Chapter VII

CONCLUSION
The broadcast media is one important agency that constructs social reality and disseminates it. It has a hegemonic role. At the same time, the contribution of Press to the growth of democratic ideals in modern societies, cannot be ignored. Besides being an indicator of the level of social development and aspirations for change, the Press can also be seen as an initiating force behind new social developments, especially in a growing developing country like India. This study has sought to analyse in a sociological frame, the Press as a social institution. The study explores how far the act of news making, or news reporting, its form of communication and the organisational framework supporting it, are influenced by social cultural and politico-historical forces in the society. How far is 'news' a representation of facticity, or, is a construction or reality mediated by variable social forces that influence the journalist? And how far the institutional bases of society and the social conditions of the journalists, the nature of economic and political forces conditioning the organisation of the Press, affect the functioning of the Press.

"That no charter is proclaimed, no rule book or credo issued to guide the production of news, is no proof that it lacks consistent pattern. News production is no more an indeterminate anarchy than other social processes, and where there is social process, there is order. The sociologist attempts to discern the regularities in this order. Journalists, do not of course, work by heaven-sent criteria against which events are measured for newsworthiness.
But simply because large shifting groups of people are working 'often in a hurry' there have to be routines of practice which lessen the burdens of unpredictability and make manageable the colossal task of transmitting the events of the world into news.1

Before summarising the substantial domain of the present work, one may refer to its central exploratory thrust. The study locates the dynamics of the press in its news gathering, journalistic style, content and overall organization. The fact that the Press as a 'newsmaker' is a force to reckon with, because of its ability to express public opinion and even suggest norms and rules, in no way mitigates its other functions. It even declares inter-state conflicts, punishes criminals, and sometimes almost holds the theatre of society to ransom, by its ebb-and-tide policies of reportage.

The study points out that the salience of an event, issue, or personality, becomes a function of articulation. That is, any occurrence, is rendered 'visible' only after it is taken up by the Press. The fact that newsworthiness of an event is decided according to as many subjective factors as objective, becomes all too evident. As Broder, very aptly admits,

The paper you read is shaped by unstated, implicit values and biases which you must recognise. I admit that the mirrors we use to reflect reality are inevitably flawed by our own presuppositions and prejudices. You must correct the 'spin' the twists impart to what you read. The clues are there in all the subjective elements

- phrasing, word selection, story placement, sourcing - that shape
a particular reporter's or paper's version of the news.\textsuperscript{2}

It is this "spin" that we have tried to analyse in our study. How does the
Press interpret events? How and why are events, issues and people 'initiated'
by the press, taken to the point of a crescendo, sometimes, or suddenly allowed
to die an unwarranted death? Newspersons seem to be overawed by the
happening of events rather than making any effort of finding out the causes of
the same happenings. Reportage, especially of the front page kinds, seems to
concentrate more on the 'immediacy' factor besides giving a dramatic touch to
the happening. The obsession for scoops may be undermining the "public
service orientation on journalism's part."\textsuperscript{3} This is especially true of journalists
presenting information during or after conflict/crises situations. Why does the
newsmaker, the journalist that is, always 'follow' history, chasing events within
his or her own presuppositions? There is, we feel, scope for 'making' history
too. By informing, forewarning and suggesting about things and people, at the
right time, in the right manner. There is a comment by Powell and Robbins
about sociologists which makes sense to us, with reference to journalists too.
According to them,

\textit{The sociologist without a sound sense of history swims in shallow
water.} It seems commonplace to assert this, but many sociologists

\textsuperscript{2} Border, David, 1979, \textit{Behind the Front Page}, Simon and Shuster, New York,
p.366.

\textsuperscript{3} Isaacs, N.E., 1986, \textit{Untended Gates - The Mismanaged Press}, Columbia
University Press, New York, p.44.
still do not heed the assertion. Their work suffers from the correlate of ethnocentrism: temporocentrism, the tendency to be too present-centred. At a basic level social scientists need to have a command of narrative history, the straightforward march of time.4

This ‘temporocentrism’ seems to be an indicator of the world of Press too, whether it be the journalists in person or the very ethos of the newspaper organisation.

The press is part of the communication world. It is engaged in the production, reproduction and distribution of knowledge in the widest sense of symbolically meaningful experiences in the social world. This knowledge in turn helps us to contribute to the existing store of knowledge of the past and enables us to participate in the continuity of current understandings.

After preparing the basic conceptual and empirical grounds for our study and a general review of literature, we have elaborated on the main theoretical perspectives (chapter two) to be deployed for our work. This was an attempt to draw linkages between the ideological tensions of the Press and what it portrays. Though we have discussed a number of perspectives with regard to the understanding of ‘ideology’, we have found the concept useful in its most basic sense. Ideology is constructed by people and involves a certain way of communication. So it is a kind of language with certain categories which constitute the world, or social reality. The possibility that an ideological

culture may be interfering with the 'attainment of truth' may not be such a remote one, considering the kind of depiction of events or images that readers or receivers of messages get. In fact, news itself may be described as a theoretic activity, drawing on the pretheoretic formulations of news sources... news stories engage in theorizing by juxtaposing facts gleaned from sources. Juxtaposition is a form of categorising, since it encourages the understanding that these facts have something to do with another. It both claims and creates a theoretic relationship between and among the phenomena presented as facts.

