University of London

Abstract of thesis

Author: Somnath Batabyal

Title of Thesis: News Production Practices in Indian Television: An ethnography
of *Star News* and *Star Ananda*   Degree: PhD

This thesis is the result of fieldwork carried out in television newsrooms in two
Indian cities. The research was situated in *Star Ananda* in Kolkata and in *Star
News* in Mumbai, both channels part of the Rupert Murdoch owned *Star* group.
The fieldwork was conducted through 2006 and the early part of 2007.

Doordarshan, the state run and the only television channel available in India till
the early 1990s had enforced a hegemonic, unitary notion of India since its
inception. In a world of media plenty, had the national imaginary changed, and if
so, how? The central research question this thesis tries to answer, therefore, is:
has the proliferation of private news channels in India in every regional language
given rise to a pluarility in how the nation is articulated in Indian television?

Methodologically, this thesis takes an ethnographic approach. It uses participant
observation and depth interview techniques as research methods. With over 90
recorded interviews with senior journalists and media managers, this thesis
provides rich empirical material and in-depth case studies.

This work makes three overarching claims. Firstly, the assumed traditional divide
between corporate and editorial no longer holds in Indian television. Each also does
the job of the other and a distinction between them is purely rhetorical. Secondly,
journalists imagine themselves as the audience and produce content they think they
and their families will like. Given that these professionals mostly come from wealthy
backgrounds, across television channels in India a singular narrative in content and a
hegemonic understanding of an affluent "nation" is achieved. Connected with this is
my third claim: news channels and advertisers targeting affluent audiences promote a
notion of a prosperous "nation". Though catering to different language groups - Hindi
and Bengali speakers - by targeting the affluent, *Star News* and *Star Ananda* produce
a similar, unvarying content that promotes an idea of a unitary, prosperous "India."

News Production Practices in Indian Television:
An ethnography of *Star News* and *Star Ananda*

Somnath Batabyal

SOAS

University of London

PhD Thesis

Declaration

I undertake that all material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by another person(s). I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

Name: Somnath Batabyal

Signed _____

Abstract

This thesis is the result of ethnographic research carried out in television newsrooms in two Indian cities: Kolkata (previously Calcutta) and Mumbai (previously Bombay). The research was situated in *Star Ananda* in Kolkata and in *Star News* in the city of Mumbai, both channels part of the Rupert Murdoch owned *Star* group. The fieldwork was conducted through 2006 and the early part of 2007.

The central research question this thesis tries to answer is: *Doordarshan,* the state run television channel, enforced a hegemonic, unitary notion of India since its inception. Has the proliferation of private news channels in India in every regional language given rise to a pluarility in how the nation is articulated in Indian television channels?

Methodologically, this thesis is an ethnographic study. It uses participant observation and depth interview techniques as research methods. With over 90 recorded interviews with senior journalists and media managers, this thesis will provide rich empirical material and in depth case studies. It sets out to test the "orthodoxies" of media theory that has been influenced by ethnographic studies conducted mostly in the West.

This work makes three overarching claims. Firstly, the assumed traditional divide between corporate and editorial no longer holds in Indian television. Each also does the job of the other and a distinction between them is purely rhetorical. Secondly, journalists imagine themselves as the audience and produce content they think they and their families will like. Given that these professionals mostly come from wealthy backgrounds, across television channels in India a singular narrative in content and a hegemonic understanding of an affluent "nation" is achieved. Connected with this is my third claim: news channels and advertisers targeting affluent audiences promote a notion of a prosperous "nation". Though catering to different audience groups - Hindi and Bengali speakers - by targeting the affluent *Star News* and *Star Ananda* produce a similar, unvarying content that promotes an idea of a unitary "India."

3

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to John Singh.

Four years and a bit is a long time, especially when in a foreign country and in different educational systems. The transition from a journalist to the world of academia was difficult and sometimes suspect. Money was scarce and student life, after the relative plenty of a professional, was arduous. Despite these, I have no doubt that this past half a decade has been the happiest of my life and if given a choice, I would do it all over again, without hesitation. Several people helped in this happy transition. Here, I can name but a few. To all those others, my heartfelt thanks.

Prof Annabelle Sreberny and I started at SOAS in the same year. She was a visiting Professor and I, taking a year out of journalism to pursue a Master's Degree. It was largely her effort which convinced me that academia might not be beyond the realms of possible. Every time those doubts resurfaced in the past years, a meeting with her reassured me. She went far beyond being my supervisor for this work and donned several hats. Annabelle gave belief when I had none. As mentor, her intellectual fervour gave direction to this work. As a friend, I have cherished the lunches, dinners, cocktails and conversations in and around central London. If this thesis has any worth, credit is due to her. The failings are mine.

It was Prof Mark Hobart, my second supervisor who suggested news ethnography as a possible area of work. He was deeply suspicious of a journalist's application towards academic pursuits, so if this thesis can convince him of such possibilities, the effort would be worth it. His intellectual honesty and critical questioning shaped my early academic outlook and his contribution towards this work is immense.

London was the first city I stayed in for a considerable period outside India. It is a city with whom I have had a continuous love affair, loving its streets, the music and its people. To Priya Singh who first held my hand in an alien city, I am deeply thankful. She took me home to a

posse of wonderful people: Greg, Maneesha and Naila who for the past several years have shared and enriched my life. Naila, Maneesha and Priya's everyday observations on Indian television, its media and stars kept this thesis rooted. Greg's worldview, his passions ranging from psychoanalysis to cycling made me explore worlds hitherto unknown. Together they made the past five years my happiest.

Lena Michaels has been an intellectual companion of many years. Her love for India and Nepal, her knowledge of South Asian politics and her refusal to accept most of my theories always made me question my own work. She has been a most wonderful friend without whom this work would not have been possible. I remain grateful and value her contribution.

To my colleagues and friends, Meenu, Matti and Angad, no words can express my gratitude. As we started on our fledgling doctoral careers, we had made a pact that academia would not make us suffer. We would have fun through the process, we decided. Sacredmediacow, an independent media collective was formed to ensure this and for three years, the talks which we held, films we screened and the conferences we organised, kept us away from the libraries and computers. The resultant book commission from this process is an acknowledgement that poverty need not bar creativity. To you three, my salutations.

This work would not have been possible without the help of the journalists at *Star News* and *Star Ananda.* I wish to acknowledge the help accorded to me by Uday Shankar who not only gave me permission to conduct the study but facilitated my stay at every level. His commitment to academia and this work is much appreciated. To all the journalists who tolerated my presence, incessant questions and queries, who gave me their valuable time, this work would not have been possible without your cooperation. To Gopal Kaushik and Yuvraj Bhattacharya, many thanks for making it so much fun. I must make a special mention of Yogesh Manwani, who not only gave me time and inputs and shared the secrets of the media market, but over the last few years has become a most valuable friend and ally. Comrade, many

5

Table of Contents

Introduction

The changing mediascape in India

India is in the news. Whether it is the country's rising status as an economic powerhouse[1] or the teeming millions living below the poverty line, its software geniuses earning million dollar salaries or call centre employees snatching up Western jobs, India makes a good copy. Films on India cause controversies and garner prestigious awards. Their film stars grace the cover of *Vogue* and international magazines.

The booming Indian media business exports the country's new found confidence in various ways. Bollywood has claimed its niche amongst world cinema. Films now open in London and New York before they do in Mumbai or Delhi. Indian music, both classical and popular, finds place in high street stores across the western world. The country's performers grace the Barbican and the Carnegie Hall, its music booms out of night clubs and *bhangra* pop is regular fare.

India's ever expanding television industry embodies this change. Not only has the scale of television completely transformed in economic terms, it has also become the locus where a 'changing' India is most visibly articulated. As Butcher states in the preface to her book, *Transnational Television, Cultural identity and change: when Star came to India*; "[t]he media landscape simultaneously embodied and reflected those changes" (Butcher, 2003:9). By 2006, the industry was estimated to be worth more than Rs 185 billion (approximately 230 million pounds), a dramatic turnaround from its humble beginnings in 1959 as an educational project sponsored by the state (Kohli, 2006: 62). The black and white days have been replaced with gloss, glamour and money. The state sponsored *Doordarshan*, the lone channel on Indian

---

[1] India is currently the fourth largest world economy, behind the United States, China and Japan. (*The Washington Post*, Dec 28th, 2008)

airwaves until the early 1990s, has been eclipsed and the last two decades have seen a most extraordinary growth in private channels, now numbering around 360. Nearly 160 more channels are waiting for the government's permission to go on air.[2] The Indian television viewer, more than anyone else in the world today, is then the most spoilt for choice. More than a hundred million households in India now own television sets. Seventy million of them are connected to cable or satellite TV. At the tip of their fingers lie choices galore; movie channels, music channels, television soap operas and news broadcasts. *CNN* and *BBC*, the Rupert Murdoch owned *Star TV* bouquet of channels, international sports channels and the home grown *Zee Television* all vie for the attention of the Indian audience.

Within the medium of television, the news genre has seen the most spectacular growth, prompting some to ask: "is India the world's biggest TV news bazaar?" (Thussu, 2007: 96) From just one news channel in 1998, today India has close to sixty 24-hour news channels spread across the country, most of which are "national, but many international in reach, [and] some catered to the regional markets" (ibid: 96, 97). News anchors are the new Indian celebrities, articulating reality to India's millions. With citizen journalism, live outdoor broadcast vans fitted with the latest technology, talk shows and discussions, analysis and reports, there seems to be no end of goodies for a nation of viewers until very recently fed on state propaganda as news.

Scholarship on Indian media: making a case for grounded research

The beginnings of Indian television were humble, accidental even. After an exhibition in New Delhi, the multinational electronic company, Philips, had left behind some equipment. *All India Radio* (AIR) used this to put together a broadcast in September 1959 for 'teleclubs' organised around 21 television sets that were installed in and around the Indian

---

[2]Source:Rediff India website, December12,2008, http://www.rediff.com/money/2008/dec/12you-might-soon-have-500-tv-channels.htm

Capital (Mehta, 2008: 29). If the beginnings were accidental, no one could have foreseen the exponential growth of the industry in this century in the sub-continent. The boom in satellite television (1990s) and the proliferation of private channels in India wrong footed most, including academia and scholarly work remains limited. However, predating the satellite boom, some important work was done on Indian television. Of significant importance is Arvind Rajagopal's work on the rise of Hindu nationalism, the Indian middle class and their linkages with the media and consumerist politics of the late eighties (2001). While it sets down an important marker, the time frame of the research predates all satellite channels. Sevanti Nainan's competent, authoritative work on Indian television records the early years of the satellite boom (1995) and Butcher's work on the cultural impact of the satellite revolution is noteworthy (2003). Treating the business of television media solely as an economic entity, Vanita Kohli's book *The Indian Media Business*, draws attention to the colossal capital now involved in Indian television (2006). *Satellites over South Asia* documents the changes in the region's television infrastructure through the 1990s (Page and Crawley, 2001). A more recent study focussing on how the cultural imaginations of national identity have been transformed by the rapid growth of satellite and cable television in postcolonial India is Kumar's *Gandhi meets Primetime* (2006). Most of these works take the political economy approach to examine Indian media, particularly television and its impact on the political, social and cultural life in the country. Ethnographic approaches to studying the media are even fewer. Mankekar's study of television audiences and the attempt of the state to create a 'modern' India while reinforcing family 'values' is an excellent example (1999). William Mazzarella's case study on the advertising industry in Mumbai connects to wider debate about global consumerist patterns and local mediations (2003). Swedish anthropologist, Stahlberg's ethnographic approach to studying a Lucknow based newspaper and how it constructs society is the first to study newspapers in India using such a methodology (2002). While a

commendable effort, it focuses less on news production dynamics and more on social constructing of locality through media content.

On news channels, academic work is even more limited. Nalin Mehta's recent book on television news channels is the first of its kind and offers a comprehensive history of Indian news channels (2008). The book is an impressive scholarship of the political, economic and social implications of the news revolution in the country. Daya Thussu, in his book on the rise of global infotainment, devotes a chapter to India and its news television content (Thussu, 2007: 91-113). Prasun Sonwalker has made important interventions through journal articles focusing on the "Murdochisation" of the Indian press and the new news ecology (2002). Besides these, and some edited volumes consisting of journalistic commentary on news practice, academic scholarship on news is virtually non-existent (see Sahay [ed], 2006). This research attempts to fill the giant gap, if partially, between the spread of television news channels and its scholarship.

Central Research Question and the initial hypothesis

Focussing on television news in India and its surrounding practices, the central research question of this thesis is: how is the nation constructed in Indian television newsrooms? Scholars have long commented on how the nation is flagged through news in particular and the media in general. In the British context, Scannell and Cardiff, in writing the social history of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) have argued that the public service broadcast conveys the political idea of the nation through mass culture (1991). Scannell has also stated that the *BBC* provides the space for a contemporary public sphere (1989). Similarly, Madianou demonstrated how Greek nationality and nationhood is constantly invoked in its news media (2005).

