Chapter 1

Introduction
I remember the newspapers dying like huge moths. No one wanted them back.
No one missed them.

— Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451 (1953)
The story of the newspaper in India generally begins with a reference to the publication of the *Bengal Gazette, Or Original Calcutta Advertiser*, on January 29, 1780. The *Gazette* was less a newspaper in the modern sense of the term that it lacked heavy printing equipment, distribution networks, and advertisement subsidies; it was a two sheet newspaper with a print-run of around 200, and had three columns printed on both sides with rough-faced types used for printing hand-bills and common advertisement posters that its printer James Augustus Hickey bought cheap, and printed off a wooden flat-bed press constructed by unacknowledged “native” craftsmen at Radha Bazar, Calcutta. The “Papa of the Press in South-East Asia”¹ made no pretensions of his weekly newspaper’s devotion to advertisements that included notices of property auction, horse stable charges, lottery schemes, advertisement of breads and sweet cakes, shoes, candle-shades, clocks, pistols and regimental swords, cheap booze, requests for return of stolen books, rewards for capture of runaways, and the sale of young slaves.²

The *Gazette* also contained as “news” all the gossip Hickey thought relevant to the British merchant community’s sympathetic pleasures in Calcutta: extracts from English newspapers shipped to the colonial metropolis from Britain, a “Poet’s Corner”, and Hickey’s special comments on the private, scandalous affairs of the officials of the British East India Company—the material for which was

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² “To be SOLD,” reads an advertisement published by Hickey in his *Gazette*: “A FINE Coffre Boy that understands the Business of a Butler, Kismudar and Cooking. Price four hundred Sicca Rupees. Any Gentleman wanting such a Servant, may see him; and be informed of further particulars by applying to the printer.” *Bengal Gazette*, December 9-16, 1780, in Nair, ibid., 157.
provided by Philip Francis, a dissatisfied member of the Council to the then Governor-General of India, Warren Hastings. Hicky’s monopoly was however short-lived. In November 1780, another publication supposedly approved by Warren Hastings and run by a salt agent, Peter Reed, and B. Messinck, a theatrical producer, hit the streets of Calcutta: the *India Gazette*. It offered four pages in a bigger page format, and with types bought off a Swedish missionary, John Zachariah Kiernander, its print quality was better than Hickey’s newspaper. The appearance of a competitor so enraged Hickey that he vilified whoever he thought was encouraging the rival production: from its proprietors to the Governor-General Hastings. Hickey’s rage was subsequently the cause of his downfall. The *Bengal Gazette* was denied postal facilities, and losing everything to defamation charges, Hickey found himself in jail in June 1781. He continued his journalistic war from the prison in the form of lampoons against Hastings until and after March 1782, when Hastings ordered the confiscation of his printing types and had the press destroyed.

It is not often in history, and in the history of newspapers in particular, that an ontogenetic recapitulation of the attributes of the historically earliest newspaper sheds some light on phylogenetic development, diversification, and attributes of the newspapers that occurred much later. The story of Hickey’s *Gazette* offers the least satisfaction in this respect—unless we are more than eager, at the expense of

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other historical factors, to locate a grand “adversarial” tradition of newspapers in
the Indian subcontinent with or without reference to a localized version of the
“decline of standards” argument that we will later learn to view with considerable
suspicion. In no ways can we trace a proper continuity from Hickey’s use of the
medium of print for “public purpose” to the English-language newspapers of
twentieth-century India. Yet, like Banquo’s ghost, the story of Hickey and his
_Gazette_ returns to breathe on every tale of sound and fury told about newspapers
in India. Perhaps because it returns with the hint of an important germ of truth
that a newspaper run for profit cannot choose to be too antagonistic to a
government on which its survival depends to a large extent. The less emphasized
aspect of this return is a general absence of reference to the hypochondriacal fears
and nightmares of the end of business that later moved editor-proprietors and
media moguls of Indian newspaper business in the twentieth century. Like
Hickey, they were hostile to competition and decried (real and imagined)
governmental control as interfering with their inalienable right to “free speech” all
the while they continued to scrape up a generous volume of state subsidies and
advertisement instead of, if it were to be remotely expected on moral or ethical
grounds, discontinuing on protest; unlike Hickey, they were clever enough to
manipulate the state’s control mechanisms to their favour, and build successful
business empires most of which still continue to run profitably in the early
decades of the twenty-first century, even though the “militancy” of their earlier
director-proprietors is sometimes missed.
With a passing tribute to the memory of Hickey's *Gazette*, then, this thesis attempts to comprehend the media technological changes characterizing the English language press in India in a time period immediately preceding the formal introduction of “economic liberalization” in India, from the commencement of the “internal Emergency” on 25th June 1975, to 24th July, 1991, when the Congress-led central government introduced its Statement of Industrial Policy, under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The choice of this period partly rests on the intermediate position it occupies between the era of state regulations inaugurated by the Nehruvian development state and the complete, systemic withdrawal of state control over Indian newspaper establishments—a period that has received little scholarly attention in the always-contemporaneous world of Indian “mass media” criticism. Another reason for this choice is that the period corresponds to what has been regularly acknowledged in writings on the Indian “mass media” as the inaugural of the “newspaper revolution”—described variously, and often with disregard for critical standards or procedures necessary in making such historical claims, as ushering in the “modernization” of the Indian press, the unshackling of bonds from nefarious state control. 4 Attributing ecumenical dimensions to this phenomenon, which by consensus manifested itself *ex nihilo* after 1977, some enthusiasts of neoliberal persuasions have gone to the extent of identifying it as a

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liberation movement, which invented the business motif for the newspaper business in India through newer techno-managerial play.\textsuperscript{5}

Only two reasoned, scholarly takes are available on the phenomenon: those that investigate the general growth and flourish of the newspaper business in India during this period with historical investigations of their technological compulsions, and trying to link them with the social motivations inherent to the newspaper business. The first is Robin Jeffrey’s broad historical investigation into the Indian-language newspaper business, where he lists three factors triggering the “newspaper revolution” after 1977: a rise in literacy, the greater use of newer composition and printing machinery, and the greater influence of Indian capitalism.\textsuperscript{6} The other is Ranabir Samaddar’s focussed investigation of the impact of the introduction of new machinery on the non-journalist workers of Indian

\textsuperscript{5} According to Vanita Kohli-Khandekar, it was in the years after 1977 that the Indian publishing industry properly transformed itself into a business, prior to that all reference to the print media business in India can only be made with the word “business” under quotation marks. Vanita Kohli-Khandekar, \textit{The Indian Media Business} (2003; New Delhi: Sage Response, 2010), 19-21. Also see Vanita Kohli-Khandekar, “Do we need Cross-Media Regulation?” in \textit{The Indian Media: Illusion, Delusion and Reality}, edited by AshaRani Mathur (New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 2006), 224-232, where in 2003—roughly two and a quarter centuries after the publication of Hickey’s \textit{Gazette}—Kohli-Khandekar identifies the Indian media business “at a very nascent stage”, while dismissing the notion of Indian media companies as media monopolies through a comparison of the revenue generated by the entire media and entertainment industry in India with the net revenues of international media conglomerates like News Corporation. With regard to the first part of Kohli-Khandekar’s argument, as we will see, the findings of this thesis are in thorough disagreement. As for the second part, it is the way of comparison that is at fault: a comparison of the net revenues of the BAE Systems (a British multinational, and one of the world’s leading sellers of weapon systems) with that of India’s defence budget for a given year might suggest in this vein a historical proof of the nascent stage of the business in weapons in India—which may not hold as true when the social and historical realities inside the geographical boundaries of the Union of India are closely considered.

