Chapter 7

Conclusion:

Possible and Impossible Futures
The gazetta was the usual about ultra-violence and bank robberies and strikes and footballers making everybody paralytic with fright by threatening to not play next Saturday if they did not get higher wages, naughty malchickiwicks as they were. Also there were more space-trips and bigger stereo TV screens and offers of free packets of soapflakes in exchange for the labels on soup-tins, amazing offer for one week only, which made me smec.

The “newspaper revolution” itself had no inherent ontological and ecumenical significances. Historically viewed, it appears as one of the many trial and error experiments in technological upgrade that preceded the experiments in digital newspaper production in the 1990s—a kind of adjustment process, involving the indiscriminate faith in complex machines, that were invested with techno-magical virtues. There was no talk of a “revolution” when the new technologies were being introduced in the newspaper business in India, only a consistent pleading with the state and its regulating institutions to allow these imports.

With greater concessions from the state during the 1980s, including relaxed import licences, special telephone lines, satellite transmission facilities, regular supplies of newsprint, and importantly, insulation from international newspaper cartels still denied to open shop in India, the “national” newspaper families suffered from serious delusions of competence and privilege. Even so, their efforts to replicate the television in print resulted in quixotic attempts, more pathetic than their claims of singlehandedly inaugurating a “free market” society for the notional construct of a consumption-driven, urban, and aspirational “new Indian middle class” which rose to sudden prominence during the 1980s.\(^1\)

\(^1\) The making of this construct was no doubt aided and abetted by the newspapers, but they cannot credited as its inventors. The real creator of this confused, but nevertheless, aspirational socio-cultural embodiment was the Indian state, who under successive governments, and particularly under Rajiv Gandhi’s rule, inculcated elements of both recognition and of construction into a deliberate label for a confused mélange of caste, religion, gender, and language-based aspirations, and strengthened the representative fiction of the “Indian middle class”. As Leela Fernandes observes in this context, “Rajiv Gandhi’s political rhetoric and policies participated in the construction of this new middle class by aiding in the shift of the dominant construction of middle class identity in terms of the figure of a consumer.” Leela Fernandes, *India’s New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 39.
The English-language newspaper of the 1970s was black and white, and dense with serried lines of type. The desire to adapt the newspaper to the “feel” of the magazine and the colour television, and to optimize its visual appeal, led to the demand for PTS machines and web-offsets. The newspaper of the 1980s was still printed in black and white as it had been during the 1950s. For the *Telegraph* and the *Times of India* the modular designs of their paper, their greater use of images and typographical manipulations possible through PTS, the sectional planning of pages, their greater attention to soliciting advertisements, were symptomatic of their imagined highlighting to the advertisers their elevated connections to the “upwardly mobile”.

For most others, such as the *Indian Express*, who continued the older pretence of playing the oppositional press, and imagined an automatic working of the technological magic, the real change in visual appeal was more in the newspaper’s renewed self-emphasis as a “national” newspaper than its actual ability to regularly print in colour. Apart from the minor typographical changes characteristic to the use of PTS and web-offsets, the visual impression of its product did not undergo any “revolutionary” modifications, or exhibit complex and prodigious feats of compositional elegance (see Figures 10-14).
Figure 10.
The Nehru-era newspaper:
Page one of the Indian Express, Madras edition, January 5, 1950.

The issue is set in linotype and printed on a stereo-rotary press, and consists of eight pages. The close-knit typography, and the absence of white space, are carry-overs of the practice of squeezing a maximum number of words—learnt during the war, and after the coming of teleprinters.

Figure 11.
Page one of the Indian Express, March 7, 1960.

The issue consists of ten pages. Note the wry appearance of the big display advertisement on the right-hand corner of the page—the “solus” position.
Figure 12.

The last decade of linotype: Page one of the Indian Express, February 11, 1970.

The heading of the primary “news” piece comes in three decks, as earlier, using three font sizes (with an italicized variant in the second deck) in decreasing orders of emphasis. The “solus” advertisement has become permanent, and the issue consists of fourteen pages.

Figure 13.

A “computerized newspaper”: Page one of the Indian Express, November 1, 1986.

The issue is set through PTS and printed in black and white on a web-offset. Apart from the relatively clear typographic alignment compared to that of its predecessors, the issue has a greater page count of thirty six pages. Also note the use of a single deck to hold “news” headings, including that of the lead article, and the unjustified headings that leave white spaces.
Thus, the so-called “newspaper revolution” can be best identified as an act of reinterpretation, which describes an unremarkable phenomenon as the increase in circulation of certain privileged newspapers, their import of composition and printing technologies, and their functional seeking of advertisements—mostly by employing pseudo-cultural and propagandist assumptions the “national” newspaper families had used to stress their papers’ increased self-importance before advertisers.