In his seminal work, *Imagined Communities* (1983), Anderson links the spread of European nationalism in the colonised world to print capitalism. In a world of media plenty, Arjun Appadurai makes the argument that a similar link can be found between the post-national

11

imaginary and the rise of electronic media (1996:22). While I discuss these themes in detail in the literature review, following from both their works, my initial hypothesis was that in India, with its "multiethnic, multilingual, multireligious, multicultural, multipolitical" (Ram, 2000: xi) political economy, a plethora of television channels must result in the articulation of multiple notions of nationhood. I presumed that news channels in every official Indian language must have broken the post-Nehruvian imaginary of a pan-Indian nation constructed by the state owned television channel, *Doordarshan*. Reality, however, disagreed. My empirical evidence shows, and I argue that, while the post-Nehruvian India has indeed dissipated, in its place another notion of India, every bit as hegemonic has arisen; an India for and by the middle class.

Television and the rise of the Indian middle class

The Indian television audience, most particularly its middle class, came into prominence with the economic liberalisation of the country, a process which started in the late 1980s and picked up momentum after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) induced structural reforms (Rajagopal, 2001, also see Joshi and Little, 1996). The term 'middle class' is notoriously promiscuous and does not lend to an easy definition. Sociologists have criticised the elasticity of the category 'middle class' under the liberalisation of the Indian economy (Lakha, 1999) and have noted the differentiation within the term (Deshpande, 2003). In his book *The Great Indian Middle Class*, Pavan K Verma attempts to contextualise the term:

> To my mind, in the Indian context, anybody who has a home to live in
> and can afford three meals a day, and has access to basic health care,
> public transport and schooling, with some disposable income to buy
> such basics as a fan or watch or cycle, has already climbed on to the
> middle class bandwagon. (2007: xviii)

As a purely economic entity, the Indian middle class does not have the same economic clout as their western counterparts. Applying such terms thus needs careful consideration and contextualisation. Though it is not the purpose of this thesis to provide a definition of the middle class in India, they are a very important constituent of this work as the target audience of television news channels. This work, therefore, understands the middle classes as the 'core audience' and uses a market definition of the socio-economic criteria (SEC) of viewers to understand which audience groups are thought to be lucrative targets by television companies.[3] (see appendix 1) (For more on the Indian middle class see Fernandes, 2006, for their consumption patterns, see Jafferlot and Veer, 2008)

However we choose to understand the Indian middle class, there can be little doubt that they have been a pursued lot. Almost every major global manufacturer of goods, especially the consumer variety, has tried to feed off the Indian middle class's "newly legitimated right to consume" (Rajagopal, 2001:3). From luxury car makers to handbag manufacturers, Swiss watch-makers to Hollywood producers, they have all tried to extract a piece of the global consumer that the middle class Indian has been advertised as. But alongside being courted by corporate giants and held up as the brave new consumers of 21st century capitalism, there have been the brickbats. The Indian middle class has been blamed for "shocking callousness" and turning a blind eye to the "unspeakable squalor and poverty and disease and illiteracy of the vast majority" of Indians (Verma, 2007: xiv). Dipankar Gupta (2000) has called the Indian middle class "shallow consumers" and "misplaced modernisers" and the rise of the Hindu rightwing has been attributed to them (Rajagopal, 2001).

The rise of the middle class in India coincided with the burgeoning growth of television. This has led to the articulation, I argue, of a 'middle class nation', particularly in the news genre, thereby

---

[3] The SEC table shows that viewers are classified according to the chief wage earner (CWE) of a household's earning capacity and educational qualifications. A household belonging to SEC A is more desirable to television advertisers than say one from SEC B or SEC C.

effectively marginalising all other possible articulations of nationhood. It is pertinent to point out here that this thesis does not claim that the vast numbers of the middle classes in India are passive recipients of a new television culture. Indeed, anthropological work amongst Indian middle classes has shown vastly differing attitudes towards the so-called globalisation of the economy.[4] (See Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase, 2009)

Indian Television News

As the rise of the middle class has been unprecedented, the growth of news channels in India has been nothing short of spectacular. They abound in every regional language in India. There are multiple news channels in English and even more in Hindi. Despite the seeming saturation of the media market, new channels are announced regularly. Just as news channels proliferate, serious concerns have been raised by academics and practitioners about news values, the dumbing down of content and the recent corporatisation of news in Indian television channels (see Mehta 2008, Thussu, 2007: 91-113, Sonwalkar, 2002).

The critique of television news is of course not unique to India. In America, it has been blamed for having "contributed to a decrease in attention span and the death of curiosity, optimism, civility, compassion for others, and abstract and conceptual reasoning (Arden 2003:48). John Simpson of the *BBC* has blamed television news for turning America into an "Alzheimer nation, unaware of its own or anyone else's past, ignorant of its own or anyone else's present (2002:288). Another journalist, Andrew Marr, commenting on the changing British news practices and its perception has stated "The idea of news has altered. It stopped being essentially information and became something designed to produce – at all costs, always – an emotional reaction, the more extreme the better" (2004: 381).

---

[4] (Since this thesis looks at the middle class as the target audience for television channels, it is necessary to note here that I will often use the term "core audience" and the "middle class" interchangeably)

14

While journalists have for long been documenting the particularities of their trade (see for example Rosenblum, 1998, 1989, Woodward, 2004), alongside media scholars in recent times, they have voiced serious concerns about their own practices. In India, with the recent explosion of news channels and an emerging news ecology, journalists turned academics have attempted to look back at their own practices from the outside while making use of their insider knowledge to comment on news practices (Mehta, 2008, Sonwalker, 2000). My interest in television news also stems primarily from the experiential. I was a journalist in India from the mid 1990s and as a television correspondent in the early 2000s saw first-hand the transformation which the Indian news sphere was going through. I am the concerned journalist and the academic outsider, the two positions from where I choose to enter this thesis.

Ethnographic studies in newsrooms: Making a case for India

Simon Cottle has argued that "[i]n the fast-changing fields of media and media research, studies that once challenged us to rethink basic positions of theory can all too quickly become ritually rehearsed and accepted as orthodoxy (2000:19). Writing specifically on newsroom ethnographies he states that though they have proved invaluable to media studies by providing a more "grounded theory of news manufacture" "much news ink has dried up for good under the bridge of technological change, and economic, regulatory and cultural forces have also played their part in the radical, (often professionally traumatic), reconfiguration of news corporations, news production and journalist practices (ibid: 1-2). 'New(s) times', he states, "demand a 'second wave' of news ethnographies that deliberately set out to theoretically map and empirically explore the rapidly changing field of news production and today's differentiated ecology of news provision." (ibid: 3) News ethnographies, even in their heydays, remained confined to Western settings. (see for example: Warner, 1971; Epstein, 1973; Altheide, 1976; Murphy, 1976; Tuchman, 1973, 1978; Schlesinger, 1978; Golding and

15

Elliott, 1979; Gans, 1979; Fishman, 1980; Ericson et al. 1987; Soloski, 1989) "It has become routine for universalistic observations about the media to be advanced in English-language books on the basis of evidence derived from a tiny handful of countries." (Curran and Park, 2000:1) "These are nearly always rich Western societies and the occasional honorary "Western" country like Australia" (ibid).

It is in this context of a changing news ecology in India and a lack of ethnographic approaches to studying newsrooms that this thesis chooses to situate itself and make its intervention. A particular burden of this work is to enquire if news practices in India are indeed different from its western counterparts and how they contribute to the new discourse of India resurgent.

Despite their focus on mostly western practices, the strength of ethnographic studies in newsrooms is that the researcher can enter the newsroom environment and describe practices from within, contributing to a more nuanced form of theory. While there is an abundance of material which has emerged out of India focusing on its media and connecting it to a larger political economy discourse, there is a significant lack of material looking at the particularities of practice. In the sphere of television news production, there is none.

This study claims to be the first television newsroom ethnography from India. The research is a result of ethnographic work carried out in television newsrooms in two Indian cities: Kolkata (previously Calcutta) and Mumbai (previously Bombay). The research was situated in *Star Ananda* in Kolkata and in *Star News* in the city of Mumbai. Both the news channels are part of *Media Content and Communication Services Ltd* (MCCS); a joint venture between Rupert Murdoch owned *Star* group and *ABP* (Anandabazar Patrika) *TV*, a regional publishing house from Kolkata. The fieldwork was conducted between November 2005 and September 2006. The first part of the fieldwork was spent in Kolkata followed by an intensive five months in Mumbai.

The Chapters

This thesis has eight chapters, including this introduction. The next chapter, the literature review, is divided into three parts. The first deals with the primary research concern: how is India articulated through its mainstream media? It puts forward a theoretical framework through which to understand the imagination of nationhood in India's present media ecology.

The second section contextualises the subjects of research, the two television channels, *Star News* and *Star Ananda,* in the current political economy of India. It compares present news channels on Indian television to the state run television network *Doordarshan* which until the early 90's was the sole provider of television content in the country. *Doordarshan's* project of a "pan-Indian national programming", the political meddling in its day-to-day affairs and its attempt at "nation-building" (Rajagopal, 2001) are examined in this section. Contrasted against the *Doordarshan* days is the privatisation of channels today and the market driven approach to news production. The final section is a discussion of the advantages of ethnography as a methodology with which to study newsrooms, and a review of earlier such studies.

The third chapter discusses the specific research methods used within the ethnographic framework: observer participation, depth interviews and analysis of news content structures and how and why I have employed such a triangulation. The chapter provides a detailed account of the process of gaining access, ethical dilemmas of the research and the limitations of this work. My reflections on the fieldwork, relationship with the journalists and managers, my own views of working in Mumbai and Kolkata and also particular episodes that highlight the fieldwork experience are also discussed. This chapter also has a section on the limitations of this thesis and other research directions that might have been possible but which I did not follow.

By dwelling at length on my own self-narrative of being a journalist in India prior to my academic pursuits and how it affected my

approach towards this thesis, this chapter adds to a growing body of work done on Indian media, particularly in news, by former practitioners. (Mehta, 2008 and Sonwalker, 2000) While there has been much work in the UK and the US by journalists writing and commenting on their own practices, in India such work, especially academic, is new and emerging. This particular chapter therefore adds to a nascent body of literature on Indian news media where the ethical dilemmas of being both an insider (journalist) and an outsider (researcher) are worked through. This is also a theme that is constantly evoked throughout this thesis.

The fourth chapter, the first to focus exclusively on fieldwork, suggests that the corporate section of today's newsrooms is actively involved in producing and planning news content. In detailing the work practices of the corporate section of *MCCS,* I propose that earlier news ethnographies paid scant attention to corporate strategies. Any research on today's advertisement driven news television houses that ignores corporate influence on content will provide only a partial picture of news determinants within an organisation. By examining minutely the different sections in the corporate office of *MCCS,* namely the chief executive officer's functions and the sales, marketing, research and human resources teams, this thesis argues that the traditional editorial/corporate division in television news organisations no longer holds. I claim that corporate responsibilities now include direct editorial inputs. Observational data and interviews with key personnel of each of the departments highlight how the corporate section designs, plans and executes news strategies, news stories and news programming. Specific instances are listed to support this argument.

This chapter, therefore, feeds into a pressing debate in media theory in India, and indeed elsewhere. With the advent of private television channels in the country, the role the corporate play in editorial matters has assumed importance. In his book on newspaper barons, *The Paper Tigers* (1998), Coleridge had observed the same trend in the Indian newspaper industry in the late eighties. "Of all the newspaper owners in the world, I met no one so single-mindedly

wedded to marketing as Samir Jain, [owner of India's largest publishing house, *Bennett and Coleman* and the publisher of *The Times of India*]".
(1998: 81). By examining the particularities of how the corporate takes on key editorial responsibilities, indeed to a point where a distinction between the two becomes immaterial, I attempt to provide media theory with empirical data with which to understand the ever spreading tentacles of a market driven, ratings obsessed media industry. This is not to be read as a straightforward imposition on editorial practices by the corporate, as there is in fact close collaboration between the editorial and the corporate teams. As much as the corporate assumes editorial functions, the editorial team inculcates the mantra of maximising profitability.

In the fifth chapter I examine the newsrooms of *Star Ananda* and *Star News*. It offers a comparative analysis of work practices in Kolkata and Mumbai. By doing so, it wades into some of the major academic debates on news media theory. Academic work has often portrayed journalists as unthinking, unconscious subjects (Ericson et al. 1987). How does this claim hold up in today's market driven newsrooms of India? Soloski has argued, "objectivity is the most important professional norm and from it flows more specific aspects of news professionalism" (1989: 213). How is objectivity understood in Indian television newsrooms and what are its consequences? Has the meaning of the term changed given the changing news ecology? Is news mere "routinisation" of production processes? (Halloran, et al. 1970) What kind of professional socialisation goes on in Indian newsroom and what are its consequences? How does peer group pressure work in these contexts? Who is the audience, how are they imagined and, as I argue, how are they "captured" in newsrooms? In contrast to the academic debates about the "forgotten audience," or audience as the "missing link" (Schlesinger, 1978: 106), my empirical data suggest that Indian television news is all about the audience and its construction. Instead of assuming that Indian news practices are identical to Western professional practices, this research enters the newsroom milieu, see it

at different times of the day, and understand news practices as well as journalists' interpretation of them.

Several themes emerge. The key among them being the concern news producers have for maximising profits. While the corporate has clawed its way into the editorial, the latter too has become a willing ally. The onus placed on Television Rating Points (TRP), a quantitative viewership monitoring mechanism devised by the market, has rendered editorial judgement captive to it. News producers have now come to view these numbers as reflective of their own performance.

