INTRODUCTION

Media institutions are engaged in producing and reproducing symbolic forms and meanings and communicating them to the general public. The symbolic forms, whether 'printed word' or electronic visuals, are conditioned by the dominant cultural codes, traditions and political histories of given regions and are formed within the general logic of commodity production. Thus viewed, there is a close interweaving of ideological, political and economic realms in shaping the symbolic forms and meanings within concrete media institutions. The analytical framework of the present study draws its moorings from a recognition of the existence of these interrelationships. And in that framework it attempts an empirical analysis of the growth patterns and structural changes in a dominant media institution in India namely, the Press.

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2 "When we buy a newspaper we participate simultaneously in an economic exchange, in subjection to or reaction against an ideological formation and often in a quite specific act of political identification or at least involvement... the nature of the political involvement is quite specifically economically conditioned. Similarly, TV news is economically determined within commodity production in general, performs an ideological function and explicitly operates within politics..." Nicholas Garnham, 'Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass-communication', in Richard Collins et al. (Eds.), *Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader* (London: Sage Publishers, 1986), pp. 18-19.
STUDIES ON MEDIA: A REVIEW

In general, media studies can be seen as falling under two main classes: (1) theoretical discourses and (2) empirical 'impact' studies. The theoretical studies, which are informed by various perspectives on ideology, culture and consciousness, provide rich insights into the interrelationships between economic, social and cultural practices and institutions relevant to media production. This is particularly so in the writings dominated by Marxist theories, the central tenet of which is the base-superstructure metaphor. The metaphor propounds the idea that economic structure of society (the base) conditions the existence and forms of the state and social consciousness (the superstructure). The superstructure is not autonomous, but has a foundation in the social relations of production.

In media studies, the base-superstructure relationship has been interpreted in two ways. One strand makes a distinction between media as a process of material production and as a site of

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3 Richard Johnson, 'Histories of Culture/Theories of Ideology: Notes on an Impasse', in Michele Barrett et al. (Eds.), Ideology and Cultural Production (London: Croom Helm, 1979). He points out that the renewed academic interest in issues related to media, culture and consciousness was induced by developments in theory on many fronts like "Raymond William's literary criticism and Edward Thompson's socialist humanist history, French structuralist Marxism, Jean Paul Sartre's attempt to reconcile existentialism and historical materialism, revival of interest in the early writings of Marx. development of the Frankfurt School's Marxism with its concern with subjectivity and the ideological work of the media and the rediscovery in England of the second generation Marxists like Gramsci and Lukacs". (p.50)

ideological struggle. And the other underscores the interaction between media institutions and social and economic conditions of existence. Seen thus, there should be three levels to understanding media: (1) the ideological functioning of the media institution, (2) the materiality of media production (irrespective of its nature of ownership, private or state) and the specific historical form of its economic articulation, and (3) the specific effects of subordinating media production and reproduction to the general logic of commodity production and, more importantly, the varying and shifting relationships between economic, ideological and political levels within concrete media institutions and within concrete historical junctures.

Within the Marxist tradition, one set of theories stresses the "relative autonomy" of media and ideology, and argues that the base does not reduce ideas to economic phenomena. Therefore, the internal dynamics of the superstructural elements can be uncovered independently of a consideration of the economic contexts in which they are embedded. The central connections between mass media and power structure is sought in such studies in the media's relation to the capitalist state, which organises and orchestrates legitimization processes and where "the

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5 Details of this position can be found in Garnham, 'Contribution to a Political Economy'.

6 Peter Golding and Graham Murdock, 'Ideology and the Mass Media: The Question of Determination' in Michele Barrett et al. (Eds.), Ideology and Cultural Production.
unity of the dominant ideology is constructed\(^7\). The other stream of theories considers media output as an 'unproblematic relay system' for capitalist interests and ideology. Thus viewed, "mass media are ideological tools of ruling class domination either through direct ownership or via ruling class control of state"\(^8\). Both these positions, it has been argued that, displaced economic determination from the centre of analysis of the political economy of mass media\(^9\).

There has been increasing realisation in the later theoretical debates that economic determination is a significant focus of analysis. Golding and Murdock argued that "...the ways in which the mass media function as 'ideological apparatuses' can only be adequately understood when they are systematically related to their position as large scale commercial enterprises in a capitalist economic system, and if these relations are examined historically\(^10\).

\(^7\) Stuart Hall, quoted in Golding and Murdock, 'Ideology and the Mass Media', p.207. This article provides a critical narrative about the major contributions within this line of argument, especially of the British Marxist theorists Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. Althusser (who considered media as part of the 'ideological state apparatus') and Gramsci (who theorised it as an instrument of 'ideological hegemony') are the two domineering influences on Williams and Hall.