It did not include any introspection on part of the English-language press on their technological use of machinery to intrude on and upset different spheres of reality; it did not lessen the newspapers’ dependence on the state for advertisements and newsprint, or the control of newspapers by a privileged business élite; it certainly did not reconsider “news ethics” or social justice while the newspapers arrogantly portrayed themselves as a robust, muscular, and fiercely independent “national press”.

If the phenomenon reveals anything “new” about the newspaper business in India, or for that matter, its connections to state-subsidized capitalism, it shows that there remained an abiding, reductively narrow-minded faith in the significance of economic profit over the imagined socio-cultural functions of the newspaper. As Karl Polanyi observes, more generally, of the severe limitations imposed on individuals by this economic rationale, which he historically likens to a cancerous growth in human societies:
For once man’s everyday activities have been organized through markets of various kinds, based on profit motives, determined by competitive attitudes, and governed by a utilitarian value scale, his society becomes an organism that is, in all essential regards, subservient to gainful purposes. Having thus absolutized the motive of economic gain in practice, he loses the capacity of mentally relativizing it again. His imagination is bounded by stultifying limits. The very word economy evokes in him not the picture of man’s livelihood and the technology that helps to secure it, but recalls instead a set of particular motives, peculiar attitudes, and highly specific purposes, all of which he is used to calling economic, even though they are mere accessories to the actual economy, owing their existence to an ephemeral interplay of cultural traits. Not the permanent and abiding features of all human economies but the merely transitory and contingent ones appear to him as the essentials.²

The individual players of the “newspaper revolution” in India—the owners, managers, and journalists for whom the moral domain existed only in the economic imperatives of their papers—were arrogant enough to stress apodictic connections between their prioritization of economic success and the survival of all societies under the territories of the Indian state. As whether they can be really considered the discoverers of the “new Indian middle class” (in societies under the territorial administration of the Indian state) which autonomously exploded in favour of the “free market” in the 1980s is an interesting idea—definitely worth researching further. Questions as whether this “middle class” was really “new” lie completely beyond our context; even so, they most certainly went beyond the researching and intellectual capabilities of most journalists as well when they

testified to its historic arrival during the 1980s. Since the burden of proof lies more with the believer: we may only identify that the evidence available is not enough to provide a general outlining of the cultural play of the “newspaper revolution” in Indian social spaces heralding a “free market”, except for the newspapers’ operational faith in the capabilities of their new machines to secure socio-economic benefits.

What the involuted myth of the “revolution” really achieved was the way it helped newspapers to mythologize their presence before advertisers. A newspaper printed by the new technologies privileged the photographic intentions of the advertiser by providing it visual self-exposure—a leaning towards this magical end was reflected in a greater visibility of the display advertisement in the pages of all big Indian newspapers, even before they took to PTS and the web-offset.3 The continuous iteration between advertisements and “news” on the pages of all the big English-language dailies had also increased considerably by the beginning of the 1980s (see Table 4), embodying an anchorage of persona for each of these newspapers in a conceited and self-reflexive affirmation of itself as a primarily advertisement medium.

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Table 4:

*Percentage of print space devoted to advertisements in the biggest Indian dailies (1953–1981)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Language Field</th>
<th>City edition</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statesman</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindustan Times</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times of India</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Bombay and Ahmedabad editions considered together</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amrita Bazar Patrika</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Express</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ananda Bazar Patrika</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the above table that from 1981, all buyers of the major English-language dailies were in reality buying more advertisement than “news”. What followed was a quantitative increase in advertisements, than a sudden, qualitative shift. The fixation of newspapers for the “exploding middle class” coincided thereafter with the spread of colour television across the country from 1982, techologizing a shift in cultural codes, strengthening an exaggerated narrative of consumption, and powerfully offering the commodity image of the advertisement in India as a “generalized social ontology”.