Journalists however, cannot be dismissed as mere cogs in the wheel, "unwittingly, unconsciously serving as a support for the reproduction of a dominant ideological discursive field" (Hall, 1982: 82). In Mumbai several journalists I interviewed were critical of their own practices. Many felt that they were compromising on "news values" and "ethics" but stated that the job demanded it. In Kolkata though, this critical reflection was absent and journalists dismissed any notions of "values" in news, stating that the primary motive was to increase profitability.

The audience is the primary concern of both the editorial and the corporate and the sixth chapter examines how the audience is understood in the two television newsrooms in particular and the media industry in general. Unlike traditional work on audience studies, this chapter attempts to understand the audience as a discursive formation and explores how its imaginings within a newsroom affect news content. It looks at the audience in two separate ways. Firstly, it focuses on the quantitative aspects of measuring the audience. It explains the mechanics of TRP data collection with a brief background on Television Audience Measurement (TAM), the company responsible for collecting and collating the data in India. By explaining the procedure, reviewing the literature on television ratings and examining the political economy of television news production in India, the chapter claims that ratings target affluent audiences and television content is produced for this wealthy section of Indian television watching public.

Secondly, through interviews with journalists, the chapter attempts to understand the journalists' imagining or understanding of the audience. It establishes that journalists in both the cities imagine themselves as the audience and produce a content that they think they or their families and friends would like. Given that journalists belong to an elite section of society, the news content becomes an articulation by the privileged for the privileged and "in this promised land, the poor are wished away, for everyone's full potential may be realised and well-being achieved by all" (Chakravorty and Gooptu, 2000: 91).

This discourse of the elite is not an Indian phenomenon. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has published an impressive body of work on the question of how societal elites manage to reproduce themselves thus consolidating and entrenching their position in society (see Bourdieu, 1973). The chapter on news audiences therefore addresses a major body of work in social and cultural theory. But while connecting to this larger debate, it shows the particularities of Indian newsrooms where a certain articulation of audience is privileged over others, justified over claims of viewership demands. Presenting interviews with journalists, the chapter then explores the processes of newsroom socialisation through which this becomes common rationale.

The seventh chapter analyses the structures of news content in the two channels. Seeking to connect news content with corporate strategies and editorial processes, I claim a causal link between the two. I argue that pursuit of a certain audience, an obsession with TRP ratings and a certain professional socialisation in news rooms leads to television journalists' understanding of news being skewed and homogenised leading in turn to a colonising of communication space by 'cricket, crime and cinema'.

The debate about tabloidisation and dumbing down of news content is an ongoing one. Writing in the context of broadcast journalism in America, Schudson has critiqued the "intrusion of marketplace values into the professionalism of journalists (2003, 90)." Thussu states that "[t]he lack of concern among television news networks for India's majority population is ironic in a country which

was the first in the world to use satellite television for developmental purposes" (2007: 111).

It has been argued that in pursuit of advertisement revenue, news channels are dumbing down content to reach the lowest common denominator. William Mazzarella in his ethnographic study of the Indian advertising market in the early 2000s, quoting an industry executive talks of the Indian predilection for uproarious *tamasha* or spectacle in advertising content. (2003: 220) Interestingly, Thussu uses the same term, *tamasha,* to describe news content in India. (Thussu, 2007: 91) My work connects these two worlds, of advertising and news content, and shows the processes by which in the latter's pursuit of the former, news content gets reduced to a *tamasha* or spectacle.

The concluding chapter comes back to the beginning, addressing the questions I started out with and attempting to provide certain frames through which the entire work might be analysed. As mentioned earlier, a key ambition for this work is to understand the notion of 'India', and the practices through which the 'nation' is articulated. The media articulates national identity and to an extent the country's imagining of its role or position in global politics. It is often the media that becomes the "primary site for the exposition of different social and political discourses..." (Chakravorty and Gooptu, 2000: 93). In India, with its transitional economy emerging from decades of trade barriers and restrictions, the news media business is creating a homogenised notion of nationhood. My thesis concludes that the new India is only for a few thousand: the sample size audience of rating companies. It is imagined by even fewer, the journalists of the new Indian television newsrooms. Together, they articulate and live the dream of 'Cricket, Crime and Cinema.'

Meant to be a detailed case study of news practices from emerging economies in the South, the concluding chapter looks at the empirical evidence against some of the established 'orthodoxies' of media studies in news theory and analyse how they hold up to scrutiny in a different news setting and a new century (Cottle, 2000). (See Chapter 2 for a detailed account of these orthodoxies) Are they still

22

useful tools to determine and analyse journalistic practice? This section works through the orthodoxies and the evidence to see how they might still be useful categories for analysis in India and elsewhere.

Research Claims

In summary, this thesis makes three broad claims. First, the assumed traditional divide between corporate and editorial no longer exists in Indian television. Each does the job of the other and a distinction between them, at least in this context, is academic. Second, journalists imagine themselves as the audience and produce content they think they and their families would like. Given that these professionals mostly come from prosperous backgrounds, across television channels in India a singular narrative in content and a hegemonic understanding of an affluent nation is achieved. Connected to this is my third claim. In pursuit of advertisements, which target wealthier sections of society, television channels too focus on the same group as their primary or core audience. With journalists coming from the same economic class as the target audience, a match-making takes place. Privileged journalists articulate for a privileged audience and a hegemonic, unvarying content is produced across news channels.

The remit of this work is varied. For media scholars, journalists and anyone else interested in Southern practices, the thesis provides a detailed case study of two Indian newsrooms. To the theorist, it provides empirical evidence to challenge and build on existing frameworks of media theory. To the ethnographer, the work provides an example of how a practitioner turned academic might approach his/her subject of study and the resultant conflicts and dilemmas that arise in different situations. For journalists everywhere and Indians in particular, this work attempts to hold up a mirror to their own practices by someone who, not very long ago, was part of their curious breed.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

How does a country where 456 million people live below the poverty line get to frame itself as an economic power house?[5] The average Indian family today consumes 100 kilograms of food less than it did in 1991 when the process of economic reforms started to kick in. Incidents of farmers, unable to pay back loans, committing suicide have become so regular that they are relegated to the inside pages of local dailies. Yet, national parties coined 'India Shining' campaigns as election platforms and the Indian media jumped on the bandwagon.[6]

As any social reality, 'nationalism' is a historically situated concept and hence discursive. One of the key areas where such discourse is played out is in the media: it is often the media that becomes the "primary site for the exposition of different social and political discourses..." (Chakravorty and Gooptu, 2000: 93). Recent work in media studies on the relationship between media and nationalism has argued that the "inequalities of power or the homogenising tendencies" (Hallam and Street, 2000: 7)of the process of nationalism, creates media biases and forces an articulation on those who resist or are marginalised from this national identity. This process is further aided by the present day media's penchant of targeting specific audiences groups, thereby marginalising entire sections, which it does not consider its core readers or viewers.

One of the primary concerns of this work is to understand how the transformed, capital intensive and entertainment driven Indian media, especially television news, imagines nationhood in the 21st century. Who does it include and who are excluded from this imaginary? To do this, the first part of the literature review will put forward a theoretical framework through which we can analyse the

---

[5] Source: the World Bank report on India in 2007. The global poverty line is measured at $1.25 per person per day.
[6] The Bharatiya Janata Party ran the 2005 general elections in India on the India Shining campaign and contrary to popular belief, suffered a humiliating defeat. The country's news media, almost without exception had predicted a win for the BJP.

24

empirical material. The second part of the chapter is a historical reconstruction of Indian television. If we are to understand how present day television media is reconfiguring nationhood, *Doordarshan* and its efforts to build a pan Indian nation for three decades, until the late eighties, must be understood. This section will pay attention to the state run television channel's efforts and contrast it with the glitz and glamour of the private channels. Having identified the theoretical frameworks and the context in which this study is situated, the third and final part of this review will discuss news ethnographies, their advantages and blind spots as a methodology. It will attempt to establish why, in the Indian context and given our research questions and concerns, this was felt to be the most appropriate approach for this work.

Nationhood: Theoretical Frameworks

Benedict Anderson's work serves as a departure point for this analysis, especially since his conceptualisation of the link between the rise of the nation and the rise of print capitalism resonates with my own concerns in this investigation. In Anderson's analysis, printed texts – the novel and the newspaper - which first developed in Europe in the eighteenth century and then spread to the Third World through a spread of print capitalism, came to provide the technical means to forge the idea of the nation in societies outside Europe (Anderson, 1983).

"But the revolution of print capitalism and the cultural affinities and dialogues unleashed by it were only modest precursors to the world we live in now" (Appadurai, 1990: 28). In India, the rapidly growing media spaces (especially since the explosion of the media market since the 1990s in India) were constructing a new idea of the 'authentic' Indian. Private television channels were eroding *Doordarshan*'s pan Indian nationhood, influenced by Nehruvian socialism and ideas of nation building. The "imagined community" was being re-articulated. The new private television channels, though substantially free from state control, were not "a democratic electronic

public sphere where all voices are freely represented and heard, and which apparently appeal to the free domain of popular imagination" (Chakravorty and Gooptu, 2000: 91). Instead, as my empirical evidence will show, particular visions achieve dominance through constant re-articulation (see chapter 7).

Michel Foucault has changed our perceptions of knowledge, linking it intrinsically with power (power/knowledge complex) through discourse (see Foucault, 1972). Foucault has argued that discourse constructs the topic, that "[D]iscourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about ...a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (Hall, 1997: 44). The study of discourses includes the rules which prescribe certain ways of talking about some topics and excluding others and how knowledge about a topic acquires authority, a sense of embodying the 'truth' about it. This knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true, "not the Truth of knowledge in the absolute sense but of a discursive formation sustaining a regime of truth" (Hall, 1997: 49-50). Calling into question the overall category of 'reality', Foucault demystifies the 'regimes of truth,' (media, governments, agencies, world views, etc) which claim that there is a singular version of reality that can be identified.

If there can be multiple versions of social reality, then construction of nationhood will be a contested one, given the opportunity. The Indian television economy, with its hundreds of channels, might be producing a range of myths which could then be producing multiple versions of the nation. Indeed, as Appadurai has argued, the electronic "mediascape" might even transcend the notion of the nation. Eloquently extending Anderson's argument, Appadurai finds a link between the post-national imaginary and the electronic media.

> "[...] as mass mediation becomes increasingly dominated by the electronic media, (and thus delinked from the capacity to read and write), and as such media increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries, and as these audiences themselves start

> new conversations between those who move and those who stay, we
> find a growing number of diasporic public spheres (1990: 22).

Appadurai's argument "that the era in which we could assume that viable public spheres were typically, exclusively, or necessarily national could be at an end" (ibid) is seductive. Indeed, as I mentioned in the Introduction, I had started out this journey hoping to find a land of 'multiple Indias' articulated by a myriad television channels. Reality however, or rather my empirical evidence, argued otherwise. *Doordarshan's* unvarying idea of India promoted relentlessly on the airwaves had indeed given way to the market forces of capitalism and private channels. But instead of Appadurai's post-modern dream, another unvarying notion of India had come to the fore, dominated by a middle class consumer revolution. Between 1980 and 1989, India saw a 47.5 per cent rise in consumption expenditure (Dubey 1992: 150). This process received a further boost following the opening up of the economy in the 1990s. A new and confident middle class, animated by the vision of setting India on a newly liberated path of progress and economic prominence on the world stage, "assumed for themselves the role of the makers of the nation in new ways. In the emerging middle class political vision, the nation is a community of citizens who are enfranchised by freedom of choice, consumption and material gratification and a lifestyle of enjoyment and pleasure" (Chakravorty and Gooptu 2000: 91).

Arvind Rajagopal, writing on India and this new television audience, has argued that the market reforms of the early 1990s and two epic television serials, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* helped the rise of Hindu nationalism in India (2001). "Liberalisation and Hindu nationalism shared their technologies of transmission for expanding markets and audiences respectively. If their messages and their adherents overlapped or crossed over, it was not necessarily out of conscious design, although design was not absent" (ibid: 3). My empirical evidence is closer to Rajagopal's than that of Appadurai's post national imaginary. The former has drawn an "opportunistic" alliance between a resurgent middle classes and Hindu nationalists

27

facilitated by television images in the late 1980s and early 1990s. (2001:3). It is Rajagopal's resurgent nationalist middle class which by the turn of the century had turned into the core audience of Indian television. The next part of this chapter elaborates how, dictated primarily by market economics, *Doordarshan* moved away, in the late 1980s from its earlier goals of 'education' and 'nation-building' and how private channels took this process forward to construct a middle class India.

Doordarshan: Building a "nation"

In a charmingly informal book of his days as the Director of *Doordarshan*, Indian Administrative Service[7] (IAS) officer Bhaskar Ghose talks about his experiences in the state-run television service (Ghose, 2005). Full of political intrigue, the book is an insider account of the state control over the airwaves in India until the storm of satellite television caught it unawares. Bhaskar Ghose was plucked from an insurgency ridden North Bengal where he was the district commissioner, brought to Delhi at the behest of Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister and head of the Congress Party in the mid eighties, and appointed to take over *Doordarshan*. Despite Gandhi's personal interest in Ghosh's appointment, intrigues were never far away and a political dismissal was always at hand. Ghose recalls an instance at a party where he met the late Rajiv Gandhi when he was the Director of *Doordarshan*:

> The formalities were over, and I was leaving, when Rajiv Gandhi called me back.
> 'Bhaskar", he said. 'just stay on a minute.'
> Rajiv Gandhi personally went to the door that led to the main corridor of the Parliament building and locked it.
> 'What's all this I hear about your being anti-Congress?' he asked.