\(^8\) Garnham, in his 'Contribution to a Political Economy' points out that Miliband's interpretation of the expression "means of mental production" used by Marx and Engels in the *German Ideology* is a classic version of this position. Miliband maintained that though there may be differences in the ways in which mass media attempt to prevent development of class consciousness among the workers and their ability to put forth a radical alternative to capitalism, the fact still remains that the class which has the means of material production at its disposal' does have control at the same time of the means of mental production. (p.16).


\(^10\) *Ibid*, pp. 204-205.
According to them, the changing material processes of media production under the influence of capitalist development and the consequent changes in the structure and organisation of the media system in the post-industrial revolution scenario, demand that mass media be viewed first and foremost as industrial and commercial organizations which produce and distribute commodities within a capitalist economic order. The characteristic feature of the industrialisation phase of the media system (including Press, publishing and Cinema) in Europe and America was consolidation of control within by large establishments and chains (communications corporations) through mergers, take-overs and a high degree of 'acquisitive diversification'.

However, the theoretical debate instead of providing clues as to how to chart the relationship between media production, ideology and social and political order, almost ended up posing

12 Raymond Williams characterised this stage as one where methods and attitudes of capitalist business penetrated deeply into extended areas and established themselves near the centre of communication, with the potential of exerting determining influence on the range and form of its output. See, Raymond Williams, Communications (London: Penguin, 1968). Stuart Hall shared this concern by stating that 'there is a decisive relationship between the growth of the media and everything we understand as characterising monopoly capitalism'. See, Stuart Hall, 'Culture, the Media and the "Ideological Effect", in J. Curran, M.Gurevitch and J.Woollacott (Eds.), Mass Communication and Society (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).

the grand question of 'how important is economic determination in studying mass media?'
The political economy dimension of the theoretical discourse has been rendered a secondary status in assertions about 'determination of cultural production in the last instance by the economic mode of production'\textsuperscript{14}. In the context of a pluralist Third World democracy like India, such excessive preoccupation with the 'economic' realm implies relegation to the background of the specific factors and processes, which interact with and modify media as a superstructural phenomenon. Any framework that seeks to understand the political economy of mass media should accommodate the specific events in the social and political histories of countries as significant constituents of the base.

As for the empirical studies, they generally place the emphasis mostly on mass communications and deal only with isolated short-term effects of media on individuals and thereby ignore the distinctiveness of media in terms of its "continuous flow or very daily operation"\textsuperscript{15}. In general, the empirical studies have limited scope in understanding the complex and dynamic interrelationships between media and the socio-economic and political processes. The empirical studies of the Indian Press are no different. Hence, they are not covered in our review.

\textsuperscript{14} Murdock and Golding, 'For a Political Economy'; and Golding and Murdock, 'Ideology and the Mass Media'.

\textsuperscript{15} John Downing, \textit{The Media Machine} (London: Pluto Press, 1980), p.161. According to Downing, to base one's assessment on stray excerpts from the media's continuous flow is like "a blind fold stab, hoping that a random single item will somehow explain the imprint of a million".
UNDERSTANDING INDIAN PRESS: A FRAMEWORK

Though there exist a large number of studies on the Indian Press dealing with its various aspects, we have identified three major sets. The first set narrates the interface between the socio-political forces that characterised the freedom struggle and the nature of the Press then. The second set of studies looks into the links between politicisation process and growth of Press as part of a larger enquiry into the political history of the country since Independence. The third set is concerned with the growth of the Press since the seventies with the focus placed on the role of the changing technology and development of the social infrastructure in fostering the growth and character of the modern Press

It is interesting to note that almost these empirical studies consider specific aspects of the growth of the Press without probing into the possible interrelationships between the different levels both within the Press, and between the Press and the general economic structure and,

thereby, leave a major gap in our understanding. The present study seeks to identify this gap and analyse the growth pattern and structural changes in the Press after Independence in a political economy framework. It views the Indian Press as a historically specific mode of ideological production and reproduction interacting with and, in turn, being modified decisively by specific social and political phenomena.

Our study addresses the following specificities of the Indian situation as having interacted with and shaped and modified the nature and growth pattern of the Press:

1. the distinct characteristic features of the Indian freedom struggle (for instance, the working of a multiplicity of political ideologies and social reform movements);

2. the process of politicisation and democratisation in the post-Independence phase (especially, its accent on competitive politics and fragmented nationalism);

3. discrete linguistic and spatial identity of the Indian Press; and

4. changing nature of monopoly interests in the context of fast technology diffusion and accelerated growth of advertising industry, particularly since the mid-seventies.