\textsuperscript{6} Robin Jeffrey, \textit{India’s Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press} (2000; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003). We may note that unlike the neoliberal critics drawing differing conclusions from his research, Jeffrey identifies in the history of the Indian press during the Nehruvian era and after, the survival of Indian capitalism in spite of state control, which burgeoned (rather than came into being) after the “newspaper revolution”. Robin Jeffrey, “Monitoring Newspapers and Understanding the Indian State,” \textit{Asian Survey} 34, no. 8 (1994): 763.
newspapers, where he generally dismisses the idea of the “newspaper revolution” as an initiative mostly encouraged by state largesse, with the introduction of exogenous technology imports to the newspaper business.7

The first is an exercise in progressivism: it rigidly maps an evolutionary route that, though it does not ensure or forestall “tolerance and wisdom” on part of the “revolutionary” newspapers,8 invariably solemnizes the triumph of capitalist press-owners in India in securing power and profit from the late 1970s, alongside a celebration of their technological prowess, and their general vindication of “truth” and “justice”.9 The second indulges in lapsarianism characteristic to Marxist modes of analysis: on the one hand, it correctly locates in the technological triumph of the Indian newspapers the desires of their owners and managers who sought to expand the frontiers of inter-organizational control,10 on the other, it stresses the “inevitability” of the adoption of the new technologies and their

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8 Jeffrey, India’s Newspaper Revolution, xxxiv.
9 This is intelligible from the manner of argumentation Jeffrey maintains throughout his corpus. His later writings, more clearly emphasize his sympathies for Indian “newspaper-owning families”, who “pursue their businesses with a combination of self-interest, self-importance, public interest and flair”, in stark contrast to “faceless corporations” operating in the global North, “listed on stock exchanges and dedicated not so much to truth and justice, or even to the glorification of their owners, but to the highest annual returns for their shareholders” [Robin Jeffrey, “A Surname on the Pages,” Outlook, November 1, 2010, 80]. Whether the “news” products sold in Calcutta by Ananda Bazar group (owned by the Sarkar family) really exhibit qualitative virtues in matters relating to “truth” and “justice” over those sold in London by the News Corporation (owned by the “faceless” Murdoch family), is a prejudicial opinion on the realm of emotions, which assumes that every small-sized specimen is necessarily oppositional to and unlike the larger-sized, which might, and then, might not be true. However, as the third chapter of this thesis shows, the standards of “truth” and “justice”, especially when they are associated with the universalized concept of journalistic “objectivity”, are deeply problematic, and unstable notional constructs by themselves.
10 Samaddar, Workers and Automation, 201.
bringing of the newsroom to the fore—thus fulfilling the predictions of Marx in the “growing proletarianization” and “exemplary evolution of the journalist into an information technician”.\textsuperscript{11} (Though it goes beyond the scope of this research, we may note that the systematic capitulation of editorial space in Indian newspapers to advertisements, as more fully witnessed from the latter half of the 1990s and spilling out to the present, quite disproves the roles expected of these “proletarians” according to this variant of the Marxist prophecy.) While both provide important insights into the phenomenon, both indulge in sufficient generalizations concerning the automatic transition of the newspaper from an era of mechanical typesetting to that of “computerized” newsrooms during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, and without a systematic investigation of the newsprint angle to the Indian newspaper business which complemented the newspapers’ use of new machines and made greater circulations possible.

By acknowledging its great debt to the various findings of these two analyses, this thesis offers a fresh look on the so-called “newspaper revolution” from a historical standpoint: it presents that the “newspaper revolution” was a technological exercise in self-augmentation by oligopolistic “national” newspaper families desiring phototypesetting (PTS) machines for composition and web-offset presses for printing; an exercise that was possible only after a directional careen in the state’s priorities from the earlier developmental state model which involved the gradual dismantling of the restrictions set by the regulatory institutions, and

the easier availability of newsprint. By looking closely at the parasitical dependence of the English-language newspapers on the state in terms of resources, access to facilities, and social legitimation, it analyses the horizons of desirable aims chosen by these newspaper families concerning the technological aspects of newsmaking—during their prolonged period of operation under the Nehruvian development state and in this transitory era. It demonstrates that the phenomenon had come about with no “revolutionary” underpinnings, but from the interplay of various factors and fears that made Indian newspapers attribute techno-magical dimensions to machines used by the Northern newspapers during the 1970s, aspire for them even when not particularly equipped for technological action, and wield them as newer instruments of power.

In brief, the argument is put forward that state control remained predominately ineffective for the business of making newspapers in India—instead, it was the state that provided the English-language press access to strategic economic and cultural facilities, enabling it to lay claim to its imagined status as the “national press” before the “newspaper revolution”, and restructure its newer “free market” aspirations during, and after, the state had dispensed with the developmental agenda.
The general historical backdrop

Any discussion on the newspaper business in the Indian context, especially when it addresses questions of a technological nature, is incomplete without a reference to the inflexible and happy faith in technologism that historically remains at the core of the post-colonial Indian state’s fascination with industrial progress. It is this faith that continues to assert itself in the social arena in favour of every interventionist dream envisaged by the Indian state; it is the one that moves the state when it holds techno-progressivism as tantamount to the unfinished task of modernization that becomes its justification for the newest technological upgrade. By sanctimoniously upholding and trying to replicate what it has learnt as the spectacular and absolute triumph of progress in the industrial North, this faith asserts and reasserts itself in every act of conjuration tried out by the state in the social arena. Industrial progress becomes the dry slogan for supporting or opposing every attempted technological transformation; the faith in technologism leads to a violent denial of choices and narrowing down of all debates to the artificial systemic dichotomy of the traditional and the modern. Nevertheless, like all systems of faith, this faith in technologism bears reference to history: in this case, two distinctive yet interlinked strands of history.

The first spreads across a greater span of time when a long and cumulative process of directional socio-historical violence during the centuries of colonialism ensured the birth of various forms of proto-nationalism amongst the colonized
peoples in the Indian sub-continent;¹² as well as it led many of them to newer and incomplete technologically-induced desires that were shipped across the oceans, railroaded across the villages and the cities, telegraphed across the length of the sub-continent, and dreamed off in the new and old cities via newspaper advertisements and handbills pressed by the moveable type. In the industrial era, these desires accentuated through the colonial ordering of the world around synthetic hierarchies of progress, and the use of the Northern scientific-industrial model of technological prowess as an essential component of the civilizing-mission ideology, and as an uncomplicated and absolute measure of human advancement, creativity, and cultural worth.¹³ Technological progress attested to the supremacy of the Northern institutional structures and practices, and the “high cultural” chauvinism of the colonizers; at the same time, the analogous dehumanization and dismantling of traditional social structures through colonial policies—those that pushed alien Northern technologies and mostly the products of the imperial metropolis’s industries deep inside the Indian social spaces, simultaneously eradicating the traditional artisanal crafts and obliterating the use

¹² The real driving force of these proto-nationalist movements was not a pan-Indian “national consciousness”, but anti-imperial resentment and resistance against colonial oppression. As Eric Hobsbawm observes in this context: “Insofar as there were proto-national identifications, ethnic, religious or otherwise, among the common people, they were, as yet, obstacles rather than contributions to national consciousness, and readily mobilized against nationalists by imperial masters; hence the constant attacks on the imperialist policies of ‘Divide and rule’, against the imperial encouragement of tribalism, communalism, or whatever else divided peoples who should be, but were not, united as a single nation.” Eric Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality (1992; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 137.

of indigenous technologies and intermediate ones that bridged the gap between the traditional and the industrial in the North.

The primary effect of these violent impositions was the creation of a cultural dependency, apart from the social, economic, and technological nature of the dependencies that followed. While technological and socio-economic dependencies ensured that the most successful commercial enterprises that arose in the Indian colonial spaces were not those that succeeded by creating indigenous technologies but those that acquired and tried to graft the technologies of the industrial North in India; cultural dependency ensured that all colonial encounters with technological progress, even when they contested racist convictions of Indian incapacity in garnering technological skills, 14 or seriously questioned the validity of technology as a universal measure of excellence, were riddled by an ambivalent reliance on part of the thinkers on the virtuosity and products of Northern technological progress. 15 In other words, the asphyxiating and long historical exposure to colonialism ensured that the Northern social-evolutionist teleology with all its accoutrements weighed heavily on the colonial imagination in India: their existences interwoven with the reality of a fragmented

14 See, for example, Siddhartha Ghosh’s critique of the discriminatory colonial technical education system, and the conservatism of “nationalist” educators during the colonial era, which Ghosh insists, dually spawned the classes of unskilled, unknowledgeable, but overbearingingly proud “Baboo” engineers in India. Siddhartha Ghosh, Kaler Shabar Kolkata (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1991), 204-213.
15 As Daniel Headrick observes: “No one illustrates their ambivalent attitudes toward Western technology quite as well as Mohandas K. Gandhi, who wore handwoven garments made of homespun yarn but also used a watch, travelled by train, and kept in touch with his followers by telephone.” Daniel R. Headrick, The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 382.
and highly partial exchange with the technologically advanced civilizations of the
industrial North, the “natives” of India—especially those from the privileged
castes exposed heavily to colonial education, “modern science,” and
industrialization—accepted, in varying degrees, the innate cultural superiority of
the Northern technological model.