---

[7] Indian Administrative Service, popularly known by its acronym IAS, originated as the elite civil service of the Indian Government under colonial rule and was formerly known as the Indian Civil Services. It continues in the contemporary civil services of India, though these are now organised differently.

'Anti-Congress, sir?' I said completely surprised. 'I'm not anti-Congress or anti or pro any party.'

'That what I thought,' Rajiv said. 'But all these Bengal MPS in the Congress are saying your news is slanted against the Congress. They say you're Jyoti Basu's man.' He laughed in that very contagious way he had. (Ghose, 2005:163)

Despite the evident political overtones of the reported conversation, Rajiv Gandhi was a young, relatively modernising prime minister who was attempting to bring *Doordarshan* out of the top heavy, state controlled approach of earlier decades. By the mid eighties, "[l]ed by Rajiv Gandhi-now the prime minister of the nation, a younger, more urbane, Anglophile, and technophile generation took charge of producing a new, more cosmopolitan image of Indian television" (Kumar, 2006: 34). The cosmopolitan image that was to emerge in the late eighties was a far cry from the objective for which public broadcast television in India was said to have been started. Indian television had begun as a socio economic educational project for villagers in India in 1959 (Thomas, 2005: 99). In January 1960, in collaboration with the Delhi Directorate of Education, *All India Radio* began producing one-hour educational programmes for students in higher secondary schools. In the same month, Ford Foundation sent a team of experts to examine some of the educational programmes being made and made a grant of $564,000 to the government of India as partial support for a four-year educational project.

"General television services were launched with an one hour daily transmissions from Delhi on the eighteenth anniversary of Indian independence, August 15, 1965. Although entertainment and informational programming was introduced as part of the "General Service," the proclaimed goal of television broadcasting in India was educational, and programming emphasised issues such as adult literacy and rural development. General Service consisted of a ten-minute "News Round Up" mostly read by an on-screen presenter in a format developed for All India Radio" (Kumar, 2006:27).

The late 1960s was a period of expansion for television in India; broadcasting stations were established outside Delhi, in Mumbai (then Bombay), in the troubled states of Jammu and Kashmir and in Amritsar to counter the flow of Pakistani television programmes. By 1975, centres were operating in Chennai and Kolkata (then Madras and Calcutta respectively). The political overtones of the central government and the way it chose to operate television services were evident in the fact that the opening of the centres was embroiled in controversies. In Kolkata which is a bastion of the Left, the party which ruled the state of West Bengal never felt adequately represented on television as central bureaucrats controlled television programming. "The authorities seem to forget that India is a federal polity, with its multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural components...', wrote Jyoti Basu, the long serving chief minister of West Bengal (cited in Page and Crawley, 2001: 63).

Central control also meant the domination of Hindi over other languages. The promotion of Hindi as the national language ran into problems and political agitation in Madras (Chennai) (Kumar, 2006: 29). As Page and Crawley point out: "in linguistically diverse countries, central control tended to involve the reinforcement of a dominant language- in Indian, Hindi, in Pakistan, Urdu and in Nepal, Nepali" (Page and Crawley, 2001: 62). The declaration of a state of emergency in June 1975 by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and her use of *All India Radio* (AIR) and *Doordarshan* as propaganda machinery, further confirmed the political usage of the media by the central government. After the emergency and the defeat of the Indira Gandhi government in 1977, the fledgling political party, Janata Dal came to the helm. With a promise of sweeping changes, the new government appointed former newspaper editor B G Verghese as the head of an independent commission to decrease governmental control in broadcasting. While impressive on paper, the commission's recommendations could not make much headway as Janata Dal lost power owing to internal frictions, bringing the Congress Party back to the centre in 1980. Mrs Gandhi immediately shelved all proposals of decentralising

broadcasting. But other events conspired to wrench governmental control away from television broadcasting in India.

The 1982 Asian Games

New Delhi was awarded the opportunity of hosting the Ninth Asian Games in 1982 and this event more than any other, until the economic liberalisation of the 1990s, propelled the growth of television in India. Colour television was introduced during the games and a technological overhaul began. Ghose, writing in his capacity as then Director of *Doordarshan*, states: "The most elaborate preparations ever to have been made for a sports event of this kind were taken up, with a high powered organising committee headed by Rajiv Gandhi, assisted by a number of his friends and an assortment of experts from different fields" (2005: 28). The relatively small Indian middle class – which until now had little to do with the television agenda of the government – got their first taste of entertainment programming, and of colour. A decade and a half later, this small Indian middle class was proclaimed as the largest such economic group in the world, and to become the focus of advertisers and news producers, both nationally and internationally.

"The gradual shift of successive Indian governments from an earlier commitment to socialism, together with the hosting of the Asian Games, prompted the massive growth of television in the country" (Thomas, 2005: 100). The Asian Games not only ushered in colour and efforts to modernise the television broadcasting infrastructure in India, but it also initiated a movement away from 'educating' to 'entertaining'. Though an effort to merge the two together continued for some more time, it was the latter which gradually gained primacy.

Entertaining the Nation

The success of *Hum Log* (*We the People*), a soap opera centred around the everyday lives of a North Indian joint family, highlights *Doordarshan*'s efforts to combine the educational with entertainment.

31

Starting in July 1984, two years after the Asian Games, "*Hum Log* was an attempt to blend *Doordarshan*'s stated objectives of providing entertainment to its audience, while promoting within the limits of a dominant patriarchal system, such educational issues as family planning, equal status for women, and family harmony" (Singhal and Rogers, 1990: 75, cited in Kumar, 2006:32).

As this thesis is concerned with production practices, it is interesting to note the circumstances under which soap operas – 'serials' in *Doordarshan* parlance - came to Indian television and its production practices. Ghose, then Director of *Doordarshan*, writes:

> Early in the 1980s, David Poindexter, president of a US-based NGO called Population Communications International, brought to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting the idea of using soap operas to communicate social messages subliminally. The then secretary, S.S Gill, was interested and Poindexter was able to bring in Miguel Sabido, a pioneering producer of soap operas in Mexico who had used them successfully to carry out messages about family planning. Why this started in Mexico isn't difficult to explain. In a predominantly Roman Catholic country like Mexico, family planning in any form frowned upon; advocating it on television is out of the question. Nevertheless, concern over the high rate of population growth led to the idea of using soap operas to convey, very subtly, messages about the benefits of small families, the misery that afflicts large families living on a small income, the better quality of care received by children in small families and so on. Nothing overt, just ideas woven into the storylines of what were otherwise turgid family dramas (Ghose, 2005: 33).

The Pan-Indian and Me

I have used the experiential as a media practitioner quite extensively through this thesis. When it comes to situating the self as part of pan-Indian audience watching *Hum Log*, memory is an unstable analytical tool, given that they are from childhood and recollected only in patches. Nonetheless, contextualising these memories, along with the available

32

literature should help to enunciate the notion of "India" and "Indianess" which the *Doordarshan* bosses and their political masters were striving to achieve.

I grew up in Guwahati, the capital city of Assam, situated in the north-east of India. The seven states comprising the region have been mired in insurgency and separatist movements throughout the colonial period and since Indian Independence (see Nag, 1991). Part of *Doordarshan*'s strategy of nation building was an attempt at national integration through their programming. This included a show of regional films every Sunday afternoon starting with Assamese, then Bengali, then Bhojpuri and so on, through the twenty-five official languages in alphabetical order until it came back to Assamese. However inclusive it attempted to be, the domination of Delhi and the Hindi language was always obvious. Serials like *Hum Log* conveyed a notion of what the "Indian" family was like. The story of a North Indian family and their trials and tribulations over three generations are portrayed as the defining characteristics of families all across the country, with the Hindi language taking precedence over all others. Disconnected from the North of India geographically, I was part of a television audience which was sold the notion of an ideal Indian family, with "patriotic pride, family planning, gender relations and communal harmony" doled out in large dollops through the episodic narrative (Kumar, 1996: 32). Well known veteran film actor Ashok Kumar used to sign off each of the 156 episodes by translating the show's title into a different Indian language and his "one-minute summary came to symbolise *Doordarshan*'s programming agenda of creating a collective union of the nation's diverse linguistic and ethnic communities." (ibid: 33).

Selling the 'nation'

At the same time, the broadcasting of *Hum Log* also signalled a new era of commercialisation on Indian television: *Doordarshan* entered into a contract with Food Specialities Limited, the Indian subsidiary of Nestle,

33

to sponsor the production of the serial. Food Specialities agreed to pay the production costs in return for the rights to advertise its product, *Maggi Two Minute Noodles*, nationally. With an estimated audience of sixty million, the sales of *Maggi Two Minute Noodles* "increased from none in 1982 to 1,600 tons in 1983, 4200 tons in 1985, 10,000 tons in 1990 and 15,000 tons in 1998" (Singhal and Rogers, 1990:100, cited in Kumar, 2006:33). The huge economic success of *Hum Log* would alter the "educational" aspect of this and later serials, planned as they were around Mexican prototypes.

> Indeed, the serial was so successful financially that the producers gave up all pretensions of carrying any message, however subliminal or subtle. The scriptwriter began to write plain soap opera episodes that lost none of the popularity of the original episodes; if anything, they were watched even more widely. This was only the beginning. Hum Log was followed by serials like Buniyaad, all of them brought in handsome profits to the producers (Ghose, 2005: 35).

The commercialisation of programming on *Doordarshan* was soaring by the mid-1980s and a new breed of younger politicians led by Rajiv Gandhi discarded the early designs for using *Doordarshan* as a public medium for national development in favour of a more entertainment-oriented commercial culture. Shanta Kumar writes:

> As advertising and commercial sponsorship of sporting events, sitcoms, soap operas, dharmic serials, and film based programming brought in considerable revenues, Doordarshan effectively manipulated its monopoly over viewers across the country by strategically scheduling what the network called national programming during the prime time hours of late evenings and weekends (1996: 35).

Arvind Rajagopal has argued that the emergence of *Doordarshan's* "national programming" as a pan-Indian genre was crucial for the postcolonial project of nation building (cited in Kumar, 2006: 35). Rajagopal, defining the notion of national programming on *Doordarshan* writes that the network relied on programmes which portrayed an

idealised, mythical and historical past which ignored latter day divisions and present realities.

> I choose the term "national" to indicate the broad cross-regional appeal of the programmes, and their (usually implicit but sometimes explicit) elaboration of a national culture. The state's appeal to myth and history (intermingled, as always) is instrumental in this purpose. A shared past, behind and above all latter-day divisions, is projected as the crucible in which a distinctive Indian identity was shaped. This identity is, of course, under fierce dispute as competing interests vie to redefine its character; currently, minorities, especially Muslims, are threatened by a blatantly "Hinduized" national identity. (ibid)

Rajagopal developed this argument in his later work (2001) to argue that the rise of Hindu nationalism fed on two factors: the market liberalisation which led to a middle class resurgence and the cultural symbolics of television, primarily the airing of two religious epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. I focus briefly here on how these serials were produced as it elaborates the state interference in *Doordarshan* and also the gradual move towards commercialisation of the Indian airwaves.

Producing the 'myth' of India

Ghose makes it clear that the genesis of historical serials came from the Congress Party, from no less than the then Prime Minister and its leader, Rajiv Gandhi. (Following Rajagopal's argument, it is ironic that it was the pro-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which rode the Hindu revivalist movement on the back of such serials and came to prominence). Ghose writes that in early 1985 Rajiv Gandhi had written to the minister for information and broadcasting, V.N Gadgil, stating that the serials being shown on *Doordarshan* should depict "the values that were enshrined in our ancient texts and philosophy, the kind of values that were contained in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana." (2005: 38). In those days, *Doordarshan* had few in-house serials; two Mumbai based film directors, Ramanand Sagar and B R Chopra were

brought in to direct them. Sagar's relationship with Ghose was stormy, with the latter referring to former as an 'old bandicoot' in his memoirs (2005:40). Referring to the quality of the serial as 'awful', Ghose is still forced to air it because of political pressure. The following exchange between Ghose and Gadgil, the minister elaborates the situation:

> 'What did you think of Sagar's Ramayana serial?' he (Gadgil) asked.
> 'What you did, sir,' I (Ghose) said. 'It's awful."
> Gadgil sighed and nodded. 'Yes, I know. Yes. But you see,' he said looking away, 'I'm afraid we have to start screening it.'.... 'I have no choice. Some MPs have begun saying that we are holding it back. I believe they mean to speak to the PM.' (ibid: 40)

The religious overtones of the serial meant that Ramanand Sagar could continue to get extensions as politicians did not want to be blamed for stopping it and hurting majority Hindu sentiments. When Ghose attempted to stop the extension of the serial, Sagar told him that the consequences would be severe. Ghose retorts that the consequences would have to be faced; to which Sagar plays his trump card:

> 'Even if it comes up in Parliament?' the bandicoot asked me softly.
> 'What will the mantriji (minister) say then?.... 'You know it cannot be stopped now,' Sagar continued.... 'There will be chaos if it is stopped.'
> (ibid: 42)

Ramayana and *Mahabharata,* despite questionable aesthetics, helped further the commercialisation of television in India. While political interference in *Doordarshan* was rife, and continues to this day; in the late 1980s, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his advisers attempted to move away from the socialist era and the Nehruvian notion of nation building and development which had dominated *Doordarshan,* towards a more entertaining style in programming (see Kumar, 2006: 35). This can be seen as the precursor to a television industry now solely focussed on entertainment and the middle class. It will be helpful here to examine the conditions under which the explosion of channels took place and how, in a competitive market vying for the same eye balls

36

(that of middle class India), this gave rise both to homogeneity and a dumbing down of content.

