an order on wages under the Payment of Wages Act, 1947.

Vast improvement in attendance

New Delhi, May 28 (UPI)—The attendance of students in schools and colleges has shown a vast improvement over the last few months.

No pay for strike period: Mishra

New Delhi, May 28 (UPI)—The Government today announced that there will be no pay for the strike period.

N Ireland Govt resigns

BELFAST, May 28 (AP)—Northern Ireland's provincial Government today announced its resignation.

Tamilian chauvinism will boomerang, CM warned

New Delhi, May 28 (UPI)—The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu today warned that Tamilian chauvinism would boomerang.

Essex the drawn

CHESHAM, May 28 (UPI)—The Essex cricket team today drew the match against the West Indies.

Power for Haryana, industry cut off

CHANDIGARH, May 28 (UPI)—The Government today announced that power supply to industries in Haryana would be cut off.

Maharashtra turn under curfew

AHMEDNAGAR, May 28 (UPI)—The Government today placed parts of Maharashtra under curfew.

City weather

Max. temp. 37.0°C (98.6°F) Min. temp. 26.2°C (79.2°F)

Dailies may become thinner still

New Delhi, May 28 (UPI)—The newspaper industry today warned that dailies may become thinner still due to rising costs.

Cong bags 4 seats in Bihar

PATNA, May 28 (UPI)—Bihar Lok Sabha Chairman Biju Patnaik today announced that the Congress party had won four seats in Bihar.

Meet the Brain

WESTON ELECTRONICS WESTON electronic calculator

Methodok Business Systems advertisement with logo and contact information.

Textile strike near complete

Hindustan Times Correspondent

BOMBAY, Jan. 18.—Workers in the textile industry here, which employs over three lakh hands, began an indefinite strike to press their demands for higher wages and security of service for temporary employees.

The strike, which covered all the 60 mills, was complete and peaceful. It is led by militant trade union leader Datta Samant, backed by four other unions. The "recognised union" for the textile industry, the Hachirya Mill Mazdoor Sengh (HMMS) of INTUC, is not a party to the strike.

Dr Samant has warned the Government against adopting repressive measures to deal with the strike. He said if he was arrested and repressive measures were let

loose, the authorities would have themselves to blame if the workers retaliate.

Dr Samant demands that a wage increase of Rs 250 to Rs 400 per month be given to workers and nearly a lakh of temporary hands be confirmed. The additional financial burden on mills on account of these two demands alone is calculated at over Rs 100 crore by the workers and Rs 150 crore a year by the millowners.

The strikers live mainly in Central Bombay, particularly in the Lal Baug-Parel area. The population directly affected by the strike is over a million. The last prolonged strike by textile workers was organised in 1973-74 and had lasted 42 days. It was led by Mr S. A. Dange, the veteran CPI leader. However, he had failed to

gain anything meaningful for the workers.

RMMS president Vasant Hosang said his union was not opposed to the demands of the workers. "But, we are opposed to the manner in which the strike call has been given and the method adopted by Dr Samant's union to coax the workers to join the strike," add agencies.

Workers of the mills run by the National Textile Corporation and the Maharashtra Textile Corporation have also joined the strike.

A supervisor was assaulted at Khodadad circle in north Bombay this morning, police said.

Two mills were observing a weekly holiday, according to Mill Owners' Association sources. Workers of ten mills are already on strike over bonus issue since Oct. 12, 1981.

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Shed PM



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Arundhanii

The Prime put down misguided

She has called upon to give up their mentalities. She genuinely early solution to what more grievances they have.

Mrs. Gandhi was talking today on the Punjab situation in Punjab must to most people elsewhere irrational, she said.

Mrs. Gandhi added that Punjab was not against, economically Even more unsubstantiated allegation that Sikhs denied their rights.

Mrs. Gandhi said were out of power all means for it. All means were being economic, political and social.

The Prime Minister often stated and have high regard Punjab. They are patriotism, valour, city for hard work sense and optimism

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