The exchange did not, through democratization, upset the basis of the traditional
priestly, commercial, political, and cultural powers associated with their castes, as
Marx had presumed. Rather, it served as an additional component to the powers
of these high caste élites, most of whom saw the acceptance of the Northern
technological model as a necessary condition to their caste-based emulation of the
colonizers; as Claude Alvares argues, these castes that had once chosen to become
“Persianized” under the Moghuls, easily opted for “Westernization” during the
British colonial rule—their fondness for Northern technologies, alongside the
change in attire, language, diet, and cultural preferences, were less inspired by
their desire for being “modern” than to demonstrate their ability to emulate the
culture of the British as their caste superiors who, likewise, tried hard to establish
themselves a freestanding ruling caste.16 This held important consequences for
the attitude to technology in the post-colonial situation in India in general, and
for the English-language newspaper business in particular, when a number of
these caste élites came to own newspapers in India printing in a language

16 Claude Alvares, Decolonizing History: Technology and Culture in India, China and the West: 1492 to
incomprehensible to the masses of people, but at the linguistic apex of the administrative, political, economic, and cultural transactions of the élites.

The second history occupies a shorter period in historical time. It begins, against the general stretching out of the first, in early twentieth century when there were attempts in both the imperial metropolises and the colonies to reinforce the techno-progressive model of social development by stressing a crucial and hurried association between technological triumph and modernity—this was thought achievable through modernization overdrives, the total incorporation of colonies and former colonies in the industrial paradigm. This was perhaps where the synchronicity between the liberal bourgeois and Marxist thinking in the North was the most pronounced—from interest in the intentional use of specific technologies used in the North to the untroubled faith in technological modernization for bringing non-Northern societies under the ambit of Northern stages of development whether through capitalistic or socialistic means—there occurred in the competing theories the same unshakeable belief in a total societal transformation possible through quick and decisive engineering in the causal socio-economic core through (modern) technological intervention.¹⁷

With the coming of the modernization hypothesis, the use of the techno-scientific measure as a touchstone for verifying and defining everyday life and culture in the colony coincided, more forcefully, with the reduction of all societal

concerns to the deeply flawed doctrine of economic reductionism prevalent in the North—one that tried, through various means, to address the complexity of the human condition only through economic want-satisfaction.  

By the end of the Second World War, the problematic ideology of the civilizing mission had ceded way to the affected systemic coherence and social-scientism proposed by the modernization hypothesis as experts of diverse persuasions debated the transition from “tradition” to “modernity” in the colonies. In stark contrast to its predecessor’s vision of centuries of civilizational contact that would roll endlessly for changing seasons and unchanging years of colonial domination before the disparities between the “civilized” and the “uncivilized” finally ceased to exist, the modernizers saw the untroubled transition to modernity realizable in the newly liberated colonies through a drastically reduced time frame: the “underdeveloped” nations of the “Third World” could achieve modernization in decades, while the “emerging” nations could expect parity with the “First World” feasibly within an individual’s lifetime.

The modernization paradigm was also distinct from its predecessor in that it projected the cultural and cognitive basis of technological progress as scientifically

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18 As Karl Polanyi reminds us, economic want-satisfaction forms the exceptional rather than the natural determinants for human behaviour and motivation. The triumph of this narrow economic outlook, as Polanyi suggests in his historical study of the myths of classical liberalism, can be best viewed as a historical peculiarity equally influenced by nineteenth-century economic liberalism and the constringent class theory of Marxism—one that allowed an all-embracing scope to economic reductionism and championed the validity of the unusual motive of economic want-satisfaction as an universally effective one. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (1944; Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 158-160.

19 Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Man*, 410-412.
established, and as confidently as it tried to dissociate itself from the histories of violence that characterized the colonial era, it resorted to greater violence in its efforts to drive to irrelevance all anti-technological traditions that had survived the centuries of colonialism. Since the prescription of modernization consisted of enunciating a series of sudden and transformational societal shifts, the “mass media” (the newspaper foremost among them) were envisaged as to serve the crucial purpose of socio-cultural reordering: simultaneously acting as indices of statistical abstracts (such as literacy, economic health, political involvement, et cetera), and as agents of domination that forcefully persuaded, through a linear and unidirectional process of information transmission, the socio-cultural legitimacy of the proposed shifts.20

The history of the Indian newspapers’ faith in technology needs to be grasped against the rhythm of the delicate, reciprocal dances of these two intertwining histories, interspersed with the blood music, screams, and silences of a million histories of exclusions, repressions, mediations, and manoeuvres which forced a complex negotiation of the idea of technological necessity for the post-colonial Indian state. While the social evolutionist teleology, informing both these histories, appeared most obligatory a template by the emerging successors of the Raj—who proceeded to carve out their national territories by mimicking the violent exclusion of peoples and communities that historically characterized the

birth of nation-states in the global North\textsuperscript{21}—the cultural and cognitive basis of Euro-American technological progress was forced \textit{de rigueur} on the peoples of the geographical territory of India by an emergent Nehruvian state, confident of its steady march to technological heaven. Any opposition to the state’s technologism provoked a countervailing disdain from the state’s theoreticians and planners, as well as from the social and cultural élites, who recognized technological progress as organized and optimum common sense as they measured its transformative aims as value-free and neutral.

In this context, we might perhaps refer to the growing disregard for the Gandhian view on technology before and during the transfer of power. Despite his penitential convulsions and hysteric insistence on a moral philosophy founded on a politically-charged spiritualism, Gandhi’s economic objections against technology had two specific grounds: he feared that the proliferation of highly mechanized, capital-intensive industries would ruin the social fabric of the country by causing cities to further encroach upon villages causing widespread unemployment and complete socio-cultural disruption; and that there would be the concentration of economic power in the hands of an urban élite, with

\textsuperscript{21} That is, the acts of emulation did not only include the inclusive “civic” form of nationalism encountered in hagiographies of the Indian state. Nor do I suggest that this was one of the failed attempts to imitate in a “non-Western” societal context, the all-encompassing cohesion attributed to nationalism as a “Western” invention—an “imagined community”. Rather, the violence and exclusionary practices that characterized the birth of the Indian nation-state has rough historical correspondences and debts to the conflictual and exclusionary processes of nation-building that, as Anthony W. Marx argues, lie at the core of and historically characterize the birth and formation of nation-states in the industrial North, primarily in Western Europe. See Anthony W. Marx, \textit{Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism} (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
disastrous socio-economic and historical consequences for the rest of the country.\(^\text{22}\) These were complemented by his more forceful normative argument against technology, one that objected to the “craze for machinery” and indiscriminate use of complex technologies: whatever their long-run or immediate social consequences, Gandhi felt that technological benefits were always incompatible with humanitarian ones, and therefore, gravely suspect.\(^\text{23}\) And yet, the emergent Indian state remained fascinated with technologism to the extent that it entirely ignored Gandhi’s apprehensions concerning the import of technology from the industrial North at the cost of non-utilisation of labour-intensive methods that Gandhi held as beneficial for labour-abundant social spaces such as India.

By the late 1940s, the faith in transformative technologies on part of the newly-formed state had greatly smothered the Gandhian opposition to technology; pitted against modernity itself, the Gandhian view on technology had become inconsequential by the time “national planning” took effect in the territories of the post-colonial state. This is the point often missed by scholars like Jeffrey who emphasize the untroubled inheritance of the Gandhian hostility to technology in

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\(^\text{22}\) For a brief overview of Gandhi’s economic objections to technology, see Ajit K. Dasgupta, *Gandhi’s Economic Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 64-87.

\(^\text{23}\) “I cannot recall a single good point in connection with machinery,” observed Gandhi in 1938, in response to a journalist’s queries: “As it expires, the machinery, as it were, says to us: ‘Beware and avoid me. You will derive no benefits from me and the benefits that may accrue from printing will avail only those who are infected with the machinery craze.’ ” M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1938), [http://www.mkgandhi.org/swarajyaihindswaraj.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/swarajyaihindswaraj.htm) (May 11, 2011). The passage clearly shows how indebted Gandhi remained to the ancient Thamusian scepticism concerning technology that Plato outlines in *Phaedrus.*
the Indian state’s attitude to its “mass media”.24 Contrary to their suppositions, the state élites and bureaucrats did not pursue the Gandhian objection with respect to specific media technologies such as the newspaper, the radio, and the television. Their nonchalance and rigidity came more from their complex alignment to technological modernization that stressed an automatic and magical transformation through the phenomenon of economic progress, and their inheritance of a colonial mindset that viewed “mass communication” as an extra-technological element to the bureaucratical organization of the state, integrated into its administrative and legitimizing mechanisms, and attached to its activities of social and political intervention through propaganda. The state retained the earlier colonial state’s way of maintaining class division in “mass media” usage: the urban élites were allowed to have their privately-owned commercial “free” press for “news” and analyses, while state-controlled broadcasting patronizingly targeted the rural poor through the radio, and later through the television—a “tradition” that held for almost the second half of the twentieth century.25

From the 1950s, the Indian state took to technologism as the only valid perspective on modern societal change: albeit a miraculous one that could lay claim to history and ethico-historical continuance of tradition through prophecies


of immediate action and the raising of “temples of humanity”. Since the state was not keen to upset structures of power, privilege, and economic concentration of wealth, the basic strategy of India’s “mixed economy” rested on a subservience to technology as a primary decision, while it carved its own feeble charters of “statolatry”—the gloriole of altruistic self-sacrifice on behalf of the state—which, as Ludwig von Mises observed more generally in 1944, also provides the necessary foundations to a philosophy of bureaucratism. The reverential awe for technology did not force the Indian state to try out radical and disastrous technological experiments in the social arena to the extent that they happened in the Soviet Union or China, for bureaucratic and political judgement in India were crucially dependent on plebiscitary returns which in turn was dependent on the orientation of the big business towards the state. Rather, as it happened, while the state tried to homebrew what Soviet technocrats devoutly called the pyatiletka (the Five Year Plan), it tailored its regulatory institutions to protect Indian big business from global capitalistic competition, and failed to install a developmental state in India.