As William Mazzarella notes of the emergence of the “new” consumerist dispensation of the 1980s:

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4 Compiled from figures cited by the Second Press Commission. Ibid., vol. 2, 183.
This new formation was one response to the decline of the paradigm of planned development, and while it initially served the government’s interests in addressing its more affluent constituents, it came with universalistic pretensions. At this point, however, the ideologues of consumerism found themselves having to incorporate both aspirational consumerism and public service within the discourse of the commodity image and were thus presented with a contradiction: the discontinuity between pleasure and obligation.6

The above was as much reflected in the play of aspirational advertisements on the state-run television as the institution of an Advertisement Standards Council in 1987 stressing “self-regulation” in print and television advertising. The board of the Advertisement Standards Council was populated by members from Indian business such as its chairman Brahmi Vasudeva (the owner of Hawkins, one of the biggest companies selling pressure cookers), and members like Harish Mahindra (representing the big business family that virtually monopolised on the manufacture of tractors and pump sets), J. C. Chopra (the senior vice-president of Voltas, one of the biggest sellers of refrigerators and air-coolers), Mukul Upadhyaya (a representative from Bajaj Electricals), Harish Jain (chairman of the Jaisons Group of companies), Lalit Bijlani (owner of Blaze Advertising), Gul M. Engineer (owner of Selvel Publicity and Consultancy), Roger Pereira (owner of Roger Pereira Consultants), Xerxes Desai (director of the Tata Press), as well as members from the print “news” business: Ram S. Tarneja (the managing director of Benett Coleman, the company publishing Times of India), P. Mehta of Blitz,

6 Ibid., 98.
and N. Murali (the younger brother of N. Ram, and director of Kasturi and Sons, the company publishing the *Hindu*).  

The real purpose of the Advertisement Standards Council lay elsewhere: it successfully diverted attention from the “public service” rendered by commercial advertisers to an insistence on their projected aspirational transformation of societal spaces through an insistence of “freedom” and the quotidian “utility” of consumerism, which as Mazarella reminds us, in no ways can be abbreviated to the “purely instrumental calculus of the market”.  

As enthusiasts of this aspirational programme—one which spoke less in metaphors of use and possession than it projected “new” affiliation, inclusion, and stressed the insecurity of exclusion now that the developmental agenda of the state was absent—a newspaper owned by any of the “national” newspaper families acted as one of the primary channels (apart from the television) through which the “new” consumerist dispensation travelled daily and extensively across the urban centres of India in the papers printed on their new machines, and to a very great extent, leaving out the “news” of the resistance part. This can well be the subject of a future critique of the historically shifting play of advertisements in the pages of these newspapers, which is to yet to be systematically explored.  

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8 Mazarella, *Shoveling Smoke*, 103.
9 See Appendix Two for a brief and highly incomplete glimpse of some advertisements that appeared in the pages of the Madras edition of the *Indian Express*, during the newspaper’s passage from the colonial era to the 1980s.
However, and it was only to emerge after most of the big newspapers had taken to their use, the new machines did not automatically translate into the enormous profits envisaged; at least, not for all the newspapers. Though, by the end of the 1980s, while the newspapers variously used the new technologies (or failed to use them to their benefit, as in the case of Statesman or the Amrita Bazar Patrika), their attempted or real use of these technologies prompted all to effect hikes in their advertisement rates. For example, in the two years between 1986 and 1988, the price of a column centimetre of advertisement space in the Bombay edition of the Times of India rose from Rs. 125 to Rs. 290 (a 132 per cent rise over the previous); in the Statesman it rose from Rs. 102 to Rs. 115 (a thirteen per cent rise); in the Amrita Bazar Patrika, then decelerating and heading towards death, from Rs. 70 to Rs. 75 (a seven per cent rise).10

The “new” marketing of the English newspaper in India during the 1980s, whether by the Telegraph in Calcutta, or more forcefully and unabashedly tried by the Times of India in Bombay and other Indian cities, still, was hardly a creative intellectual innovation. It was the blind copying of the practices of many Northern newspapers who after the arrival of the television tried to ascertain their survival by trying household penetration in the 1970s, and attached newer symbolic merit to their use of the new machines, as well as to operational solutions that expanded

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earlier conceptions of a “relevant market”—“which could be reached through a package of supplements offering exclusivity in their new areas of colonization.”

While newspapers continued to rue about newsprint supplies, they wooed advertisers with greater zeal. Their profits escalated as the state embarked on the course of “economic liberalization”—state control remained a nightmare from the past; the state was acting as the guarantor who was helping their visions of the Indian “free market” to materialize. For example, the Times of India group’s net profit was Rs. 47 million in 1987-88, it rose to Rs. 1.3 billion on revenue earnings of Rs. 4.79 billion between 1993 and 1994—the reason why it cut down on newspaper prices in the early 1990s, inaugurating a series of “price wars” with other dailies and in newer cities, was that for it, circulation revenue had largely become irrelevant for it after 1991. An important fact often forgotten in this context, or deliberately ignored under the greater weight of neoliberal propaganda, is that the Indian state remained the single largest and consistent advertiser for all newspapers during this time and much after. In the early 1990s, for example, DAVP, the central government’s agency for publicizing the policies and programmes of the Indian government, and also the India’s largest advertising and publicity agency with the widest network of business offices throughout the country, had over 3,100 big and small newspapers listed on its panels, and on an average, provided them with around 16,200 classified and display advertisements a

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11 Smith, *Goodbye Gutenberg*, 57.
year.\textsuperscript{13} While newspapers coursed through their highly contrived form of societal intervention through “news” appearing as natural and commonsensical in the euphoric attachment to “economic liberalization”—the profits the big newspapers made were in most part, as before, paid from the public exchequer.