The Indian Television Industry: 1990s to date

The catalysts of the booming television industry in India were two separate events: the opening up of the economy in the early 1990s (Bhatt, 1994: 1), followed by the first Gulf War. The former brought cable television to India; the latter showed what a spectacle it could provide (see Kumar, 2006: 3).

> By the early 1990s, a number of factors had come together to challenge the viability of governments' control of the electronic media. Among these were the emergence of a democratic consensus across the region, the growth of a more independent press, the popularity of video, the beginnings of economic liberalisation and the development of a new, extended, urban middle class in India and other countries. (Page and Crawley, 2001: 68)

The Indian government's control over the electronic media, so carefully orchestrated during its inception in the 60's, was breached indirectly. As in much of South Asia, it.was the rapid rise of videos that broke the monopoly. "Though more of a threat to cinema than to TV, it gave the middle classes a greater choice of entertainment, whether through imported western films or the latest products of Bollywood" (ibid: 66). Two significant developments therefore took place almost simultaneously: the rise of a new middle class in India, and the rapid growth of a market driven media that catered to and articulated middle class imaginings. An inkling of the possibilities of television came with *CNN*'s coverage of the 1991 Gulf War. The telecasting of live events set a new benchmark for television journalism. *CNN* might have created the awareness, but there were other agents which made change possible in the South Asian broadcasting scene. Page and Crawley point to three: the *AsiaSat-1* satellite - the first Asia specific satellite available for television broadcasting in the region; the entertainment oriented

37

content which proved highly attractive, as opposed to the fare doled out by national networks; and the cable system created to meet local demand for new satellite service (Page and Crawley, 2001: 76). A Chinese capitalist operating out of Hong Kong, Li Ka-Shing, owned *AsiaSat1*, which provided satellite coverage to both private and national broadcasters from Turkey to Japan. But it was Mr Ka-Shing's broadcasting company Hutchison Whampoa that started the revolution called *Star* (Satellite Television Asia Region) *TV*, later bought by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in 1993.

India was not meant to be a central target and the "phenomenal success of *Star* in winning and audience in India was a surprise to *Star*'s own managers" (ibid: 77). Within six months, India was *Star*'s biggest market, despite it targeting only the English speaking elite. Soap operas like *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* became household names. Yet, its access to most of India was restricted because of the language barrier. Private channels came up rapidly to fill this gap, including none less than *Zee TV*. Beamed through *AsiaSat-1*, *Zee* became an international player in its own right. Regional channels with language specific audiences sprang up across the country and channels like *Eenadu TV* and *Sun TV* in South India established an audience loyalty in the late nineties. With the relative marginalisation of English, *Star* launched Hindi language channels and its impact was felt immediately.

The archaic broadcasting laws of India formulated during the colonial era were meant to maintain the government's monopoly over the airwaves but a Supreme Court decision in 1995, stating that the airwaves belonged to the public, forced a review of the laws. The Indian Government did not allow private players to broadcast from India and thus most used Hong Kong as their base and *AsiaSat-1* as their satellite. But in 1998, the government removed this restriction, allowing even more channels to come into play.

Origins of the Private News Channels in India

Here we return our focus to the transnational news channels in India and their sudden growth. The importance of owning news channels for broadcasters was also because of the perceived impact they could have on the governments in South Asia, especially in their attitudes towards broadcasting regulation and also as a key tool for lobbying for change in them (Crawley and Page, 2006: 87). *CNN*, as mentioned above, was the first channel to open up the possibilities of live news in the Asian market. Despite the success of its 1991 Gulf War coverage, *CNN*, which was formed in 1985, took a further four years to start operations in Asia. It opened its first Asian Bureau in Hong Kong in 1995 and within three years it had seven bureaus in the continent, one of them being in New Delhi. "The nature of globalisation in the 1990s underlined the importance of strategic alliances between broadcasters, or between broadcaster and distributor, and the short-lived nature of some of those agreements" (Page and Crawley, 2001: 84). In India, *CNN* operated with both private and public broadcasters. It collaborated with *NDTV* in 1993 for selected news coverage to be shown on *Doordarshan's* national network. The programme, *The World This Week,* became one of the top rated programmes on *Doordarshan* and made Prannoy Roy, the head of *NDTV*, a household name. The fact that within fifteen years, *NDTV* had four channels of its own - three devoted exclusively to news and one to entertainment - exemplifies the fast moving economy of news business in India.

The *BBC* and *CNN* were in competition in India. While the *BBC* was constrained financially because of its charter and financial obligation as the British domestic public service, *CNN* was able to move more quickly, at least initially. It was successful in signing a partnership with *Doordarshan* in 1995, making it the first broadcaster to be allowed on an Indian satellite (*INSAT2B*), though two years later the agreement was revoked. The *BBC*'s constraints were to a large extent mitigated by the creation of *BBC Worldwide* in 1996. Its operation in Asia had started earlier with its partnering with the *Hutchison Whampoa Group* in

providing news and information to the *Star TV* network. This came to an end when Murdoch took control of *Star* in 1993 with different agendas and goals to the *BBC*. The latter went on to sign deals with private television groups in India. One such group was the largely unsuccessful *Home TV* for which the BBC provided news in Hindi. With the launch of satellites like the American *PanAmSat*; *CNN, BBC* and other similar groups found an easy access to Asian televisions sets through cable operators who were able to receive these satellite signals and thereby upload directly to homes. This allowed for beaming signals from outside (Hong Kong) and circumvented government regulations in India as well as regarding foreign television companies in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

In providing Hindi news for *Home TV*, the *BBC* had realised that the attraction of an international broadcaster lay in its ability not only to provide global news but also to focus on regionally focussed news, a mantra which *Star TV* took to heart under Murdoch. In fact, much of *Star*'s strategies were derived from earlier experiments by *BBC* and *CNN*. The latter were the first to rope in *NDTV*. *Star News* was produced completely by *NDTV*, both in Hindi and English. This allowed *Star* to cash in on the experience and popularity already created by *The World This Week*, the earlier news programme produced by *NDTV* in collaboration with *CNN*.

The news genre was to be fragmented into more specific areas, especially business and sports news. Niche broadcasting or 'narrow broadcasting' focus took advantage of the global reach of satellites and their ability to target specific audiences, and channels like Singapore-based *Asian Business News International* (ABNI) developed business specific news channels. Within this niche, "there was a dual target: viewers and opinion-formers as well as potential investors." (Page and Crawley, 2006: 84). As my chapter on content analysis shows, even within general news channels, niche programming, specific business hour news, sports news and news on cinema and entertainment are more the norm than the exception. The Head of Research at *MCCS*, Jyotsna told me in an interview:

> In a broad sense the genre is news, but within news it is amazing
> what the possibilities are. It could be a news show based on
> automobiles, a news show on finance, or it could be a news show
> targeting the women or youth. So programmes are completely slotted
> based on viewership data, and also on past experience and on what
> the competition is showing at that time (09/05/2006).

News Channels in India: The Present

If *CNN* became a household name during the Gulf war, fifteen years later, in a partnership venture with India Business Network (IBN), it had made its inroads into Indian livingrooms. *CNN-IBN* is just one of eight national news channels in English in India, with at least four more in the offing. Following in *CNN*'s footsteps, *Reuters* teamed up with India's biggest media conglomerate, the Bennett and Coleman Group, and *Times Now* launched operations in 2006. However, compared to Hindi, the growth of English channels has been slower. The latter's growth is astonishing, considering that the first such channel, *Aaj Tak*, was launched in 2000 and only as a 20-minute capsule on *Doordarshan*. Along with the available literature, I use the experiential (I was part of the industry when the changes were happening) here to reconstruct the shift of television news channels from English towards the regional languages, especially Hindi.

The shift to regional languages

Following the success of *Aaj Tak*, *Star News* re-launched in 2003 and started its own in-house production, launched only in Hindi. *NDTV*, which until then had produced for *Star News*, launched both in Hindi and English but with more prominence and money put into the former. As part of the *NDTV* news set-up, my colleagues and I realised the sudden differences in power relations with our Hindi colleagues. English, until then was the preferred medium, with English language journalists being paid more money and managing to secure more

privileges. Overnight, the balance of power shifted with the Hindi channel, *NDTV India* getting new recruits with higher salaries and more facilities like bigger studios and better equipment than their English counterparts. Clearly, the advertising money was in the Hindi-speaking market. For *Star News,* "within one week of the switch to Hindi, *Star News* ratings almost doubled. (Thussu, 2007, 102)

Along with the success of Hindi news channels and targeting niche audiences, vernacular news channels have also filled the airwaves. Not just regional players were involved, but also international players too. For example *Star* launched a Bengali news channel in association with the *Anandabazar Group* in Bengal in 2006 and in 2008 launched a Marathi News channel. "Almost from its entry into the volatile Indian broadcasting market in 1992, the localisation of his operations in India was a unique character of Murdoch's strategy in India (Thussu: 101)." Regional giants in the South, *Eenadu* and *Sun TV* launched their own news channels in early 2000 and today, local language news channels exist in almost every Indian state. From just three private news channels in the late 1990s, India now has over sixty of them. There are seventeen Hindi language channels and eight in English besides dozens in the various vernacular languages of the country. Kumar notes:

> Even a cursory glance at the changing landscape of Indian television
> reveals that the meteoric rise of satellite and cable channels in the
> 1990s has disrupted the hegemony of state sponsored network,
> Doordarshan, in unparalleled ways. (2006:2)

But the break with *Doordarshan* and the embracing of a market driven television economy has not been without its problems. With no competition and used by the government as a medium for propaganda, *Doordarshan*'s programming focusing on education, development and national integration, promoted a homogenised notion of the nation. Private news channels however, whilst having a regional focus and niche audiences are driven by a profit motive. This brings us to a central question of this thesis: has a plethora of channels targeting different

42

language groups broken the national imaginary promoted in the *Doordarshan* days and allowed for several different 'Indias' to coexist? This question had led to my choosing *Star News* and *Star Anando* as case studies, to see if a Hindi and a Bengali channel offer different notions of the nation and 'Indianness' and if so, what these notions are.

A 'national' audience?

Both these news channels advertise themselves as 'national' channels. *Star Ananda* claims that it is the first 'national' news channel in Bengali. It follows to reason therefore, that both produce news for national television audiences. Is the imagination of nationhood different in Bengali and Hindi? If so, what are they and how do the imaginaries change? If not, and a singular idea of nation still dominates, is it different from what was articulated in the days of state sponsored *Doordarshan*. What are the particularities of such change?

The new India of Television Rating Points

In the chapter on audiences (see chapter 6) I explain how the television ratings system in India targets the affluent. The system originated in the US, with advertisers wanting to justify their expenditure and understand viewer responses. Advertisers targeting audiences have a vested interest: they have something that they want to sell to the audience. For this the latter needs purchasing power and therefore India's middle class, supposedly the largest in the world, became a prime target for television producers. Until very recently, the monitoring boxes used in the ratings surveys were not used to survey nine of the poorer states in India. The majority of the surveyed audience are from the metropolitan cities and in the higher income bracket. As Mehta notes "The biggest problem though is that TAM sample measures only urban areas. India's entire rural population, consisting of an estimated 145 million households, is totally ignored (2008:180-181). A homogenous audience means that once a certain kind of programming

gets high audience ratings in a particular channel, every other channel wants to replicate the same. This gives rise to homogenous content and "cricket, cinema and crime" dominate Indian television news channels. Though not the nationalist, propaganda-oriented content of *Doordarshan*, yet the private news channels of 21st century India have created their own myth of a "promised land" of affluence and well being. "In this promised land the poor are wished away, for everyone's full potential may be realised and well-being achieved by all" (Chakravorty and Gooptu, in Hallam and Street [ed] 2000: 91).

It is clear that the Indian media has undergone a transformation of epic proportions in the last decade. Political economy approaches to media studies have commented on the "market triumphalism and the weakening of the nation-state" (Dubey, 1992) in the country. These new discourses of the nation: what it is to be 'Indian', who is 'Indian' and the Indian media played a key role in this imagining. In seeking to understand this new 'India', I chose to conduct two newsroom ethnographies. The lack of news television studies in India and a desire to fill this gap were also a major impetus for this approach. News ethnographies have some inherent strengths that allow us to understand production dynamics in a way broader political economy approaches cannot. In the next section, I review earlier ethnographic approaches to newsroom studies, the salient points of the methodology and the problems.