26 The expression “temple of humanity” remains the quintessential expression of the technologism characterizing the Nehru era. It owes its origins to Jawaharlal Nehru’s assertion of technological triumph in 1955, when he laid the ceremonial foundation stone for an irrigation dam across the river Krishna at Nagarjunakonda—the archaeological site of a great centre of Buddhist learning in the second century BCE. Nehru, who saw no conflict between tradition and technology, famously declared his act of inauguration as laying the foundation to a “temple of humanity” in India, and symbolic of the new temples that would follow in its wake.

27 This was one of the many reasons as why Gandhi’s forceful plea for the decentralization of power were rejected in favour of a top-heavy centralized Westminster-influenced model of parliamentary democracy that also allowed for the existence of a big business class in the Indian economic sphere.

I am not suggesting an instrumental reading of the Indian state, historically existing only to serve as the principal executive of the Indian big business. Nor do I wish to suggest, along the lines of certain political thinkers that the state élites’ needs to continually reproduce themselves through the twin engines of a “new political technology”—plebiscitary politics, and a combination of legal bureaucracy and managerial technocracy—overwhelmed their search for older styles of political and juridical legitimacy as they placated big business. Rather, it was the inability to reconcile élite control with democratic legitimacy—understood not only in terms of its lowest common denominator, parliamentary representation—that lead the developmental state to depend on Indian big business. (It influenced the state’s relationship with the big newspapers to a great extent, especially when the most influential of these were owned by the same.) The irreconcilability of this division led the state to forsake socialist midwifery to set up a “greenhouse” for Indian big business; it found assurance in what Peter Evans calls “embedded autonomy”—the networked nature of contact between the state bureaucracy and the particularistic interests of the Indian big business. At the same time, the state’s decision gave Indian big business more room for manoeuvre, for planning its strategies of survival and capital accumulation through privileges drawn from the licensing institutions, and for pursuing selective commercial goals not at all beneficial to the purposes of “ordered

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growth”. As Vivek Chibber emphasizes, the failure of the development state in India, evident after the collapse of “national planning” during the late 1960s, bears as much relation to the state’s own shortcomings as to the organized offensive launched by Indian big business against the idea of disciplinary industrial planning: “The dilemma this posed was that the very provisions designed to elicit the support of private capital also made it rational for it to resist the instruments of discipline.”

If a dependence on Indian big business formed an integral part of the Nehruvian state’s strategic nous for “democratic planning”, its embedment in a global complex of development aid projects and technological exchange programmes made it involve itself in a search for “appropriate technology”, which actually became the conditions for a vertiginous dependence on both certified (and often disused) technologies from the global North, and knowledge prescriptions recommending heuristic pursuits—especially for new areas untouched by private capital. Obstinacy remained a long-standing characteristic of the Indian state’s decisions, during and after the collapse of the Nehruvian development state, to maintain technological projects once they had been judged as advantageous to some purpose. The meaningfulness of the state’s antecedent decisions were justified by the consequent upkeep these technological projects required from the state for their continued existence—cutting the heel, sometimes the toe or an odd

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finger, to make the foot fit the shoe. Coupled with these Procrustean endeavours, an overwhelming faith in technologism and an incomplete grasp of technological modernization strengthened the belief, equally moving the state planners and big business, that technological solutions once vigorously worked out would continue to smooth out uninterrupted benefits across generations and until the last of the stars fell across the skies—it was this belief which clung fiercely and unrealistically to the manufacture of newsprint at Nepanagar, the making of teleprinters by the Hindustan Teleprinters Limited, or, for that matter, the assemblage of the “indigenous” Ambassador cars by the Birlas.

Although projected as home-grown technological solutions, the majority of technologies used in India across the public-private divide existed mostly as “creole technologies”: old technologies fallen to long disuse in the industrial North that survived their historical obsolescence in the new “indigenous” spans of

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32 We will later see this in detail in Chapter 5.

33 Hindustan Teleprinters Limited (HTL) was the public-sector company invested with the task of making teleprinters in India. Operational from 1960, HTL went into technical collaboration with an Italian firm to run a monopoly over the teleprinter business in India—selling “indigenous” teleprinters to the military, the posts and telegraph department, and the news-agencies till the use of teleprinters fell to disuse with the coming of the fax machine and the computer. When late realization dawned, the company tried to survive first by making electric typewriters modelled on obsolete versions of the Remington and IBM typewriters; then, by making electronic typewriters; during the early 1990s, as a company unsuccessfully trying to sell switching and transmission facilities to telephone companies. In 2001, the government sold HTL to Himachal Futuristic, a private firm, which acquired it with intentions to grow hotels and real estate on its factory sites in Madras. Sushila Ravindranath, “Teleprinter Tale,” Financial Express, July 6, 2009.

34 Hindustan Motors, the company manufacturing Ambassador cars, came into being during the war in 1943 when the Birla family went into collaboration with Nuffields of the United Kingdom to set up the first automobile plant in India. The production of the Ambassador car started in 1957, and continued in the same way for more than half a century. The company assembled imported engines and machine parts to the “eternal” design of a mid-1950s Morris Oxford Series III car which, during the licensing years and beyond, remained the dignifying chariot of the political élite and the state bureaucracy.
life and routine offered to them in the poorer, indigent social spaces of the global South.35 The legacies of colonialism, the high monetary costs of technological modernization, the dispassionate “humanitarianism” of the Northern technologists that made them ship only their outdated technologies to the “Third World”, and primarily the faith in technologism together ensured that there remained an overabundance of these “creole technologies” in India—to a great extent, dependent on the technical knowledge, machinery, components, spare-parts and raw material provided by transnational companies operating out of the global North. This formed more than a casual nexus. Under the light of a thousand technology collaboration agreements between the transnational companies and their Indian business collaborators enjoying the privileges granted to them by the licensing system, the import of technologies into India fell into a repetitive pattern: the restrictive clauses of the collaboration agreements prevented the Indian collaborator (who was, in all circumstances, most unwilling) to improve upon the imported technology or, for that matter, share its use with the state research institutions.36

35 David Edgerton, The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900 (2006; London: Profile Books, 2008), 43. As Edgerton observes, “creole technologies” contain a sense of the hybrid, but hybridity is not one of their defining features. Rather, the expression “creole technology” suggests that a particular technology imported into a poor country often acquires a new lease of life and longevity, long after it has been winnowed out from the rich countries where it had once been invented. This is another way of putting: whatever their expected ideals, and the reasons for their obsolescence in the North, their continuation in the global South justifies and preserves the “original” purpose of these inventions.

36 Suniti Kumar Ghosh, Development Planning in India: Lumpendevelopment and Imperialism (Mumbai: Research Unit for Political Economy, 2002), 58.
At the same time, the institutions, practices, and networks that grew of their “Indianization”, less in the small factories of urban shantytowns than in the biggest techno-industrial projects pursued jointly by the state and Indian big business, often acted as countervailing forces in the societal level that rendered the state’s attempts at technological closure through newer technologies mostly partial; if adamant on the benefits of technological progress, the state élites were wary enough of ricochet effects in the political and economic spheres if they proceeded to allow drastic technological restructuring that appeared detrimental to the interests of big business. It followed that whenever technological obsolescence loomed large over various fields of business and threatened them with extinction, the easy option of fresh import of technology (proven in the North) prevailed over the need for domestic research on the upgrade of their technological components.

Against this backdrop, a variety of “technological revolutions” happened in India after the collapse of the Nehruvian development state. Supported by the state and its institutions, closely followed and often led by private capital, they were in reality short-cut attempts by a state-subsidized capitalism to supervene upon the use of various “creole technologies”, mostly by replacing them with newer technological imports which brought with them their own set of ideologies, organizations, and symbols—while the importers spoke the old metaphors of technological progress in newer, coarse voices crying for deregulation and the “free market”. As we will see of the “newspaper revolution”, it was to the
transformative desires of the post-Nehruvian state—which fantasized about nuclear reactors, electronic gadgets, satellites, colour television, and space travel, while the macerated dreams of constructing dams, bridges, roads, schools, universities, and mechanized farm convertibles slowly exhausted themselves—that the aspirations for the “newspaper revolution” most tenaciously attached itself.