Chapter three relates to the history of ideas within the newspaper organisation. Here we have discussed the dominant ideology of the Press, before independence, when it was guided by a mission or a vocation besides the professional, commercial values which are paramount in the post-1947 period, especially in the decade of the fifteenth year of India's Independence. The study discusses the reality of the other-than-English dailies which are a force to reckon with. This is contrary to the general perception that the ruling elite or the urban-bred, who constitute the reading public, are largely English speaking. The debate on the classification of newspapers into national and 'regional' dailies remains unresolved. One group reiterated its stand on classifying national newspapers in terms of its widespread coverage, across state, language barriers. But such a criteria restricts a national daily to the

newspapers in English or Hindi. Another school of thought is of the opinion, that the demarcation between ‘national’ and ‘regional’ dailies is on convoluted bases, besides smacking of a colonial hangover. The responses to our queries, by journalists, have also come as a revealer to their sense of motivation to stay on in the profession, despite their general disillusionment.

This chapter also elucidates how the history of a newspaper is almost like the history of the country in which it is published. Newspapers range far beyond the politics of their nations.

The literary and artistic life, the way ordinary people live, the goods that advertisers are trying to sell, the way the nation’s children are to be educated, the way its believers worship, the way its businesses and banks function, the style of its criminals and the behaviour of its police, the justice of its courts - they are all there. A newspaper is a daily diary of the culture of a nation.⁷

It would be a sociological inadequacy to ignore the structural determination of journalistic reportage. There is ample material to warrant that a journalist does not write for himself or herself but is part of an organisation where she/he has a role as an individual. How they exercise their judgement in negotiating their roles, is dependent on their place in the hierarchy of the organisation besides their own discretion. While Chapter three deals with journalists as ‘operatives within a system’, the subsequent chapter ‘The News Makers’ treats them as ‘operators of a system’. The responses to our

questions, reveal a newsmaker who is largely urban bred, belonging to a nuclear family, or at least adheres to those norms, and one who scarcely objects to a change from his job. So the journalist comes out as a dynamic and ambitious individual who would not mind switching over loyalties, to join another organisation.

Considering the fact that the gate keepers of news have daily meetings to decide ‘what goes in’ and ‘what goes out’ for the newspaper, it comes as a revelation that there are so many job-hops-within the print media. The fact remains, that daily newspapers maintain, in fact inculcate, the sense of competition amongst journalists of different newspapers, as, basically the profession is an industry, with profit motive as one of its major priorities.

Chapter five has delved into the manufacturing of news in different contexts. Here we have specifically dealt with the linkages between theory and media, that is, how the latter ‘constructs’ reality. We have also elucidated journalists’ views vis-a-vis their standing/ranking, in different spheres, as compared to other professions. The fact that they rate themselves very high on the ‘respectability’ sphere besides giving a very high rank in the ‘contribution to society’ sphere, speaks volumes for their sense of self-image.

Chapter six deals specifically with certain case studies which have been situations of conflict or crisis in the last few years in India. Most of our examples have been taken from the crises of the eighties and nineties, except for the Indo-Pakistan relations which we took because of it being an ongoing
problem — of communication. A ‘breakdown of communication’ is symptomatic, we feel of all the cases of crises we have taken up, which is where the role of the media and the newspapers in particular, comes in. The case studies on Punjab, Ayodhya, Shah Bano, Bhopal Gas Tragedy, Indo-Pak conflicts and the reportage of Beauty Pageants were taken up to gauge the opinion of our ‘newsmakers’ with regard to important political, social, environmental and other ‘cultural’ realities that invade our day-to-day lives. They invade us via the ‘mediated representations’ or images that we are fed by the ‘image-makers’ of society.

The study notes that the situations of conflicts/crises are major sources of news. The converse is also true. In the event of the breakdowns in communication whether they be in the instance of terrorism, communal violence, propagating stereotypes about women or general neglect and indifference to health and environmental issues, thrive on media coverage. The suppression or projection of news, the disinformation or vacuum of information, or even a surfeit of information becomes a case of people "in the news" working as partners in progress along with those ‘making news’. The former, refers to politicians, bureaucrats, terrorists, economic high ups, cultural extravaganza organisers and the like, the latter refers to our ‘newsmakers’ that is journalists. While it would suit the interests of politicians, officials, terrorists, other violence propagators, models, royal family members etc. to be ‘making’ news by being ‘in’ it, it would also serve the interests of all those...
who make or 'construct' the news - editors, correspondents, photographers, managers and owners of newspaper industries. The present study furnishes material to argue the following:

- Newspapers do interpret events according to the occupational values of their organisation;

- News is manufactured, keeping in mind the vested interests of both categories of 'newsmakers' - those who are 'in' it, and those who make or 'construct' it.

