INTRODUCTION

Threat perceptions - and the whole array of concepts and issues that dominate the realm of security - are critical in the study of foreign and defence policies. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of literature dealing with the new debates on the question of security, leading to its very reconceptualisation. Threat and security are interrelated in various contexts. The principal sources of threat to a country are often defined by the perceptions of its decision makers, which is contingent on various factors. These perceptions and the manner in which they are projected to the people play a significant role in shaping public opinion as well as articulating and formulating state policies. In this context, the mass media play an important role, not merely as a channel for projecting the perceptions of various sections of society, but also in providing information and, more importantly, in moulding these very perceptions. It is through the media that attitudes of people are largely shaped. The nature of information and opinion is therefore a matter of concern for the democratic processes of any country. This is not to assume that threat perceptions or the mass media are the most important determinants of foreign policy making, but rather that their study provides a better understanding of the issues concerned.

The study of perceptions is, however, of crucial importance in the specific context of South Asia, particularly in the relations between India and Pakistan. A persistent trend in the relations between these two countries has been the enduring nature of threat perceptions and their mutual mistrust and recrimination ever since their very emergence as two separate entities. The volatile relationship between them had its origins in the nature of the struggle for independence and the circumstances of
partition. Despite the passage of time, relations between India and Pakistan saw no improvement, witnessing, on the other hand, perpetual sabre-rattling, a spiralling arms build-up and a nuclear power rivalry in the subcontinent. Threat perceptions and militarisation in the region reinforce each other, forming major obstacles to peace and development in the subcontinent. The adversarial relations between the two countries is being sustained by the images they have of themselves and each other, images which continue to persist despite the emergence of new generations on both sides of the border. Evidently, perceptions and mindsets of the people are an underlying factor in India-Pakistan relations and are fundamental to an understanding of bilateral relations. It is in this context that the role of the mass media gains significance, taking into account their role in projecting images and shaping perceptions. Given these circumstances, the study of the dynamics of threat perceptions in India-Pakistan relations within a broader theoretical framework and incorporating the role of the mass media is of relevance.

**Nature and Scope**

Perceptions of threat are defined by notions of what constitutes security. Security and threats are therefore correlated. There is a realisation that security can be perceived as a freedom from threats or as a social construct. Security debates, over recent years, have witnessed the emergence of wider and more comprehensive connotations in contrast to the traditional military/strategic, state-centred conceptions based on the realist paradigm. Although there are diverse perspectives on the issue, there is a general understanding of the need to include economic, social, political and environmental conditions, which
are conducive to a life of freedom and dignity within its ambit. There is also a perception that the question of identity is crucial to the understanding of 'security' with constructions of danger on the 'outside' often being used to define a particular identity.

In the subcontinent, the nature of the struggle for independence and the circumstances of partition are perceived to have played an important role in defining the insecurity narrative. While India’s secular, federal polity has been perceived to threaten Pakistan with reabsorption, the principle of Pakistan’s ideology as a homeland for Muslims is viewed as threatening India’s dismemberment by ethnic and religious groups. The mainstream security discourse in India continues to be based on traditional state-centred concepts with its attention focused on the threat from external aggression and internal violence and secessionism, aided and abetted by outside forces. Within such a framework, militarisation and defence build-up are often projected to be the means to safeguard the security of the country. Security concerns have centred on Pakistan and China and the strategic linkages between them. India’s ruling elite also held the view that India was destined to play a major role in Asia – as the predominant regional power. On the contrary, Pakistani leaders viewed the acceptance of a lower status in terms of the regional balance of power as the very negation of Pakistan’s independent existence, and a source of threat and insecurity to the country.

While India is determined to maintain its dominant role in the region, Pakistan is equally set on attaining a balance of power in South Asia, thus fuelling the arms build-up in the region. The nuclear issue also forms an integral part of the security discourse in South Asia. The ‘Peaceful Nuclear Explosion’ at Pokhran by India in 1974 was perceived by Pakistan to be the
culmination of India's hegemonistic designs in South Asia and as a nuclear threat to itself, leading to an outcry within the country for nuclear parity. The following years witnessed accusations by both countries regarding the nuclear threat posed by the 'other.' Decades of hostile relations resulted in rigid postures and perceptions in which each side has taken for granted the aggressive designs of the 'other.' The mass media have, in turn, over the years, played an important role in sustaining and reinforcing this enemy image, and in exacerbating the perception of threat from each other. The Pokhran nuclear tests of India in 1998, followed by Pakistan's Chagai tests, reinforced threat perceptions in the region, and set the stage for an invigorated nuclear debate in South Asia.