Scopes and definitions

This thesis is not, and does not purport to be, a comprehensive history of the English-language press in India during and after the collapse of the developmental state in India. Nor does it attempt to offer a thorough and systematic account of the technological practices of newsmaking in India.

What it proposes, in the course of narrating a story subject to a thousand digressions, is an evaluation of possibilities and ways in which the workings of the newspaper business in India might be historically reviewed and critiqued, involving questions that interrogate the historical play of individuals and institutions manufacturing “news”, their relation to social and institutional structures, and the media technologies they employed to sell neatly-trimmed pieces of newsprint marked with printing ink—the pieces carrying strong ideological markers of their makers’ preferences for all things social, political, and
entertaining, but also the characteristic and tangible marks of the printing machinery used. Frequently, an excessive insistence on the politics of the symbolic and lexical codes contained in newspapers makes us forget what they really are: politically and symbolically charged material objects branded by time that primarily sell readers to advertisers, apart from pretentiously and self-importantly averring to represent the actual world of the preceding day in all its intricately compounded complexity.

Overwhelmingly, the critique of the newspaper in the Indian context still largely adheres to the older, problematic view of newspapers as purveyors of “free speech”. This ensures that the analysis of newspaper “content” sees considerable application—from detailed investigations of intentionality in select newspapers’ coverage of issues and events relating to particularistic themes such as the play of gender bias to short-term insistences on the élitist articulation of “news” discourses. While historically-founded content analyses definitely expand on our understanding of particular aspects of newsmaking, those that exclusively seek empirical verification, at their best indulge in historical simplification when

37 It is perhaps not irrelevant to note in this context P. Sainath’s observation that the “mass media” in India, in terms of their internal social composition, proclivities, as well as their attentiveness, are the “most exclusionist institutions of the Indian democracy”, and that virtually no Indian newspaper has full-time correspondents on agriculture in a country where the overwhelming majority of population is rural, and where drought, devastation, corporate plunder, and farmers’ suicides seriously endanger the rural economies. See P. Sainath, “Disconnect between Mass Media and Mass Reality,” in Market Media and Democracy, compiled by Buroshiva Dasgupta (Kolkata: Institute of Development Studies Kolkata and Progressive Publishers, 2011), 19-23.


stressing particularities, apart from running the risk of becoming a counting exercise.\textsuperscript{40} Apart from the content analyses, there exists an abundance of general condemnations of the Indian newspapers’ distortion of reality through an insistence on their manufacture of “paid news”\textsuperscript{41} (as if “news”, in general terms, are not manufactured), and the abdication of their role of the “fourth estate”\textsuperscript{42} (as if this role was ever historically operative in the Indian context). What all these views have in common is the assumption of the neutrality of the commercially-owned newspaper as a capable and transparent medium of unbiased communication, at least the strong hypothetical suggestion of a possibility of its being nonpartisan a mediator. As it is suggested throughout this thesis, this neutrality itself becomes strongly suspect when we begin to consider the newspaper’s characteristics as a technological medium.

I would like to particularly insist upon the above: it is less important that “news” made by newspapers represent a truncated, garbled, and designified version of reality, or that they are a manufacturing of reality. We need to be aware that every word that occurs between the newspapers’ columns is a word that carries on it symbolic and cultural marks of entitlement and privilege; every kind of

\textsuperscript{40} In this context, we can refer to David Barrat’s general identification the limitations of content analysis: “Just as the formal questionnaire is a contrived form of social interaction, content analysis is an unnatural and artificial way of looking at the media... In seeking to isolate and categorize ‘particles’ of media output, content analysis is in danger of taking items out of context.” David Barrat, Media Sociology (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1986), 106.


information communicated as “news” is information procedurally favoured, technologically processed, and ritually chosen to be communicated over countless other equally-valid information that too might have been communicated in print. In other words, “news” carried by a newspaper is not a distortion, or even a reflection of reality: it is the product of the newspaper’s self-reference as a technological medium which primarily reflects its own views on social legitimacy, and closely matches its expectations and definitional horizons of profitability.

The point about self-reference deserves some clarification. Most reporters and editors, constantly wary of being charged as propagandistic, readily acknowledge that not only in the “news” and opinions expressed through its editorial pages is the newspaper a personality (as distinct from its owners, editors, reporters, managers, and press workers), commenting upon things and societo-political events from its individual point of view, but in the manner of presentation of “news”—in the “news” content, in the typographic shapes, the arrangement of images and “news” items of varying importance, the nature of advertisements carried, et cetera—the newspaper they choose to serve has a definite (“objective”) approach towards “news”, one that differs from the others competing in the same arena. I want to emphasize that the way in which “news” are contained in a newspaper, along with the non-“news” elements that exist alongside the “news” on paper by virtue of its use of specific technologies of composition and printing, together serve as important indicators of a newspaper’s self-esteem and its
projected social image—what I choose to refer to, and without any psychological implications whatsoever, as its self-image.

The term “self-image” is used to denote in general terms the image with which a modern newspaper likes to locate itself in a particular socio-historical space—the ways in which, for example, the Hindu continues to imagine and project itself as “India’s national newspaper since 1878”; the Times of India now externalizes it being “India’s national advertiser”; or the way the Statesman, in the 1970s, acted as the exemplar of what is today nostalgically evoked as “old school journalism”:

It did not believe in chatting with its readers. It talked to them, in carefully cadenced prose, from the benign eminence of its editorial pulpit. The reader was always ‘gentle reader’, whose gentility would be outraged by the merest whiff of commercialism. So in the reports and articles—barring those on the business page—no brand names or names of commercial establishments could be mentioned. Such a mention would have been a ‘puff’, and would immediately expose the paper to the charge of having compromised its editorial objectivity. Of having sold out to ‘vested interests’, a latter-day scarlet whore of Babylon. To avoid such an unfortunate metamorphosis, The Statesman would resort to tortuous circumlocution. When ‘Housewife’ Roda Dustoor—the wife of company secretary P. T. Dustoor—who also did the Western film reviews—wrote her weekly shopping column she could never refer by name to Flury’s but always had to say ‘a popular Swiss confectionery on the corner of Park Street and Middleton Row’.

These images, accompanied with varying fondness for historicizing its being a “mass medium”, gets constructed for every newspaper through two different kinds

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of social projections: one that refers to the newspaper’s view of itself as a business enterprise that tries to maximize its commercial profit through a wooing of advertisers and indirectly, for the sake of advertisers, a readership; the other that refers to its perceptions about how it is looked upon by its advertisers, and therefore again, by a certain kind of readership, as a privileged provider of “news”.

A reference to a newspaper’s self-image, as it is founded on a newspaper’s second-order assumption of a readership in both cases, draws attention to the question of the intention of transmission: where a newspaper’s conceptualization of its readership emerges, as Raymond Williams insists, “not from an inability to know them, but from an interpretation of them according to a formula”. 44 According to Williams, this formulaic interpretation is impossible unless newspapers, the best and the worst of them as “objective” providers of “news”, begin conceiving themselves as capable devices of effecting social control, and conceptualize their readership as a mob: “The idea of the masses is an expression of this conception, and the idea of mass-communication a comment on its functioning.” 45

45 Ibid., 323. Williams’s objection to the commercial newspaper as a controlling device springs from its severance with the common ties and interests of a community, as in the case of a community newspaper, and finding refuge in the construction of a market, “interpreted according to a ‘mass’ criteria”—“the fact that it and its readers are organized in certain kinds of economic and social relation” [Ibid., 331]. In fact, in consistence with his unswerving commitment to the identification of communication as arising only in a historically formed and culturally bound “community”, Williams considers all attempts to separate the means of communication from their means of production as acts of capitulation to the essentially bourgeois vision of “mass communication” [Ibid., 331-323; also see Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (1961; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 55-65; Raymond Williams, “Communication and Community”, in Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism, edited by Robin Gable (1961; London and New York: Verso, 1989), 19-31; Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (1976; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 72-
A newspaper’s self-image is primarily founded on a first-order assumption of its own specific and definitive abilities to woo advertisers: an assumption founded less on the temporal stability of the old markers on profitability than on the continual replenishment of its “structures of feeling”, and more importantly, on its attempts to renew profitability through the restructuring of its aspirations to promote the diurnal fantasies it constructs for sale. In other words, on the basis of the distinction it makes between itself as a manufacturer of a commercial object called the newspaper and its self-attributed social role of a legitimate provider of peremptory voices contained in its “news”, a newspaper’s self-image is confidently emphasized (if not defined) not only in terms of its production purposes as how it generates “news”, but also in terms of how it puts the technological medium of the newspaper to convenient use to make “news” work on paper. Too often, an