There remains a final point to be made. As we have seen, the “revolutionary” use of the new machines was successful only when the newspaper using them, such as the \textit{Telegraph}, forcefully publicized their use to create strong symbolic support networks in the form of editorial and managerial teams that testified its ability to replicate, better than its competitors, all brands of advertising. Without this ideational association the partial use of PTS, the “di-litho”, or the web-offset machines was largely pointless—as we have seen of the \textit{Hindustan Standard}, the \textit{Statesman}, and the \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}. As we have also witnessed, there was no automatic leap from the hot metal to the “personal computer” that undid the shackles of composition for the Indian-language newspapers who, as Jeffrey insists, spearheaded a “newspaper revolution”\textsuperscript{14} or as Samaddar asserts, effected the automatic transformation of the Indian journalist into an information technician\textsuperscript{15}—but an increase in the variegated use of PTS and offset machines by different “national” newspaper families who set different levels of preference and followed different trajectories while using them for both their English-language and Indian-language dailies.

\textsuperscript{13} Kumar, \textit{Media Education, Communications, and Public Policy}, 352-3.
\textsuperscript{14} Jeffrey, \textit{India’s Newspaper Revolution}, 43.
\textsuperscript{15} Samaddar, \textit{New Technology in Indian Newspaper Industry}, 28.
What we today identify as the “personal computer” did not, in the 1980s, carry its meaning about it like a burning bush or a tabernacle for some supernaturally-inscribed circuit boards whose mystical repute putatively remains unchanged throughout history. “Personal computer” was the marketing name for an unsuccessful brand of hulky microcomputers, fitted with QWERTY keyboards of the typewriter, that International Business Machines (IBM) introduced in 1982 in the United States to replace the keypunch equipment and the mainframe computers; the name outlasted the machines’ use, and later became a generic name for dissimilar versions of machines made by IBM and different manufacturers for use in office environments where their use certainly did not have much to do with personal ends. These machines fitted with QWERTY keyboards had not been introduced in the Indian newspaper business till the 1990s; nor did all of their earlier avatars come equipped with extensive word-processing facilities. Even in the United States, the word-processing software of the late 1980s had not been quickly and seamlessly integrated into IBM office computers—they were machinated for input speed than for formatting and

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17 In 1989, for example, a 32-bit “personal computer” (IBM PS/2 Model 70) used by a select few in America weighed around 23 kg, occupied a space of one square metre, and worked with a random access memory of 16 megabytes—unable, as we may note, to thoroughly sustain the workings of the earliest word-processing software. A 16-bit Soviet microcomputer (SM-4) of the same period weighed 636 kg, occupied fifteen square metre of space, and worked with a random access memory of 248 megabytes, mostly to facilitate the movements of guided missiles. CIA research paper, CIA/SW/89-10023X, *Soviet Bloc Computers: Direct Descendants of Western Technology* (Washington, DC: U.S. Directorate of Intelligence, 1989), 4, CIA Special Collections Internet Archive, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000500644/DOC_0000500644.pdf (August 10, 2011).
editing—as much for efficiency, as for the continuing managerial insistence on the hierarchical separation of “menial” and “intellectual” tasks.\textsuperscript{18}

It was in the late 1980s when newer computing machines arrived in the Northern newspaper business, compatible with software that systematically combined the workings of the operating system of the computing machines with the visual interface of grey and white display terminals, and enabled pagemaking and design through integration with editorial application programmes like Adobe Pagemaker; it were they, to indulge in a historical simplification, that properly enabled digital typography and design, drove out the last generation of PTS machines and their operators, and forced the reporters and editors to input data like the compositors as well as prepare the newspaper for publication by correcting and revising. The PTS machines temporally ruled the interregnum between the use of hot metal and digital composition—they did not epitomize digital composition possible through the “personal computer”.\textsuperscript{19}

For the few newspapers in India who prided themselves in owning computers during the 1980s, the composition machines they used were primarily third-generation PTS machines. These were run on bulky microcomputers, fitted with CRT terminals displaying flickering text in green and harsh yellow against a dull gray background, and with awkward keyboard layouts and an incredibly complex set of keyboard combinations for the operator to memorize. They mostly acted as speedier input devices for the “news” copies while the editorial tasks of writing,