The media play a complex and sensitive role in society by projecting images and shaping perceptions as well as in creating a social ethos. By providing its stamp of approval or criticism it can confer legitimacy or reinforce the perceptions and objectives of decision-makers or act as a catalyst for change in policies. It can play a fundamental role in reinforcing negative stereotypes or in transforming enemy images. Similarly, the suppression of dissent can hinder informed public debate or foster misperceptions. Although the media are largely expected to safeguard the interests of the people, particularly in democratic societies, in reality it often acts as an auxiliary to the state. This is particularly evident in the coverage of issues pertaining to national security, defence, etc. Taking into consideration the historical significance of the print media in India, the focus of this study is on the press, and more specifically daily newspapers. The press in India has, over the years, tended to be, in varying dimensions, a voice of the establishment as well as an important agency of communication, information-dissemination
and public debate, particularly in the context of domestic politics. Its role in the realm of defence and foreign policy, and conflict situations is, however, open to criticism.

Profile of Literature

A review of the existing literature related to this study reveals that despite its relevance not much work has been done in this field. Recent years have, however, seen the emergence of a number of theoretical studies on issues relating to security and threat perceptions. Several attempts have also been made to relate them to the context of South Asia, significant among them including Khattak (1996), Pasha (1996), Buzan (2002), Samaddar (1998) and Nizamani (2001). In the context of press and foreign policy in India, studies such as that of Vilaniam (1989) and Singh (1986) were in the larger context of the struggle for a New International Information Order (NIIO). The aftermath of the Kargil conflict did see a few articles on the role of the media, including that of Sinha (2002), Seshu (1999) and IIMC (1999). They are, however, largely restricted to that specific situation. So also is the case with the articles on the Indian press coverage of Pokhran-II, which have been posted on the website of ‘Journalists Against Nuclear Weapons.’

Notwithstanding the vast literature on India-Pakistan relations, very few attempts have been made to examine the manner in which images of Pakistan are projected in the Indian media/press. Among the few relevant works in this context is that of N.Bhaskara Rao (1971), who, through a content analysis of newspapers of India and Pakistan, highlighted how the mass media of the two countries are dogmatically one-sided in their orientations towards each other. The study focuses on the period of the 1965 war, with a strong emphasis on methodology
and statistics rather than the actual analysis of media content. The compilation of the deliberations at a workshop for media persons organised by the South Asia Forum for Human Rights is also relevant to the study. This work by Rita Manchanda (May 2001) analyses the coverage of conflict in the context of India and Pakistan and argues that during conflicts between the two countries, or where the state is pitted against militant nationalist self-assertion, popular movements and social conflicts, the mass media have functioned as an adjunct of the national security apparatus. However, no attempt has been made to examine Indian press coverage of Pakistan's nuclear programme, let alone from within the wider framework of threat perceptions in South Asia and Indian perceptions of Pakistan's nuclear programme.

**Objectives**

The study seeks to analyse the nature of threat perceptions in India-Pakistan relations within a wider South Asian scenario. In order to enable an in-depth analysis, a case study of the Indian perceptions of Pakistan's nuclear programme focusing on the Indian press (as depicted in daily newspapers) has been undertaken. The study attempts to provide an insight into the nuclearisation of the subcontinent and the perceptions of Pakistan's nuclear programme among the various Indian governments, political parties and the strategic community, which together constitute the dominant discourse on the issue in the region. A review of public opinion and the counter-narrative on the issue is also made. Within this framework, it seeks to examine the nature of the security discourse in the Indian press, particularly vis-à-vis Pakistan, focusing on its nuclear programme. Being an integral part of the nuclear politics of South Asia, Pakistan's nuclear programme cannot be viewed as
a distinct phenomenon. The study, therefore, examines the question from a wider perspective, incorporating aspects of India's nuclear programme wherever relevant. It keeps in perspective the nuances of Indian media coverage of the perennial conflict with Pakistan. The study attempts to explore whether the coverage reinforces the ruling elite perceptions or whether it plays any critical role including that of facilitating an informed public discourse. It also examines how the press views the question of nuclear and defence build-up in the region and whether it provides the necessary contextual background for an informed public debate on the issue.

**Hypotheses**

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

1. **Threat perceptions** seem to underlie the relations between India and Pakistan, and they appear to have emerged from the historical circumstances of the emergence of these countries as two independent entities. Competing conceptions of national identity are interlinked to perceptions of security in the region. Threat perceptions as reflected in the dominant security discourse in India identify a major threat to the country as being from external enemies who are also responsible for internal security problems. Despite the emerging trends in the redefinition of the concept of 'security,' threat perceptions as reflected in the dominant discourse continue to be based on a realist state-centric paradigm, with territoriality as its core.