46 I borrow the term “structures of feeling” from Raymond Williams’s hypothetical attempts to define a zone of social experience in the sociology of culture, as distinct from the more formal concepts of “world-view” or “ideology”, where the affective constituents of the “practical consciousness” of participants interact with the structures of “a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies” (Williams’s emphasis) [Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977),132]. As a concept, “structure of feeling” acknowledges the role of the subjective working inside institutional structures, and that “truth” at its best, can be reached at an inter-subjective level. At the same time, a prolonged insistence on it becomes a risky business; as Fred Inglis warns us: “for to study feeling as it articulates as action is to risk becoming quite sterile with abstraction, like a golfer studying the rhythm of other people’s swings until he locks himself tight with self-consciousness” [Fred Inglis, Raymond Williams (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 229]. Moreover, as David Simpson notes, Williams’s constant recourse to the Gramscian notions of the “dominant” and the “residual” working in the field of culture, makes “structure of feeling” (as the aggregate of individualized but aesthetic experiences of participants in the yet unformulated structures) resemble ideology in the classical Marxist sense (stressing the negativity of false consciousness), or at its best, a mix of different ideologies in ferment [David Simpson, “Feeling for Structures, Voicing ‘History’,” in Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams, edited by Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 37-39]. For these reasons, the term is used sparingly and with caution.
emphasis on newspaper’s politico-social function leads to an excessive preoccupation with the first, and at the expense of inattention to the second.

A newspaper’s restructuring of its aspirations involves, among other things, some media technological factors that dissemble material “biases”: those that cannot be understood if we view the newspaper solely in terms of an additive politico-social, and primarily political, organization. In Chapter 2, with reference to the intellecctions of a number of twentieth century thinkers on the “mass media” like Harold Innis (and to some extent, Marshall McLuhan), Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Jacques Ellul, who attest on the fact that media technologies foster their own set of material “biases” which have important implications for the way “news”, technology, politics, and indeed, “culture” gets conceptualized in social spaces, we identify the need to address questions on media technology, especially when there are some factors peculiar to the material nature of the newspaper as an ensemble of media technologies that cannot be understood if we are talking solely in terms of its political shaping. This goes along with a reiteration of these thinkers’ insistence on the ecological nature of transformation accompanying the instauration of every new media technology, which disproves, in particular, the idea that a technological change is only a sum total of all its social components, or simply an additive or subtractive factor to the environment in which it is introduced. As Neil Postman succinctly puts the implications of Harold Innis’s thoughts on the play between the material nature
of new media technologies and the affective role they play in the realm of politics and “culture”:

New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think about. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think with. And they alter the nature of the community: the arena in which thoughts develop.47

A reference to media technology in the case of newspapers, therefore, does not divert attention from the question of intention, or for that matter, distract us from referring to the embedded nature of technology in newspapers-as-artefacts that ultimately reflect certain socio-political imperatives.48 Rather, it allows us to ask questions that are forgotten alongside the material basis of “news”, and the way newspapers use specific technologies to affect the “substance” of “news”; permitting us to analyze the “structures of feeling” moving human players in their ways of adoption of these technologies. It sharpens the incisiveness of these questions with the observation that “culture” always pays the price of technology, and that without arguing for some alternate form of utopian vision, which—highly capable it may be in demonstrating the play of economic and political motives within the dissonance of conflicting ideologies—invariably accompanies a tragic inability to exceed the range of vision permitted by the same utopian modality, especially when the mediated nature of knowledge seems to make


48 In this context, we may refer to Langdon Winner’s insistence that there remains the further need to take technological artefacts seriously, for their characters might reveal particularities that can act as necessary complements to all theories of the socio-political determination of technology. Langdon Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” Daedalus 109, no. 1 (1980): 121-136. 123.
provisional admissions, observations, and critiques on mediated “culture” inseparable from an assumed socio-historical perspective on futurity envisaged in the form of social and political control. More importantly, it makes us aware that capitalists and technologists are highly insensitive to the unpredictable and irreversible aspects of the technological changes they introduce, to the extent that they superciliously act as “cultural risk takers” in the overthrowing of older traditions and socio-cultural formations in different contexts rather than being merely self-important, personal risk takers.

If a newspaper’s credence is founded on its claim to exclusivity: it is not only because of its operations as a privileged provider of “news” in a symbolic terrain confusingly referred to as its circulation market, but for the reason that a newspaper tries to manoeuvre for legitimacy and special attention in a social space where, in most cases, other newspapers (and other “mass media”) also happen to operate according to the more or less same conceptual or operational cultural criteria set for validation: through “news sourcing”, advertiser appeal, and

49 The classical Marxist insistence on the reclaiming of technological media after the abolition of “class society” can be a case in point here. This is referred to in some detail in Chapter 2, where I trace Walter Benjamin’s disagreements with the Marxist view of the technological media, and later, find myself in general agreement with Jacques Ellul’s observation that all utopic visions of society, including the most egalitarian of Marxist visions, contain definitive dreams of totalitarianism and envisaged control. Marxism’s close attachment to the idea of the political “class” makes it question the universalist pretensions of the “mass media” and reject the fixed status of “news” in social spaces through ideology-critique. However, the same attachment prompts it to find utopic faith in a means-end rationality that, generally, makes its grant autonomy to technology, apart from going characteristically silent on the systematic cultural exterminations carried out by the communist regimes in twentieth-century history, or identifying as why the maxim “There is no Pravda in Izvestia, and there is no Izvestia in Pravda” (There is no Truth in News, and there is no News in Truth) became the identifying characteristic of “mass media” for all socialist territorial states like the Soviet Union.

“objective” newsmaking. To put it differently, it is the competition given to a newspaper by other similar claimants to the privilege of arrogant and unidirectional transmission, and the extent of the recognition it grants to this competition, that are influential on a newspaper’s conceptualization of itself. This means that on the one hand, a newspaper has to insist on a unique character of “news” carried by it, on the other, it has to professionally lay claim to distinction, over others, in terms of how its “news” is print to fit.

The fitting of “news” is often unpleasantly physical, for the use of the medium of print invariably insists on (if not enforces, as Walter J. Ong suggests51) a sense of closure. Kitsch becomes integral to the newspaper’s technological recreation of the daily “news” pages for the same reason, as we will see in Walter Benjamin’s critique of the newspaper, where he identifies the generation of kitsch in the newspaper’s attempts to force a comprehensive and ordered view of the world through unproblematic technological replication, and through its assertions that the version of reality it offers is the only admissible, distinctive view of reality. This laying claim to distinction is found in a newspaper’s acute awareness of itself as a hand-held portable material medium made of paper that has to deal with,

51 “A newspaper’s pages are normally all filled—certain kinds of printed material are called ‘fillers’—just as its lines of type are normally all justified (i.e. all exactly the same width). Print is curiously intolerant of physical incompleteness. It can convey the impression, unintentionally and subtly, but very really, that the material the text deals with is similarly complete or self-consistent.” Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982; London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 130. Ong’s insistence on typographical justification holds true to great extent in the case of “traditional” newspapers opting for narrow serried columns of justified type unrelieved by pictures or large headlines. At the same time, a qualifier needs to be added: newspapers after the invention of “features” put to use justified type for only for what they thought “hard news”, and set as convention the use of left-aligned type for “soft news” with white space visible in the ragged edges.
because of the specific demands of the medium, a number of non-“news” particularities that include, but are not restricted to, a newspaper's design and presentational elements.

As Peter Shillingsburg observes in the case of a literary text, the design and the presentational elements constitute the bibliographic codes that by way of appearance importantly affect and fix the lexical codes of that text: “It is said that the bibliographic elements telegraph to readers the ways in which they should read the lexical text.”52 In the case of a newspaper, a greater and more anxious desire is at work in its obsession to successfully propagate its own image in society as it attempts to fix the connotation and meaning of its “news” much before the vans start rolling out of its presses: a desire to impress on its readers—as-advertisers (and readers as commodities to be sold to the advertisers) its technological uniqueness in providing “news” in embodied form through printing and composition technologies, and fixed through the presentational forms newsmakers call “furniture”. This desire is apparent in every newspaper’s compulsive and manic attachment to the distinctiveness of its nameplate—the title of the newspaper set horizontally in special type appearing at the top of the first page in every edition—which supposedly sets the “tone” for a newspaper’s unique way of presenting “news”. The name of a newspaper, together with the dateline, occurs prominently at the top of every page—except for the edit page.

where the name is emphasized more “traditionally” in the “mast” (more properly, the “flag”) along with the date of the particular edition, and its temporal position in the sequence of editions—adding symbolic weight and anchorage for the newspaper’s attachment and attention to the “news” content occurring below. This is concomitant to an emphasis, achieved through typographic means, on self-referent qualifying phrases and terms within the “news” body (such as “it was first reported by THE STATESMAN,” “in an exclusive interview with THE TELEGRAPH,” and so on) in the hope that they together create a stable, if nor permanent, attachment to its exclusivity as a provider of “news”.  