\textsuperscript{18} Greenbaum, \textit{Windows on the Workplace}, 67.
\textsuperscript{19} Bringhurst, \textit{Elements of Typographic Style}, 139-140.
redacting, proof-correction, and page-designing were still carried out on paper. Girilal Jain, the last chief editor to write blood-and-thunder editorials for the *Times of India* between 1978 and 1988, had a “computer” in his Delhi office during the early 1980s, as did some of his editorial subordinates in the newsroom hall. While interviewing Jug Suraiya, who had earlier worked as an assistant editor with the *Statesman* and confessed to writing editorials with a ball-point pen, and without knowing how to use a typewriter—Jain proudly showed Suraiya his tool for crafting editorials, a fountain pen. 20 This technological archness was later the first casualty of the computerised newsmaking practices that were introduced by eager managements during the 1990s.

It was indeed highly ironical that after the big Indian newspapers, and almost all of the English-language press, had made elaborate stakes in their imports and installation of the PTS machines, effected workforce and production reorganizations that meant for them the revelation of a concrete magic assuring them of an uninterrupted technological continuation through time over their linotypes—in the early 1980s, for example, the executive director of the *Hindu* had hoped the new machines would last them the next thirty years 21—the new machines themselves, were going into obsolescence in the Northern newspaper industry with the coming of front-end editorial systems integrated with newer computing machines. This ensured that most of the PTS machines the Indian newspapers had hysterically sought, imported through persuasion and bribery,

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20 Suraiya, *JS & The Times of My Life*, 172.
deeply invested with magical faith, and used with evangelical fury throughout the
greater part of the 1980s were to become as completely inutile as their older
linotypes in the next few years when digital technologies chose to reassure and
comfort the newspapers through what we have seen as the faith in technological
replication—drawing upon and professing to feed the newspapers' control of time
through speed and the reinforcing of their space bias.

For most newspapers, their “new” machines joined the older “new” machines—
resold mostly as scrap metal and electronic junk. For few others like the
*Statesman*, they rusted and mouldered in the newspaper's printing backyards—sad
testimonies to their importers’ miscalculated faith in technological redemption.
Like its old rotary presses, the *Statesman* considered these machines intrinsically
valuable for resell purposes, although not as pitifully evocative relics of earlier eras
of transmission of power and privilege when the paper lead the newspaper
business in India by virtue of its technological prowess, and maintained
superciliously arrogant, uniformed employees for the sole purpose of switching on
the electric lights when the managing director entered his room. The machines,
as junk, stayed with the newspaper till the first decade of the twenty-first century
when the paper's new owners who succeeded Irani after his death with leaner
schemes of economic appreciation and understanding, leased off the backyards,
and part of the colonial era building which also contained the paper's library and
archives, for real estate purposes.
The ultimate technological irony lay elsewhere. By 1991, the year in which a Congress-led central government abolished all import restrictions on printing equipment through its formal consent to “economic de-regulation”, the technological switchover to PTS, if not the web-offset, had been accomplished by most of the big Indian newspapers. In the following year, newsprint was placed under the Open General Licence, removing the last vestigial pretences of state control. And yet, for all the reasons that the state rocked the cradle of the “newspaper revolution” from 1975 to 1991, and the big newspapers cherished the demonic, heightened production speed of their composition and printing machines as well as their ability to directly import newsprint, it happened that the space bias of the newspaper over the delivery of “news”—for long cherished as one of its proudest accomplishments, if not its supreme value—had been unalterably transmogrified by the spread of television in India.

Flickering images shot through a domestic device fitted with a cathode ray tube, and slowly warming up against the sound of television static, held a greater degree of “believability” over the best colour photographs, advertisements, features, and “news” printed by the most technologically-advanced English newspaper in India and delivered at breakneck speed to its buyers. Moreover, it was in the early 1990s that international “mass media” players like CNN, BBC, and STAR TV 22 strode into the “news” business in India from without, assiduously selling images of death and destruction from the Persian Gulf, the

22 A Hong-Kong based satellite television company, Whampoa Hutchison, soon to be owned in its entirety by Rupert Murdoch.
fires from a thousand burning oil fields, and the stimulating flight of American missiles moving like giant swarms of predatory fireflies against the night skies of Baghdad. The arrival of these players in India upset all the newspapers’ stable plans for uninterrupted techno-magical protraction of their businesses through PTS and web-offset machines, also upsetting half a century of the “tradition” of having a government-owned broadcasting and a commercial press. But the stage was also set for newer strategies, newer rapprochements with these international players, and newer bargaining of facilities from the Indian state.