2. The Indian press apparently reinforces these threat perceptions, reflecting the state-centric approach to
security perceptions and marginalising voices of dissent. Security is framed in the language of exclusion, reinforcing enemy images of Pakistan as a major source of threat to India.

3. Adversarial images of Pakistan seem to have been reflected in the perceptions of Pakistan’s nuclear programme in India, accentuating a nuclear threat from that country. Pakistan’s nuclear programme in general and the 1998 tests in particular are not generally perceived in their wider context or in relation to India’s own nuclear programme/tests, but rather as a major source of threat to the country and having implications for its own nuclear policy.

4. Over the years, the press in India has ostensibly accentuated the official nuclear discourse regarding Pakistan’s nuclear policy, often taking their cue from the strategic community and helping to sustain the nuances in India’s nuclear policy. Obfuscating issues in their wider context, the press appears to have underscored the nuclear threat from Pakistan and reflected the realist paradigm of analysis as evident in reporting the nuclear tests of 1998. The demonisation of Pakistan’s nuclear programme is in stark contrast to the sanitised depiction of India’s, helping to reinforce government perspectives and policies.

Scheme of Chapters

The study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter provides a contextual background to the study, examining the notion of threat perceptions and the approaches to the concept of security.
The South Asian scenario is examined in a wider context, delving into the dynamics in India-Pakistan relations. It analyses the security/insecurity narratives of both India and Pakistan within this framework, focusing specifically on the dominant discourse as well as the counter-narratives on the issue. The second chapter discusses the importance of the mass media and its role in the context of threat perceptions, providing an overview of the role of the media in the specific context of the relations between India and Pakistan.

With a brief introductory overview of the nuclear policies of India and Pakistan, the third chapter examines Indian perceptions of Pakistan's nuclear programme, focusing particularly on that of the government, political parties and the strategic community, which define the dominant discourse on the issue. An insight into the counter-narrative is also provided. The approaches of these sections to nuclear weapons and India's nuclear policy are also referred to, so as to place the issue in perspective. The fourth chapter provides a historical overview of the coverage of the nuclear question in the Indian press. It examines the coverage of Pakistan's nuclear programme, as well as India's nuclear policy so as to enable a better understanding of the issues concerned.

The fifth chapter is a comprehensive one, providing a content analysis of Indian press coverage, focusing on three daily newspapers - The Times of India, The Indian Express and The Hindu during the period May to July 1998. An in-depth analysis of the coverage of Pakistan's nuclear programme in these newspapers is based on a comparative framework, with reference to the nature of the coverage of India's nuclear policy. While distinguishing the coverage among newspapers wherever
relevant, the trajectory of coverage by each newspaper is also studied, differentiating between the periods before India's nuclear tests, the period leading up to Pakistan's tests and the remaining period under survey. The findings of the study are brought together in the sixth and concluding chapter, which serves to provide an analysis of the study in its entirety.

Methodology

The study is based on the historical-analytical, comparative and content analysis methods, based on both primary as well as secondary sources. Primary sources include government documents, speeches, statements and press releases, as well as newspaper reports, taking into account the specificity of the study. Secondary sources consist of books and articles relating to the issue. Content analysis enables a systematic analysis of communication content, so as to identify the ideological framework, which underpin media messages and assess the value, motives and attitudes of the text. It is quantitative, when it deals with the frequency of occurrence, space devoted and the trend of coverage, and qualitative when it focuses on the actual matter spoken or printed and the nature of the content. This study emphasises a qualitative analysis, which is supplemented by quantitative data. While the content analysis in the fourth chapter makes a random survey of English language Indian newspapers, the fifth chapter is a comprehensive analysis based on three specific newspapers – The Times of India, The Indian Express and The Hindu. These are three national dailies having countrywide circulation, and were also the largest circulated English language newspapers in the country during the period under study. Studies have also shown that English dailies occupy a significant place in India, not only among the decision
makers, but also as opinion setters among the language dailies. The Mumbai, Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi editions of these three newspapers are selected for the study. Differences among the various editions are basically related to local news, which is tailored according to the particular region it serves. Differences in national news coverage are marginal, but should be kept in mind. The three-month period from May to July 1998 was selected for the content analysis, taking into account the invigorated debate encompassing threat perceptions and nuclear issues in the subcontinent in the aftermath of the May 1998 tests, reflecting the array of perceptions on the issue.