Along with “news”, a newspaper attempts to put a material distance between itself and its competitors through differing but consistent emphases on article headlines, typographic styles, the thematic and sequential arrangement of “news” items on page, the number of columns and their size (the inviolable “column rules”), the frequency of using images in proportion to the printed “news”

54 It is a newspaper convention from the early days of the “mass” press that makes newsmakers place the most important “news” of the day on the last column of the front page. The reason for this place of honour is partly due to a convention of the linotype era that allowed a long article to continue on the second page without a “break”, partly because of the assumption of the newspaper’s future appearance on the kiosks and stands together with other newspapers—where the head-up stacking of newspapers in a pile brings out this column in prominence. John L. Given, Making a Newspaper (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1907), 46.
55 All newspapers adhere to some basic grid-based layout while arranging “news” items, pictures, and advertisements—the grid, even if its underlying, is indispensable for each and every page. A newspaper grid is made up of columns, specific to each newspaper’s insistence on its size and shape: a broadsheet newspaper usually has eight to ten columns on a page, a tabloid has six to eight, a mid-sized “Berliner” has five wide columns. While the “column rules” are inviolable in terms of “news” placement, newspapers often resort to the “bastard measure” (deviations on the grid) to force-accommodate “news” that flank advertisements [Mark Tattersall, “Page Layout and Design,” in Pulling Newspapers Apart: Analysing Print Journalism, edited by Bob Franklin (London and New York: Routledge, 2008),
matter, and also, with an importance attached to composition technology and printing technology which make these distinctions possible. Consequently, every newspaper re-launch is emphasized by a change of the nameplate, a rearrangement of “furniture”, and an insistence on its technological superiority over others in the field who lack such simplicity or sophistication. This suggests that two crucial levels of spatialization, none more important than the other, are always operational in the making of a newspaper: one in which a newspaper controls “news” through “objective” professionalism within its conceptual reworking of reality, and another which fixes “news” to the structure and material shape of the newspaper for the purpose of dividing and individuating discourses by disjuncting (and often de-signifying) their content, style, pages, design and register.

A newspaper’s first-order preference for advertisers portends that a newspaper has to primarily cater to the interests of its advertisers in terms of space allotted to them on the pages. The advertisement department of a newspaper is set on this task long before actual newsmaking commences; the shape and size of a newspaper, the number of pages, the number of special supplements and pullouts, and the frequency of special “news” digests, all depend on the advertisement department’s ability to sell space, and the willingness of advertisers as buyers of space to pay high costs for visibility. These variations are governed by the amount

199-200]. The “column rules” are also disregarded when newspapers print full-page advertisements on the cover page, as can be witnessed in their recent proliferation across English-language newspapers in India.
of advertisements that a newspaper is capable of attracting; they have directly
nothing to do with the importance of “news” contained as such.56 (It is another
matter that most reporters, editors, and editor-proprietors of Indian newspapers
forget this when arguing for their newspaper’s rebellious or “ethical” stand.57) The
space devoted to “news” on the front page, as well as in the inside pages, is only
realizable after the day’s advertisements have been allotted and fixed for the
paper. In terms of practical newsmaking this means advertisements affect not just
the “objective” affiliation of diverse “news”, but also determine the extent of their
material inclusion.

A decisive factor to the ensuring of daily doses of advertisement in the pages is
the newspaper’s strategic employment of composition and printing machinery.
The primary focus of their use is in enforcing technological supremacy through
speed in production, the conquest of time—a historical carryover from times
when the newspaper was the speediest disseminator of “news”, as well as a
reiteration of the prudish self-importance it grants itself as a technological device
for enhancing the quick visibility of advertisements in social space. Another

56 While the ideology-critique approach to the “mass media” draws attention to a newspaper’s
principal dependence on advertisement revenues for its survival, and the subsequent shaping of “news”
content in terms of aspirational messages suiting the interests of advertisers, not often does it pay
attention to what this connection entails in the making of “news” in a newspaper. See the discussion
on the Herman-Chomsky “propaganda model” in Chapter 3, and also Mike Wayne, Marxism and
57 For example, witness how in his outlining of the “principles of ethical journalism”, the editor-
proprietor of the Hindu highlights the devotion of his paper’s “soul” to editorial functions, while easily
admitting the absence of walls between his paper’s editorial and marketing functions, and that eighty
percent of its total earnings comes from advertisement revenue. N. Ram, “Defining the Principles of
Ethical Journalism,” in Practising Journalism: Values, Constraints, Implications, edited by Nalini Rajan
decisive factor that a newspaper has to take into account is the question of availability of newsprint. Newsprint becomes crucial for the survival of a newspaper on two counts: the actual availability of newsprint decides the number of pages it can plan (especially in situations when the state tries to regulate and control the supply of newsprint through licensing, as we will see later of the Indian newspapers under the period of our study); a newspaper’s consumption of newsprint has to match the circulations it projects to advertisers—the newspaper strangely functioning as the only industry that affords and agrees to have a considerable portion of its manufactured product, and not just “news”, thrown back on itself as waste on a daily basis.

The ease of access to newsprint affects the way in which the content hierarchy of “news” items is arranged on a page, the use and quantity of white space around page elements, and the density of “news” items and advertisements appearing on each page, the size of the newspaper and its price, circulation, and therefore advertiser appeal. The quality of the newsprint a newspaper has access to determines to a great extent a newspaper’s presentation of “news”: the use or avoidance of reversed type (white type against a black background), blocking (the use of black or coloured blocks to highlight certain items), and its need for “visual interruptions” like photographs and information graphics. (The preference of “traditional” journalism in India for “news” in clear lines of type over “visual interruptions” like photographs and information graphics rests on the assumption that these distract and cause a reader to stop reading the main “news” contained
in the columns. However, this assumption is also part of that history of newspapers in India where the reproduction of these elements was impossible because of many factors, one of which included newspapers’ limited access to, and their use of, poor-quality newsprint.)

The accessibility of newsprint affects newspaper pagination, form, and content planning in a way that is most evident during and after times of wars: the growth of “features” in American newspapers was a direct consequence of the greater availability of newsprint after the American Civil War;58 British newspapers, who in 1941 were allowed to publish only four pages a day due to newsprint rationing, could think of “revolutionizing” their newspapers only after rationing was abolished in England in 1958.59 In more general circumstances, “news” is made at the critical juncture points when newspapers secure their daily dose of newsprint and are alert enough to deal in circulation figures which are not at odds with accounts of their newsprint consumption, and yet make advertisers recognize their uniqueness in achieving readership loyalty through their use of editorial content, as well as their successful employment of technologies of printing and composition.

With the above connections in mind, the thesis expands on the following outline. Chapter 2, as noted earlier, explores the thoughts of a few thinkers who have conceptualized the inclusionary practices of media technologies acting as

environments; it argues that we need to understand newspapers as “mass media” in terms of what they are: profit-driven information machines that are at the same time restrictive mediating environments, imposing severe limits on the society’s vision of what constitutes reality.

Chapter 3 draws reference to various scholarship on newsmaking practices, and historically traces the invention of the intrinsically evasive concept of journalistic “objectivity” in the Northern hemisphere—the doctrinaire and rigid preoccupation with the affective nature of “news” that dictates the reporter’s questions, shapes the management’s policies, and influences the editorial decisions to include objects of information as “news”—a standard uncritically adopted by the élite newspapers in India. It identifies “objectivity” as a twentieth-century phenomenon, than a historical condition intrinsic to the press. By identifying newsmaking as a set of ritual practices which conforms more to what Pierre Bourdieu calls “symbolic domination”, it argues that the extent to which a newspaper professes a nonpartisan but rigorous pursuit of “objectivity” is to be read as a function of its power and status in the society as how it provides specialized commentary and analysis through its “news”, and how it makes that “news” according to the requirements of the specific media technologies in use.

Chapter 4 provides a brief historical overview of the relation that existed between the élite English-language newspapers in India and the state during the collapse of the British Raj, and the growth of the Nehruvian developmental state. It notes the adoption of Northern newsmaking standards and customs by “nationalist”
English-language newspapers, and charts the formal entry of Indian big business in the Indian newspaper scene after the Second World War, and how newspaper proprietors from these caste-based families who had acted as speculators during the war, chose to enhance their social prestige by becoming editor-proprietors of English-language newspapers, earlier run by British proprietors from urban centres and provincial capitals of British India. It discusses the state’s ineffectual prescription of “internal control” for newspapers, and the English-language newspapers’ staking of claim to the status of the “national press”, how the state generously accorded them privilege and legitimacy through protection from international competition, and patronized them with advertisements, and economic and cultural facilities.