The study, though empirical in nature, seeks to understand the Indian Press in an analytical framework that draws its sustenance from the base-superstructure relationship as elucidated in the review of theoretical studies. Naturally, content-analysis, which has been a popular

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\[17\] Democratisation as perceived in this work has various dimensions other than good governance and efficient electoral systems. Importantly, it involves political incorporation of social movements, interest groups and issue-based organisations.
approach adopted in most Indian studies, does not find a significant place here. The stress of the study is on the analysis of growth pattern and structural changes of the Indian Press, aimed at not merely portraying the statistical trends but also interpreting the interrelationship between ideological, political and economic processes within media and society.

Another feature that distinguishes the present empirical study from the earlier ones is its very conceptualisation of the Press. In the study the Press is explicitly construed to have a 'position' and certain 'functions' at any point of time. The position is assumed to be changing relative to its equation with material conditions of production, including capital and technology as manifested in its size, reach and organisational complexity. Its functions get determined and altered largely with reference to the degree of its independence from the state. This independence is derived from the shifting equations the Press can have with capital.

Further, the study recognises the analytical distinction as suggested by Ram, between the 'credible-informational' and 'adversarial' functions of a relatively independent Press in a developing country context\(^\text{18}\). The former refers to the function of the Press as being able to influence public policies in relation to issues of critical importance. The latter refers to a situation, when the Press "tilts effectively against what begins, as a result of communication impact or influence, to be popularly and politically perceived as unjust or otherwise

unacceptable government policy"\(^{19}\). This distinction has enabled us to place the Press in a dynamic context, and analyse it as an ideological institution, which is part of the cultural realm, as well as an organisation shaped and driven by material conditions of production.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Conceptually, Press includes newspapers of different varieties in terms of periodicity, content emphasis, language, prices etc. As it is difficult to bring all the different types of newspapers within the ambit of a common analytical framework, the study has limited its scope of enquiry to the daily Press. The exclusive focus on dailies is also justified because among all types of newspapers they have the greatest potential for 'manufacturing' information and consensual public opinion by virtue of their very daily operation. Also, the question of control over ideological process becomes more potent in the case of dailies.

The broad objective of the present study is to understand the dynamics of growth and structural transformation in the modern Indian Press in the overall context of the changes in

\(^{19}\) *Ibid.*, p.151. The distinction between 'credible informational' and 'adversarial' functions is made clear by Ram by saying that "The first role (credible-informational) appears to be the prerequisite for the second (adversarial); but without the latter, which might imply some kind of 'adversarial' function in relation to government under typical circumstances, the former role might fade away through sheer disuse... At its best, an independent press combines the two roles with professional competence and sophistication and works in favour of the stabilisation of crisis-averting policies. But even under the best conditions, performance of the roles with professional seriousness might involve tensions and strains in the relationship with the government and in the arena of public policy making". pp. 187-188.
the socio-political and economic realms. Specifically, the study aims to:

(1) examine the nature of growth of Press in the colonial India and its specific links with the freedom struggle;

(2) analyse the growth patterns and structural changes in the Indian Press across regions and languages with particular reference to the period after the sixties;

(3) systematically relate the growth of the Press and its structural changes to the evolution of democratic politics in the country and the ways in which technology changes have been appropriated by it in catalysing the political processes;

(4) capture the interrelationships within the Press and between it and the socio-economic structure through an illustrative case study of a regional language Press (Malayalam dailies) in Kerala, a state characterised by high literacy, a long history of welfare-oriented social policies, and an early consolidation of political polarisation.

SCHEMATA OF PRESENTATION

The thesis is presented in seven chapters, including Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter 2 gives a brief historical background and delineates certain crucial features of the Press in the pre-Independence India. The development of Press during the period of the freedom struggle is traced through four distinct phases spanning over 1818-1937. A few major landmarks in the progression of publishing from a craft to commercial venture are also identified in this chapter.

The trends and patterns of growth in the post-Independence India, particularly after the 1960s, are traced in the second chapter. Two distinct growth phases - 1963-78 and 1979-91 are identified and analysed at three levels: states, languages and centres of publication. Chapter 3 looks into the changes in the structure of Press during the growth phases. Product-wise
concentration (monopoly) is examined here in terms of changes in the share of various circulation size-classes, while country-wise concentration (economic and information power) is studied by analysing the share in circulation of Common Ownership Units, the publishing houses that control a number of newspapers.

A variety of processes and factors are at work in the socio-political and economic spheres which influence the growth and structural changes, and which, in turn, are modified by the functioning of Press. Chapter 5 enquires into these factors and processes. In particular, the chapter describes the changes in the process of politicisation and democratisation since the sixties and examines how these changes have interfaced with those in the economic forces, and more precisely in technology, to bring about a certain structure of Press.

The above issues are examined in the specific context of a language Press - Malayalam - in Chapter 6. In part one of this chapter the historical evolution of the Malayalam Press is mapped and the crucial influencing factors identified. In part two are analysed the growth trends and structural changes in the Malayalam daily Press...

In the concluding chapter the major findings are summarised in a logical chain and the conclusions of the study presented.