- The way issues get projected is related to the 'sources' of news, especially the extent of access to these 'sources', whether they be the economic, political or social elite or those who are violence-prone.

- Newspapers are an effective medium of communication, as news gets disseminated by other modes, word of mouth, for instance, even in areas, where the newspaper may be read by a few.

- English language papers do not necessarily have an edge over other language dailies. They do affect decision making exercises at the central government level, but local dailies make quite an impact, a greater impact, at the village and town level.

- The fact that the print media is relatively free, in comparison to broadcast media, does not ensure that it is objective.

- Journalists, by and large, had a different missionary zeal before independence as compared to their aspirations now. Most of them
identified with the freedom fighters and were working towards the higher goal of independence. Now, in the general absence of such role-models in society, journalists do not seem to be on such strong grounds of morality and integrity - a consequence, we contend, of changing societal mores.

During moments of national crisis, like the ones mentioned in our study, many newspapers do tend to report in a tendentious and highly exaggerated manner, which may even fan the flames of communal fire.

Journalists would need to be trained by journalism schools to retain their non-partisan observational techniques, rather than becoming 'participants', while reporting.

Reporting has a very important bearing on people's ideas. Ideas about communities, about women's problems, about nations, about environment/health and sanitation etc.

The sensitivity required in reporting conflict/crises situations can be ensured only when individuals (newsmakers) along with their (newspaper) organizations take the responsibility of refraining from spreading stereotypes.

Something like the above can carry conviction only if the legal system especially the law of defamation etc. are made more effective and the Press bodies like Press Council are given more powers to check the
sources of information, and the tendency of 'branding' individuals/groups.

Generally reports on women get prominence only when they are saleable subjects or 'make good disaster stories'. On the other hand, women in the beauty business too are given wide coverage - again, for purely commercial reasons.

Environmental/health issues too, are taken up by newspapers, only when they become accident/epidemic-prone. Instead, newspapers besides the electronic media could 'educate' the public about the possibilities of disasters/disease, before any mishap or tragedy.

The 'checks' on the Press can be effective only if bodies like the Press Council of India are provided with more 'teeth' of the judicial kinds.

The fact that this is one of the few professions which opens doors for those with a creative bent of mind, it is to be expected that what drives them are values of objectivity, fairness and incorruptibility.

The study also highlights a number of constraints that work against those who have a 'nose for news'.

Today, journalists are more likely to seek freedom not from their proprietors, but from state governments seeking to impose restrictive legislation, or from terrorists who issue chilling codes of conduct for them and hold them to ransom. Terrorists in Kashmir, Punjab and Assam have not only increased professional hazards for journalists, they have also fuelled new debates on whether reporters who gain the confidence of terrorists and penetrate their ranks, are becoming unwilling publicists for their cause. In these states, a beleaguered Press, walks on the thin
edge of the razor. In the current climate, journalists also seek insulation from politicians and their henchmen who sometimes seek to fix inconvenient scribes.⁸

Our study contends with the fact that circulation of the newspaper is, by and large, not the concern of the reporter but is something that would be keeping the circulation managers on their toes. The thrill of the byline, constraints of time, sometimes lack of professionalism and insensitivity to certain issues may, blur the line between ‘mistake’ and ‘mischief’ in reportage. It is here that the role of journalism schools becomes significant. In a proactive manner they could sensitise would be journalists on their role in creating or inculcating values which are positive for society, besides making them appreciate the limits to which they can go, when reporting, editing or simply ‘managing’ news.

The urban upbringing of most of the journalists (in our sample, and possibly otherwise too) may in fact be a cause for the urban bias that most dailies, especially English language dailies, reflect. In that sense, we strongly feel the need for encouraging rural reporting amongst younger journalists. Newspaper organisations could perhaps make this a mandatory exercise in their training programme and even for middle level journalists.

The role of the rural newspaper is of immense significance because of its greater reach, its potential for being a conduit of development programmes

⁸ Desai and Ninan, 1996, Behind Those Headlines, Media Foundation, New Delhi, p.xi.
and its role of being a general educator. It can "indeed be a very effective channel of communication. Like a social worker, the press should fight for the oppressed with favour and in a crusading spirit. What the urban press did during the Independence struggle against foreign rulers, the rural press should do now during the struggle against domestic oppressors."9

The nation building exercise of implementing effective poverty alleviation projects, family planning, general health and literacy programmes, innovative development exercises, besides rooting out corruption and other evils, could, we feel be taken up on a more serious note akin to the missionary zeal of the pre-independence times, by the newsmakers of today's India. The question they need to ask themselves, time and again, is 'are we contributing to or, resolving conflict? Quietly 'witnessing history' may be as good as giving consent to some events or issues which need to be checked through the power of News. What Gaye Tuchman had to say about knowledge being power may be true in every sense, as we also agree that news is a social resource of knowledge and power which tapped well, could provide us with a more 'acceptable' window on the world, the reality, around us.

9 G.P.Jain in Ninan and Desai, op.cit.