Chapter 5 attempts to historically outline the system of newsprint licensing that evolved in India under the developmental state, the role played by the state licensing institutions, their efficacy, and the myths and realities behind the control mechanisms. It shows that newsprint control was a facility collectively asked of the state by the big Indian newspapers in the 1950s, in their desire to ensure uninterrupted supplies of newsprint; by the 1970s, newsprint had become the self-imposed prison in which the “national” newspapers of India trapped themselves. It highlights the fact that the English-language newspapers were the prime beneficiaries of the newsprint licensing system, and that a directional shift in the Indian state’s newsprint allocation policy from 1975 predominantly fuelled the sudden rise in circulations of the “newspaper revolution”.

Chapter 6 attends to the media technological changes carried out during the “newspaper revolution”: the technologies discarded, the new technologies introduced, how the English-language press chose them, together with a brief attempt to understand the implications of these technological changes for the business of making newspapers in India. It shows that a faith in technology as an ideology-independent (and therefore unquestionably optimistic, if not certain) force of uninterrupted possibilities characterized the English-language press’s use of imported machinery and technologies from the North; and that it opted for new technologies of composition and printing only when it considered its self-image as the “national press” as seriously threatened by the impending arrival of television, the obsolescence of its printing machinery in the North, and the imagined fear of “press nationalization”. It argues that a directional shift in the state’s priorities following the collapse of the development state enabled the import of these machines through the partial relaxation of licensing restrictions on press equipment. The chapter concludes on the note that that the new technologies did not ensure the unfolding of an uninterrupted line of technological progress for all newspapers, and while some newspapers were able to replenish their self-images, there were others, including a century-old “nationalist” English daily, who succumbed to the uncertain techno-magic of the new machines.

In brief, the thesis shows that the “newspaper revolution” had nothing spontaneous to it: rather, it was founded on a patient accretion of a thousand
benefits acquired from the earliest days of the Indian republic; it erupted in the late 1970s when the newspapers were capable of convincing the state élites that the practices and methods they allowed the newspapers confirmed to the natural outgrowth of a “general law” of technological progress.

The intention of this exploration, as I have already noted, is not to exhaustively review the socio-historical circumstances, institutional, organizational, and technological factors that culminated in the “newspaper revolution”. Instead, it is to show that it was less occasioned by a “withering away of the state”, as Jeffrey has argued,\(^60\) than a conscious support extended to these newspapers by a state who had started revising on its developmental agenda. In other words, the technological changes were not engendered by a “revolution” of free-thinking, tenacious newspapers who stood up to the Indian state, but resulted from a collusion of technologically-induced desires and newer interests among state players, the regulatory authorities, and the big business, in whose real and symbolic urges some of the English-language newspapers found powerful support to reinvigorate their imagined status as the “national press”. Also that the newspapers had to use up the excess quotas of newsprint in a time when newsprint had become cheaper in the open market than in the black market which existed since the Second World War.

\(^{60}\) Jeffrey, *India’s Newspaper Revolution*, xiii.
The broader intention of this thesis is to problematize the various taken-for-granted historical assumptions about the English-language press in India. Rather than address the diversity of what is truly the “Indian press”—fertile varieties of newsmaking traditions and histories that include, but are not restricted to, the making of intricately hand-written and the lithographed newspaper, as well as the small district newspaper still composed by hand and printed on the letter press, and the multifarious world-views that go into their making—it limits its questionings by focussing on the big newspapers that most threateningly pretended (and still pretend) to a pan-Indian “national presence”, mostly by their being the prime beneficiaries of a state-subsidized capitalism, and on account of their publishing one or few dailies from an Indian city, and one from the capital city of Delhi.

More generally, by looking at the nature and scope of technologism inherent to these newspapers' business of making “news” in India, it tries to build an awareness that the technological is not the mighty demiurge as the contemporary “mass media” wants us to see, infer, and think about reality, engrossed as they are in a commotion of moving bytes on the information superhighways, and the superficial play of bedazzling, commercial images floating on the television screens in times when the newspaper starts more and more resembling the television in its grotesquerie, but always with little or no attention to the less glamorous but more real communities, dusty old tracks, and crisscrossing
communicating songlines that are still there on the face of the earth, and which
in all probability, will continue to remain so in the future.

A note on methodology

“Method is a digression,” Walter Benjamin famously wrote while outlining the
persistent hesitations, and the continual pausing for breath for re-
conceptualization that he felt characterizes all acts of explorations:

Representation as digression—such is the methodological nature of the
treatise. The absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure is its
primary characteristic. Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new
beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object.61

Without the slightest affectations for making an original, rigorous theoretical
argument on the mystery of the “mass media”, my writing for the most part
borrows from the intellectual works of many thinkers, including Benjamin, to
indulge in lengthy digressions. These are mostly attempts to build the argument
which, I can only hope, proceeds to expand on the awareness of the English-
language newspaper in India as a tangible commercial artefact targeting social
spaces, and containing within it complex values of cultural, social and symbolic
capitals. I do not claim an understanding—nor do I attempt to thoroughly
delineate—as how newspapers in India, as texts, construct ideological and cultural
meaning in different social matrices outside the traditional realms of
hermeneutical and linguistic operations. For that reason, unlike many who have

61 Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama (1928; London and New York: Verso,
proceeded to enthusiastically trace the broader socio-cultural effects of India’s “economic liberalization” to the impact side of “mass media” business,\(^{62}\) I have tried to avoid references to the consumption face of the newspaper business in India, except for purposes of historical exemplification.

Much of this writing involves historical narrative—one that seeks meaning through the interpretation of many different but related sources which are often referenced against each other: scholarly research, historical and theoretical commentaries not only restricted to the Indian newspaper business, government reports, autobiographies of journalists, letters of newspaper proprietors, and a few interviews. I cite occasional empirical figures in the forms of tables and percentage calculations derived mostly from government reports, while acknowledging these contain their own biases and grossly reductive simplifications that serve only as approximate pointers to the argument, and more importantly, to the terribly secretive ways in which most newspapers in India are run to this day.

Of the 7,335 newspapers to which the First Press Commission sent out its general questionnaire in 1953, fourteen had initially replied; later legal threats increased the number to a hundred and one.\(^{63}\) In 1963, the number of newspapers in India for which circulation data was not available was 1,902; in 1979, it


increased to 9,116—the percentage of defaulters rising from 24.4 per cent to 53.1 per cent.\textsuperscript{64} In other words, in the year 1979, the year after the “revolution”, the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) had no inkling of the businesses of more than half the publications registered with it. In 1988, during the final decades of state control, of the 3,850 newspapers that provided circulation figures to the RNI, the over-bureaucratic state monitoring institution found only 114 newspapers “whose circulation claims were fully established”, mostly by comparing their claims with the data they provided in the previous year.\textsuperscript{65} This is a phenomenon which continues in the twenty-first century: of the 62,483 newspapers registered in 2006, only 8,512 submitted annual statements for the previous year.\textsuperscript{66} Needless to say, arguments that exclusively attach themselves to the empirical proof founded on government figures, and the equally unreliable economic figures provided by private auditors’ bodies representing the newspapers, are unrealistically assumptive of their empirical rigour.

To accurately locate evidence on the workings of the English-language newspapers in terms of their circulations and economic profits would require a thorough and detailed analysis of their economics and working conditions; it would necessarily require the breaking through the walls of proprietorial control and secrecy behind which these companies operate—none of them are listed in ________________

\textsuperscript{66} India 2008: A Reference Annual (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 2008), 649.
the public stock exchanges to this day. The possibility of such a study yet does not exist. But once we attempt to historically interrogate their roles from the scant and unreliable data, but also from other non-empirical sources that satisfy our historical curiosity, we may hope to piece together some information that may us offer some knowledge about the circumstances in which these newspapers were historically created, the people who ran them, and the newspapers’ way of conceiving their businesses.

In a way, I also see this act of exploration as my uneasy, personal adventure in an Alicean wonderland where strange realities exist deep down a rabbit-hole—gryphons, mock turtles pounding on typewriters, and audacious journalistic creatures shivering to the Queen of Hearts’ cry of “Off with his head”; apart from the greater peculiarity of comprehending a closed, convoluted world looked through a looking glass.

“Explain all that!” said the Mock Turtle.

“No, no! The adventures first,” said the Gryphon in an impatient tone:

“Explanations take such a dreadful time.”

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