News ethnographies: "The First Wave"

Ethnography as a methodology for research entails the extended involvement of the researcher in the social life of those he or she studies. Ethnographic data has provided both the empirical grounding for meta-theories as well as ammunition for critiquing the same. Since the early accounts of heathen "natives" by Christian missionaries and white male anthropologists making field trips to study the "exotic cultures" in non-western settings, ethnography has come a long way. The ground it has covered is evident if we look at the first formal

ethnographies in the 1920s of Malinowski and Mead, the later works of Evans-Pritchard and Bateson and compare them with the reflexive ethnographies, (Geertz, 1973, Rabinow, 1977), experimental ethnographies (Taussig, 1987 Fischer and Abedi, 1990), and interpretive and auto ethnographies (Danahay, 1997) of more contemporary researchers and anthropologists.

Specific to media theory, "ethnographic studies of news production have provided invaluable insights into the nature and determinants of news production and a necessary corrective, therefore, to grand speculative claims and theories about the news media. These more grounded studies have variously examined the daily routines, bureaucratic nature, competitive ethos, professional ideologies, source dependencies and cultural practices of the news media." (Cottle, 2007:1). Instead of pontificating about the media from without, ethnographic studies entered the media environment and sought to describe practice from within and thus contribute to a more nuanced form of theory.

Since the 1950s, an abundance of theoretical and empirical research – especially studies of the sociology of news production – has looked at what determines the selection of news at the production level. During the 1970s and 1980s, a number of ethnographies have looked at organisational, bureaucratic and professional nature of news production and news manufacturing processes (see Cottle 2003:13-16). Gans (1979), for example, has argued that there are in fact four strands of theory that try to explain what determines news at the level of production.

The first of these gives primacy to the professional judgement of the journalist in determining the selection of news. A classical example of this would be the much-cited "gatekeeper" study by White (1950). White investigated the selection process behind how an editor of a small-town American newspaper selected news from the wire-feeds for his newspaper. His study concluded that the selection was, in the end, mostly determined by the personal and professional feelings of the

editor.[8] While this grounding of the editorial in the realm of the personal ignores the wider organisational context of news making and has been critiqued for "essential naivety", (Golding and Eliott, 1979: 12) there are several instances where this model still applies. Gregor (1997: 49), giving an example of such personal biases, points out that a violent male-on-male attack described as a 'serious sexual assault' by one local television station in northern England, is termed 'rape' by another.

The second strand of theory has been more in favour in sociologically oriented approaches to media practice and production. According to many variants of such theories, news can be seen as an outcome of complex organisational practice.[9] Epstein (1973: xiv), for example, has concluded that what determined the selection of news "lay in defining the basic requirements which a given organisation needs to maintain itself."[10] This organisational approach has been elaborated further by, among others, Schlesinger (1978) who spent three years observing the work practices of the BBC from 1972 to1976. According to him, what we see as news is composed of pre-planning and routine and is the end result of ideological and organisational practices (1978: 47). Similarly, Golding and Elliot's (1979: 137) cross-national research into Irish, Nigerian and Swedish newsrooms concluded that news production across countries was the outcome of a "strongly patterned, repetitive and predictable work routine, essentially passive in character and varying only in detail from country to country" (1979: 83).

The third strand of theory sees news as a 'mirror' of reality itself. While this approach tends to be more in favour with journalism practitioners themselves, most media and cultural scholars have dismissed it as a form of 'naive realism' (see Tuchman, 1978). The

---

[8] There has been substantial debate about the 'gatekeeper' model, for an update of which, see Pamela Shoemaker (1991). According to Shoemaker, multiple gatekeepers control different aspects of the complex process, each having some degree of power over the selection routines and shapes of messages.

[9] This approach is somewhat similar to Inden's (following Collingwood) analysis of complex agencies. There are no simples agents: rather the outcome of actions, the selection of news is the outcome of a complex relationship between agents (organisational practice). See for examples Inden, 1990.

[10] For examples of more organisational approaches see for example Ericson et al (1987), Gitlin (1980), Fishman (1980), Golding and Elliot (1979), Schlesinger (1979) and Soloski (1989).

fourth and final cluster of theories explains the selection of stories by describing influence from outside the newsroom. Such theories are held by technological determinists such as Marshall McLuhan; Marxists analysts who foreground the influence of capitalism and dismiss journalists as "public relations agents of monopoly capitalism" (Gans 1979, from Tumber 1999: 235-236); ideological determinists who link news selection with the political ideology of those in power (see Herman and Chomsky 1998); cultural theorists who see journalists according to values of the national culture (see Galtung and Ruge, 1965); and by theorists who suggest that news is shaped by the sources on which journalists rely (see Cohen, 1963; Gans, 1979). The four strands of news theories that Gans proposes are heavily influenced by ethnographic approaches and detailed case studies.

Yet, as Cottle argues, in a fast changing news ecology, early ethnographic studies are proving increasingly unhelpful in answering complex questions about news determinants (2000). By their very influence, these ethnographic works have created their own 'orthodoxies' in media theory and news studies (ibid). Here it is pertinent to discuss Cottle's proposed orthodoxies which, he claims, media theory has become entrenched in as my methodological framework found grounding through these.

The pre-suppositions and 'orthodoxies'

Cottle, calling for a 'second wave' in news ethnographies, argues for work that "sets out to theoretically map and empirically explore the rapidly changing field of news production in today's differentiated ecology of news provision" (2000: 21). Stemming from *routinisation*, which he terms the first "orthodoxy", he points out five other "interrelated and apparently entrenched orthodoxies within the field of news study, each of which has become increasingly out of touch with today's production practices, diversified news ecology and wider news culture" (ibid). I discuss four of these orthodoxies in detail, since I initiated my research work with them as a theoretical point of entry.

47

1) Routinisation

Taking *routinisation* as a big determinant for news production analysis and as the first orthodoxy, Cottle states that it "has led to several unintended consequences (2000: 22)".

> Firstly, the characteristic 'event orientation' of news, gives expression to the temporal routines of production. (Halloran et al. 1970) and this in turn displaces from public view wider issues of social structure and longer term processes of change (Schlesinger, 1978). Secondly, a newsroom division of labour is required to monitor the 'news net' of other news media and sources (Tuchman, 1978), specialist journalists and correspondents are therefore organised into 'news beats', and news bureaus are established in certain locations (Rock 1973; Tuchman 1973; Fishman 1980). Thirdly, this places journalists in a position of dependency on 'official' sources who are thereby granted 'routine' entry into the news media and become the 'primary definers' of events (Hall et al, 1978). Fourthly, 'routine' also features in the journalists' deployment of a 'vocabulary of precedents' that help them to recognise, produce and justify their selection and treatment of 'news stories' (Ericson et al. 1987: p348) and so, in this way, helps to create the professional journalist's 'news sense'. Bureaucracy and organisational expediency of routine, therefore, as these studies help to elaborate account for the relatively 'unconscious' role played by news journalists in news manufacture" (ibid).

Cottle argues for a Foucauldian shift from 'routine' to 'practice' which can help overcome simplistic ideas of journalistic intent or ideological culpability in processes of news production. 'Practice' here can be understood as actions or activities that are repeatable, regular, and recognisable in a given cultural context. Practice is often contrasted with theory, ideas, or mental processes: what is done as opposed to what is thought; the pragmatic as opposed to the ideational. This discursive shift, according to Cottle, would move away from the theoretical positioning of journalists as mere 'supports' or 'bearers' of the organisational system, rather than as active and thinking agents

who purposefully produce news through their professional practices. It can allow the would-be ethnographer to accommodate both a sense of the 'discursive' and the 'administrative' in the enactments and regulations of social processes.

Looking at journalistic 'practice' in newsrooms has helped me to move away from the structural/agency debate in social sciences and thus avoid its inherent limitations. Social action (such as news selection) has been historically attributed either to underlying structures (such as organisations, ideology, capitalism) or to human agency (such as professional judgement, reporting the 'truth'). Since 1968, French post-structuralist theory has raised serious questions about the validity of either of these approaches in explaining social action (see Foucault 1972, 1990; Laclau 1984; Deleuze 1998a, 1998b. For attempts to reconcile structure and human agency in human sciences see Bourdieu 1977, 1990).

Recent studies of news production (Cottle, 1993a, 1999; Pedelty, 1995) lend credence to the fact that journalists do not act merely as 'supports' but are clever individuals who quickly adapt to the needs and requirements of the different organisations they work for. Even before conducting my ethnography, I was sceptical of the supposition of the 'gullible journalist'. Without careful empirical scrutiny, I was unwilling to accept that journalists are just instruments in a conspiratorial regime.

The scepticism helped. In Mumbai interview after interview with journalists and media managers revealed that news production and the resultant content does not necessarily come from an unconscious "routinisation" but a carefully thought out corporate and editorial strategy of which the journalist is very much a part. The latter might not approve of the "news values", but will definitely do what the "system" requires. S/he is not an "unconscious subject", but an un/willing participant.

Cottle states that, methodologically, the 'first wave' of ethnographies demonstrated a less than suitably reflexive stance towards their subject matter (2000). Today, reflexivity is far more than

49

simply 'going native' and then regaining academic distance. My research could hardly ignore the academic/journalist crossover or, as in my case, the journalist/academic and the resultant interplay between different disciplinary outlooks and cultural milieu. I explore this further in the chapter on methodology (see Chapter 3).

One way of circumventing the earlier theoretical problems of structure/agency can be achieved by looking at how news producers themselves comment on their own practice. In the methodology chapter, I discuss my interview methods with journalists who reflected and commented not only on their own practices but also on television news journalism in Indian in general. Amongst others, Hobart (1999) has stressed the importance of looking at commentary in the analysis of media practices. He writes:

> Among the many practices which make up contemporary mass media,
> some are reflective. That is they are about practices themselves. Just as
> a crucial, indeed, constitutive, set of practices frame, represent, modify
> and articulate events, actions, text or what have you, these practices
> comment on and articulate these articulatory practices. In this sense,
> they are meta-practices, meaning not of some higher order, but simply
> ones that come after. I shall use 'commentary'...as a way of in singling
> out these kinds of practice, the constitutive purpose of which is to
> comment on previous practices of articulation. (2000:10).

Cottle states that if we are sensitive to the ways that journalists are themselves aware of, and knowingly involved in, the reproduction of different news forms, we may also want to pursue the professional journalist's reflexivity in relation to his/her practices and how this informs the 'interpretive community'[11] of journalism– albeit with the proviso that this 'interpretive community' now needs to be interrogated in respect to its internal differentiation, whether by news outlet (Cottle, 1993a), gender (Carter, Branston and Allan, 1998) or ethnicity (Benjamin, 1995; Wilson, 2000). To these differentiations, I would like to include language. In India, where certain languages have dominated

---

[11] The term Interpretive community is used by Barbara Zelizer (1993)

while others have been marginalised, the rise of the vernacular in press, particularly television, is changing news dynamics rapidly.

2) *Professional objectivity*

A second orthodoxy, in part derived from *routinisation*, is journalistic *objectivity*.[12] In fact, the two are said to be inexorably linked. Soloski has argued that "objectivity is the most important professional norm and from it flow more specific aspects of news professionalism" (1989:33). There are several consequences that are said to follow from this. Authoritative sources are routinely sought and granted privileged access to the media. Tuchman sees this 'strategic ritual' as a pragmatic response to the elusiveness of objectivity. The norm of objectivity is internalised and journalists police themselves and discretion becomes predictable. Also, this claim of 'objectivity' obviates, we are told, the need for explicit organisational policies as a form of control (Larson cited in Cottle, 2000:28).

Cottle points out the obvious problems with assuming that journalists subscribe to a prevalent, perhaps universal, ideology of objectivity which generalises what in fact may be a far more variegated set of epistemological positions of which the journalist is aware. These are: the new 'public journalism' in the US and forms of advocacy journalism in other parts of the world (Glasser and Craft, 1998), (for example, human interest and development journalism in India); tabloid and populist forms of journalism which lay their claims 'to know' by different textual strategies; a new band of anchors and news presenters who emote news instead of the stoic, detached style of presenting. All these point at a complexity which cannot be overlooked on the basis of selective findings from earlier studies which focussed their empirical sights on high profile, mainstream western outlets.

---

[12] Professional objectivity is claimed as a significant principle of the journalistic trade. Difficult to pin down, it can refer to fairness in reporting, balanced or unbiased coverage and remaining detached from ones reporting duties. Quite often, it means all of the above.

In India there are different tiers of news production houses. There are international players like Murdoch who share space with Indian entrepreneurs like Prannoy Roy of *NDTV* and Arun Poorie of *Aaj Tak*. Both groups of media barons also compete for space along with regional giants in all parts of the sub-continent. The assumption of a shared notion about an empirically unsustainable concept like objectivity made me sceptical even before I started my fieldwork. After it, I can say that in the current news production scenario in India, the notion of an all encompassing objectivity should be relegated to the dustbins of academia. The Bengali journalists' notion of objectivity differs from that of Mumbai journalists, and this reflects in their news coverage. There is also a marked difference between what constitutes news and good reporting for print journalists now operating in television newsrooms, and what does for journalists who started their careers in television. With print having a long history in Indian news, journalists from a print background share notions of objectivity developed through several decades and handed down through generations.[13] Also, with the corporate now playing a large role in editorial matters, earlier understanding of the term 'objectivity', as a shared value amongst journalists inculcated and understood in newsrooms, must be rethought.

"Journalists are often fully aware of the philosophical difficulties involved as well as the pragmatic conventions and artifices that they and their colleagues deploy to create a semblance of news balance and impartiality. Too often they are patronised by academics who think they are the only ones who have insight into such representational issues and who fail to recognize the range of practitioner's view on offer" (Cottle, 2000: 28). Journalists often practise moral partisanship and appeal directly to sentiment and feelings; and this is not just in tabloids. I believe a careful scrutiny of mainstream and even serious

---

[13] Most print journalists now in *Star News* felt that there was a deplorable drop in news standards while such lament was muted from journalists who have only worked as television journalists.

news output can reveal how subjectivist news epistemology can be inscribed into serious news. The journalist Andrew Marr, as I mentioned in the introductory chapter as stated "The idea of news has altered. It stopped being essentially information and became something designed to produce – at all costs, always – an emotional reaction, the more extreme the better (2004: 381)" Dismissing journalists as unthinking agents, not only does them disservice, it discredits rigourous As a practitioner and also after my fieldwork, I am convinced that journalists, at least in senior positions, influence news content and if not actively then by subterfuge promote their own positions, which are not necessarily ideological. These positions vary sharply depending on the medium, language and class.

3) Hierarchy of Access

The 'first wave' of ethnographies made a powerful case that routines and bureaucratic modes of news production coupled with the professional ideology of objectivity serve to access the voices of the socially powerful, and marginalise or even silence those of the institutionally non-aligned and powerless (Hall et al,1982; Goldenberg, 1975; Gitlin, 1980). Social hierarchy is thus replicated in and through the patterns and processes of news access.

This, the third orthodoxy, is further backed-up by observations on how socialisation processes generate intra-group norms established in interaction with 'competitor-colleagues' (Tunstall 1970; Dunwoody 1978; Fishman 1980), as well as in the specialist reporters' or correspondents' immersion into the professional world-view of his/her principal sources – whether, for example, the police (Chibnall 1977) or the military (Morrison and Tumber 1988; Morrison 1994; Pedelty 1995). Moreover, this systematic over-accessing of the powerful and their views, is given a further boost by the capacity of resource-rich sources to produce 'psuedo-events' (Boorstein 1964; Sigel 1973) and encourage favourable coverage through the provision of bureaucratically useful (and commercially beneficial) 'information

53

subsidies' (Gandy, 1982). This third orthodoxy therefore, states that news perspectives are narrowed and bent in accordance to the values and views of powerful sources and that this results in a tendency towards news conformity, status quo and ideological closure. (Cottle, 2000: 30)

Schlesinger, critiquing Hall's 'primary definer' thesis and advocating the 'third orthodoxy,' makes a powerful case for a more externalist examination of various source fields and less concentration on the media (1990). Schlesinger's model is based within the sociological paradigm's concern with processes of public knowledge and definitional advantage (Cottle, 2000b). The concern here is therefore with the interaction of social relations and differentials of institutional power, organisational resources, and cultural capital.

Indian media, as most media across the world, is the domain of the powerful. News media accords power to its owners. Rupert Murdoch is just one case in point. But it would be naive to believe that Murdoch personally affects the everyday production of news. There are far more complicated processes in play. In India, the competition for advertising and the role of capital must be taken into account. As the chapter on the corporate section of *MCCS* in this thesis shows, sales teams plug stories to get advertising; brand managers promote stories to create niche value for their channels; and research and rating teams monitor and change programmes and content to get maximum eyeballs. The understanding of the "powerful and the elite" needs to be re-defined and contextualised in a fast changing political economy.

A journalistic phenomenon which deserves greater enquiry is how journalists' preconceived story ideas or frames result in the deliberate pursuit of certain voices and how, especially in television, these are elicited in interviews and subsequently clipped and packaged in conformity with this 'view' (Halloran et al, 1970; Cottle, 1991, 1993a). There is a complexity here – both strategic and cultural – which Cottle demands to be explored empirically and which promises to illuminate further an important aspect of 'power' in the perennial dance

between news sources and news producers. In Indian television this can be extended to the relationship between news producers and their imagined audience and what the former believes the latter wants to hear and see.

As I saw from my interviews of journalists, stories are chased simply because another channel is showing them; programmes are conceived simply because a rival channel has got a new show with high audience ratings. A channel showing a story means follow-ups from other channels simply because they do not want to be left behind; the processes are both strategic (no one wants to let go of a story) and cultural (it is now accepted as norm in television news rooms to continuously monitor each other).

4) The forgotten or the Imagined audience

The fourth "orthodoxy" in media studies, Cottle claims, is that "mass audience" by definition being "unknowable", can only be "imagined". "While this literally may be the case, it ignores that the audience approached "as a discursive conceptualisation or typification inscribed by the news producers into their particular news forms rather than as an empirical object 'out there', the 'imagined audience' of the news producers is literally 'at work' within newsrooms" (Cottle, 2000: 34).

Following from this, my thesis does not include audience research but an "imagination" of the audience by news producers in Indian television. The academic focus on the audience as "imagined" fascinated the news practitioner in me (see Batabyal, 2005). How did I imagine the audience as a journalist? Did I at all? How do news producers in India imagine theirs? If the audience is not 'real' how can they shape or affect content? Do they, or is the content shaped by the news producer's imagination of the audience? There were two different strands of enquiry that I followed during my fieldwork (see Chapter 6). One aim, by conducting depth interviews with journalists and media managers, was to understand how the audience was imagined in the Indian newsrooms and then to explore through observation and content examination how this becomes 'news'. Linked to this was how

quantitative data or Television Rating Points (TRP) on the audience were produced by the Indian media industry, how television companies use this data and how this affects the news producer's imagination and practices within newsrooms.

Conclusion

Summing up the literature review in this chapter, I have first set out the meta-theoretical terrain of this research: to understand the reconfiguration of the national imaginary in television newsrooms in India. I have then contextualised the present day television economy in the country, particularly its news ecology and compared it to the days of the state run television network, *Doordarshan.* The third section framed the methodology of this work, the efficacy of the ethnographic approach to understand newsroom dynamics and given the lack of such studies, its relevance for understanding India's turbulent television economy.

Using the above mentioned orthodoxies as methodological frameworks and with the intent of understanding the construction of nationhood in India through its television newsrooms, I started my fieldwork in Kolkata and Mumbai. The next chapter on methodology describes in detail the course of my work, the workplaces, people I met, my relationship with the subjects of my study, the quandaries, dilemmas and doubts and the daily practices of the researcher and the researched.

Chapter 3
Methodology

Standpoint Theory, the Journalist and the subject of study

The desire to conduct this study is rooted in my years as a journalist. The experiential is necessary to understand here as it has both helped my comprehension of the subject of study and plunged me into the confusion of being an 'insider'. There has been a constant negotiation between the academic 'outsider' and the journalist 'insider' in how I have presented myself to the 'subjects' of study and also in analysing the research material.

This research, therefore, owes a particular debt to the standpoint theorists who helped develop means of constructing episteme that resonates intensely with the experiential (see Harding, 2003). Though standpoint theory has been critiqued for being insufficiently personal, I find that it helped me to articulate "why, I, the articulating academic, find a certain issue of value to explore but more importantly, how my subjectivity resonates with and through the subject matter as I analyse it" Sreberny (2002: 294-295).

This chapter, then, while focusing on a triangulation of social research methods employed for the field work, will start by explicating the researcher's own position in regards to the subject of his study. It will work through the ethical issues of this research: how I as a journalist employed my professional experience to conduct this research, how I gained entry into the workplace and the insider knowledge I used to attain proximity and confidence of the journalists.

The crucial thing here is the Kantian distinction between viewing events from 'the inside': the 'I' as news practitioner, as opposed to from 'the outside'; the 'I' as researcher. The former attempts to *understand* people in terms of his/her own appreciation of the world. The latter treats people in terms of *knowledge* of their behaviour under objective conditions. Where ethnography stands, with psychoanalysis quite separate from all other approaches, is in working dialogically between

the two and throughout this chapter, this fine distinction, researcher/practitioner and insider/outsider, will be continuously evoked and worked through. I start with the decision of the subject of study and how both my journalistic background and the needs of research played a role in choosing *MCCS*.

The writing style of this thesis and the descriptive passages are much influences by Geertz's "thick description." In his essay, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture", (Geertz 1973:3-30) Geertz explains that he adopted the term from philosopher Gilbert Ryle. Ryle pointed out that if someone winks at us without a context, we don't know what it means. It might mean the person is attracted to us, that they are trying to communicate secretly, that they understand what you mean, or anything. As the context changes, so does the meaning of the wink. Geertz argues that all human behaviour is similar. He therefore distinguishes between a thin description, which describes only the wink itself, and a thick description, which explains the context of the practices and discourse within a society. I have attempted, in a similar vein, to contextual*ise* in as much detail as possible, news practices and its surrounding rituals in Indian television and my own role in producing the data.

Choosing the news channels

Though unsure of gaining entry, my first place of choice was the *Star News* Headquarters in Mumbai and if possible, the Kolkata office of *Star Ananda*. The reason lays both in the experiential and the dynamics of the Rupert Murdoch owned Star group in India.

To start with the experiential, it might have perhaps been easier to work with *NDTV Ltd* in New Delhi since I had already worked with them for two years, initially as Editorial Head of Kolkata and then as a Correspondent in New Delhi. Gaining entry to the Delhi and Kolkata newsroom might have been easier. But it was this proximity, which lead to abandoning the idea. I felt too close to it. I knew almost everyone and not only did I have an opinion on them, they also had an opinion on me.

Some were friends, others I couldn't see eye-to-eye with and in a highly charged environment like the television newsroom nothing is neutral. This cannot be conducive to good research.

The headquarters of *Star News*, that is *MCCS*, was in Mumbai. This helped making the decision based on the experiential. Having been a journalist in New Delhi for several years, most journalists were colleagues. Mumbai, however, would be a new experience. I had occasionally made forays into the city on reporting stints, but staying and working in the city would be new. Though I had worked in Kolkata briefly before, *Star Ananda* was a new channel and most journalists would not be known to me.

The dynamics of *MCCS* and its two channels, *Star Ananda* and *Star News*, played no small part in making my choice, of course. The parent company, *MCCS*, is uniquely placed in today's multi-lingual television news environment in India, owning *Star News* and *Star Anando*, the latter being the first 24 hour Bengali news channel and having now added a Marathi news channel, *Star Majha* to its bouquet.

The Context

To contextualise the formation of *MCCS*: Rupert Murdoch-owned *Star Television* entered Asia in the early 1990s, changing forever how Indians watch television. American soap opera replaced *Doordarshan*'s staid offerings and *The Bold and the Beautiful* crashed into Indian bedrooms. *Star News* itself was launched in 1998 but Murdoch, instead of producing the news in-house, handed over the production rights to *New Delhi Television Ltd (NDTV)*, a production house based in Delhi which until then was producing a hugely popular hourly news bulletin each week on the state-owned *Doordarshan*, called *"The World This Week"*.

NDTV had complete editorial authority and autonomy in their arrangement with Murdoch and uplinked their programmes to Star's Asian headquarters in Hong Kong, from where it was beamed back into Indian and Asian homes through Star Television owned transponders.

59

This was done to bypass Indian laws, which placed restrictions on 'live' news being up linked from Indian soil.[14] There was also a five-minute delay between up-linking and broadcast to avoid the 'live' tag. *Star News,* while it was being produced by *NDTV,* had one channel. It produced news both in Hindi and English with a half hour cycle for each. Precedence and preference was always given to English with the Hindi channel merely translating news from English and having far fewer reporters and editors with pay scales that were markedly lower. From my own experience of working at *NDTV,* I can state that the English reporters were always better paid, given more opportunities while the Hindi counterpart had far less social standing within the organisation. Things were, however, to change dramatically (see Batabyal, 2005). The sudden proliferation of vernacular news channels, especially in Hindi, completely altered the dynamics of news production and consumption. The elitism of English news channels and news journalists was disappeared and, in its place, a market driven credo of rating oriented news developed. This research wanted to understand the dynamics of news production in this changed scenario.

Vernacular News Channels: The Beginnings

Aaj Tak, a part of the *India Today*[15] group launched India's first national Hindi news channel in December 2000 and "it demonstrated the levelling impact of technology and a profound change in traditional methods of news gathering (Mehta, 2008: 86). Within a year it was garnering high TRPs. Following its success, *Zee Television* also launched a Hindi news channel, *Zee News,* and did well. Meanwhile, *Star News,* which was being produced by *NDTV,* had very high credibility and even higher losses. *NDTV* was not bothered. They were on a contract and continued to produce news which came to be well regarded. But the

---

[14] Indian Broadcasting laws do not allow a person of foreign origin to broadcast live news in India. Thus *Star* sold most of its shares to the *ABP group* and the new company *MCCS* was formed as a joint venture between the two with *ABP* owning 74 per cent of the shares in the company.

[15] The India Today group is one of the largest publication houses in India and before television was the publisher of the respected weekly, *India Today* which is the country's largest selling weekly news magazine.

honeymoon could not continue for long. Murdoch was a successful businessman and beyond a point, the losses started to hurt. *Star* and *NDTV* parted ways on March 1st, 2003. *NDTV* decided to launch two new channels: one in Hindi, and the other in English. The entire set up was revamped. Hindi reporters were hired by the dozen, their salaries hiked; they were given the bigger studios, the better equipment. The message was clear. Once on its own, without *Star's* financial muscle, *NDTV* was focusing on the Hindi channel, believing that was where the audience and money lay. A significant change was happening in Indian television production houses. The elitism of English had given way to the money power of Hindi and other regional languages.

Star News started in-house production. Interestingly, they launched only in Hindi. This was in line with Murdoch's overall strategy of "Indianising" his television channels. "Starting with Hollywood-based programming aimed at the affluent but tiny English speaking minority [less than 5 per cent of India's population], Murdoch recognised the limitations of this strategy and rapidly Indianised his television, including news operations in India" (Thussu, 2007: 100)" Reporters were hired from newspapers, magazines and other television news production companies. Fashion designers were hired to advice on the kind of clothes to be worn; hair stylists were brought in to groom the correspondents, and the male journalists appearing on television were asked to be clean-shaven. *Star News* promised something different.

But the new arrangement was not without its hiccups. Government regulations did not allow for Murdoch, a foreigner, to produce news directly within the country. *Star News* stock was divested and a regional media baron, Abhik Sarkar, bought 74 per cent of its share. Sarkar owns *Anadabazar Publications*, which has a large presence in eastern India. Along with top-selling Bengali newspapers and magazines, *Anadabazar* also publishes *The Telegraph*, a respected national daily. *MCCS* was thus formed in 2003. For me, the dynamics of this new company is interesting. An international media baron decides that he needs to produce news content in India, but launches the channel in Hindi and is forced to divest his shares to a regional news group. This leads to the

launch of a Bengali news channel in the form of *Star Anando* in 2005. I wanted to understand the news dynamic within *Star News* and *Star Ananda*, the politics of an international broadcasting company producing Hindi and Bengali news from India and now being controlled by an Indian media baron instead of the omnipresent Rupert Murdoch.

Methodology: The Theory

A Triangulation of Methods

To answer the specific queries I had at the beginning of my research, I had chosen to conduct a newsroom ethnography in two Indian television newsrooms. "In the context of news study," writes Cottle "participant observation or ethnography (the terms are often used interchangeably today) refer to the research method that involves the researcher spending considerable time in the field, observing and talking to journalists as they go about their daily tasks and documenting their professional practices and culture. (2007: 6)" I believe that a triangulation of methodological approaches: the observer participant, interviews and analysis of news content structures, allowed me to overcome the inherent drawbacks of each method.

> "Participant observation deploys a number of methods, including observation, talk and interviews, and attending to documentary sources. Although each on its own may be considered to have its weaknesses, together they provide a stronger basis on which evidence and findings can be triangulated. That is, claims and accounts produced from one source can be contrasted to those from another. Consistencies can thus be recognised and interpreted and discrepancies or differences can be pursued further and all in pursuit of deeper, more valid, interpretations. This, in turn, can prompt further multi-pronged inquiries until the researcher is confident that a more realistic understanding of the situation has been achieved. (ibid: 6)

1) Not a "Participant" observer in the newsroom: the observer-participant

I had been a participant in the newsroom; I was returning as an observer. I chose not to mix the two. In social research methods much has been said for participant observation. Anthropology, in grips of a crisis, demanded a more participatory engagement with subjects to understand the nuances of their reality. So while academic distance was necessary, a plunge into the 'real' was advocated. But I already knew the nuances: for me, the difficulty was in negotiating distance. Despite a determination to maintain distance, this was indeed difficult, as I needed to invoke my own journalistic affiliations and experience to get some people to talk, but also to invoke my academic stature with others. This constant negotiation between the insider and the outsider will be worked through as I describe the nuances of fieldwork. A more appropriate terminology would be that I was an 'observer participant' in the newsrooms. Gold's much cited classification on involvement of an ethnographer in the field states that observer as participant is more detached than the participant observer from his/her subject, a position which I was trying to achieve (cited in Bryman, 2001: 299).

2) Depth Interview

I chose to conduct depth interviews to supplement my observation and also to complement it. I had initially planned to formulate questions around my observations. But I found that the best way to proceed was to let both the methods work simultaneously. Interviews helped to explain to people what I was doing and what I expected from them. Long conversations meant that journalists were happy to allow me into their midst and were comfortable with my presence. In Kolkata, I found I was more comfortable with interviewing people and then proceeding with the observations. I felt that my status as a former *NDTV* journalist who had earlier held a senior position in the city helped people to treat me with a degree of respect and feel that it was necessary to talk to me.

In Mumbai, while my earlier journalistic career helped, it was not a primary factor as people were happy to talk and help regardless.

(During the course of this thesis, several quotes from the interviews have been repeated in different chapters. As the points of analysis in these chapters are varied, the same quotes are used to understand and emphasise the arguments.)

3) Analysis of Content structures

I had initially thought of focussing on the coverage of crime in both the channels but then decided to look at a week of the entire programming in both channels and to draw out a more comparative analysis.[16] This, I thought would also complement the ratings analysis which I have focussed on, since it is done every week. I arranged for the telecast to be recorded live at the Mumbai office and the gentleman in charge was particularly helpful once we had established that we had mutual acquaintances and that his residence in Kolkata was next to where I grew up in the city. A constant negotiation of the personal and the professional was a necessity to secure cooperation. People were generally more ready to oblige once a connection, either professional or personal, could be established, and this negotiation continued throughout the fieldwork year.

Gaining Access

As all ethnographers know, gaining access is almost always the most important part of the research. In this work, I was seeking to gain entry into the heart of the Murdoch empire in India, as well as the bastion of a family-owned business, the *ABP Group*. In India, while the media boom has caught almost everyone by surprise, media research has failed to keep pace with this explosion. Would a media house, caught up in the throes of a fierce fight for eyeballs, allow a researcher to walk into their

---

[16] Though I looked at a week's programming in both the channels, in the chapter on content analysis, I only used three days' worth. This was sufficient to establish structures and involved more than a hundred hours of material to examine.

64

midst? It is the experiential knowledge of growing up in an Indian environment where emails and phone calls go unanswered and where patience can be severely challenged, that let me have the confidence that entry can be secured, if one has the initial contacts. This was my "insider" knowledge. I also know that an "outsider" who had no previous association with the Indian media might have been able to do the same with far less trouble. But that was not my situation. I was implicated by association with the Indian media, especially news journalism.

Confirming access: A game of patience

The gaining of access to *MCCS* involved months of networking, transatlantic calls and using of contacts gained through my years as a journalist in India. I started my first enquiries in the winter of 2004 when I went to India for a holiday. My first point of contact was Mr Bharat Bhusan, Delhi editor of *The Telegraph*, the English newspaper belonging to the *Anandabazar* (*ABP*) group, which is a majority shareholder in *MCCS*. I had worked with Mr Bhusan for two years in *The Hindustan Times* where he was the Executive Editor and I was a Staff Reporter. I had hoped that Mr Bhusan would manage to put in a word for me to Mr Abhik Sarkar, who heads *ABP*. Mr Bhushan said that would not be possible as there was a "strict firewall" between television and newspapers within the group. He did, however, provide me with an email address of Mr Sarkar and also told me to send a letter by post stating my purpose of study. Mr Bhusan said that Mr Sarkar is a "bit of an anglophile" and a letter through my supervisors should work. If it did not, he promised "to look into it."

In 2005, April, I sent my first email to Mr Sarkar and followed it up with a postal mail, which had references from Prof Annabelle Sreberny and Dr Mark Hobart, my first and second supervisors respectively. Within days I got an email back saying that I should contact the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the group, Mr Uday Shankar, to whom my email to Mr Sarkar was also forwarded. Here I met my first stumbling block. Emails to Mr Shankar went unanswered. I posted him a set of

references, besides providing him with names from the media industry that would vouch for me, and an outline of my work and what it would require. There was no reply.

By August 2005, I called a friend, Mr Pradip Saha, who is the Managing Editor of an environmental magazine called *Down To Earth*. Mr Saha knew Mr Shankar well as the latter had worked with the magazine. He promised to help and have a chat with Mr Shankar. This took three months and frantic calls from me. Mr Saha called me in October 2005 saying that Mr Shankar has agreed. I immediately sent Mr Shankar an email thanking him for allowing me access and providing him with dates when I will be in Kolkata and Mumbai. Again there was absolutely no reply. I reached Kolkata in mid-November without as yet having confirmed access.

Mr Saha provided me with Mr Shankar's mobile number, albeit after instructing me not to let him know who gave it. I called Mr Shankar on the 20th of November. He was cordial on phone and asked me for a "wish list" of what I want. I sent him a detailed email stating my subject and the kind of access, which I would require. To this again there was no reply. After waiting for a week, I called him again. Mr Shankar told me that he has no problems regarding my wish list and I could come and meet him in Mumbai. I told him that I had stated in my email that the first stage of work would be in Kolkata. He said that he would write back to me on whom I should contact in the Kolkata office.

I waited until December 5, 2005 before calling Mr Shankar again. The first name of the person he provided me with was someone who had already left the organisation. This time he asked me to get in touch with Yuvraj Bhattacharya, the Output Editor of *Star Anando*. I asked him if he would have a chat with Mr Bhattacharya before I called him and Mr Shankar agreed to do so. When I spoke to Mr Bhattacharya he had no clue as to who I was or the purpose of my work. However, dropping the CEO's name helped and I was called to the office that very afternoon. Yuvraj and I met in an empty studio and he gave me a brief background about *Star Anando* and its overall aim, which I was allowed to record. He then said that he would get in touch with me once he had spoken to

Mr Shankar. Yuvraj called me a day later to let me know that Mr Shankar had said that I will have to sign a confidentiality agreement[17] with *MCCS* after which I could start work. The agreement was made ready in a couple of days by *MCCS,* and after I signed it, Yuvraj and I had another quick meeting in which I explained how I wanted to proceed with my work and the kind of assistance I would require. He agreed to introduce me to anyone I wanted to meet besides also allowing me free reign to come and go as I pleased, and talk to anyone I chose. I was also given a temporary pass and the security at the entrance was informed that I would be at the workplace for a few months.

Working in Kolkata

Fieldwork is about contingencies: adapting to different situations and making continuous adjustments to well laid plans. However, despite expecting all sorts of complications, my research lived up to and beyond what I had hoped for: I gained far more access to people, material and places than I had thought would be accorded by a multi-national news corporation which has Murdoch as a partner.

I had expected the difficulties to be institutional. My barriers were, however, in understanding how to deal with people, to quickly adapt to techniques of introducing myself, to understand when to play out my professional background of being a senior journalist and when to call in the stature that comes with being a researcher from the First World. While the first few days were exciting as I was getting to know a new place, it was difficult to get people to respond. I began to break this barrier once I met with a few former colleagues whom I had worked with in Kolkata previously. Bipasha Basu for example, Senior Correspondent and anchor who I had known previously, seemed delighted to meet me, took me around and introduced me to people. I also met the Bureau Chief of *Star Ananda,* Suman Dey who had been a

---

[17] The confidentiality agreement forbade me to write on my research while I was continuing my fieldwork in India or to help rival news channels with information. It did not forbid any publication after fieldwork was completed. It played no part again during the fieldwork and was never mentioned again. My methodology was not affected in any way, changed or compromised.

junior colleague of mine in Kolkata in a little known Bengali channel. Though he was happy to help, I felt he was a bit uncomfortable, given that he was now holding a very senior post within the organisation while I knew him as a junior reporter. Ratna Karmakar, a sports correspondent was also a former colleague who was glad to help.

The first day at *Star Ananda*

I spent an hour with Yuvraj Bhattacharya, Assignment Head of *Star Ananda* on the first day, where he explained to me the editorial focus of the organisation and the structures within the office. This helped me to plan how to approach my research. Once the confidentiality agreement was signed, and I started work on Dec 12, 2005, I had a rough plan in mind.

I had wanted to spend the first few days with the Sales team to understand the way a product is sold and what are the points of emphasis. Yuvraj introduced me to Mr Rajesh Chugh, General Manager of Sales, and I set up a meeting with him for later in the day. However, post the meeting with Mr Chugh and chatting with two of the sales executives, I realised that the sales department in Kolkata follows orders from Mumbai, where sales strategies are conceptualised. I, therefore, decided to work with the Sales team in Mumbai at the *MCCS* headquarters.

I also introduced myself to Aastha Khandelwal, Human Resources Manager at *Star Ananda*. Though we had a long discussion about strategy, again I realised that HR policies are shaped and implemented in Mumbai. I decided that it would be best to concentrate on editorial processes and look at non-editorial or corporate functions only in Mumbai. Later in the evening, I met with Suman Dey, Bureau Chief of the Kolkata Office and he gave me an idea of how the reporting team looks at stories and the different ways in which breaking news and regular stories are handled.

After the first day, I decided that it might be best to look at the editorial team in terms of the different sections the office

administration had divided them into, to handle production. I had toyed with the idea of looking at journalists in terms of experience: respectively examining trainees, early, mid career and senior journalists and their understanding of news and news sense. But given that most journalists in *Star Ananda* were newcomers, the graded way of looking and understanding them might not be ideal. I had also thought of looking at gender: the kind of power relations between male and female journalists, how the latter are employed, whether women hold key positions, and office politics and gossip around gender. Though I did continue to look at gender positions and issues during my research, this did not become a focus of the thesis. I had chosen to study journalists in the material conditions they occupy every working day and therefore thought it best to understand them through the designations, departments and responsibilities they have been given by *MCCS*. I started with interviews and observations. It was convenient to first talk to a journalist, understand his or her surroundings and how they perceive and think about it and then evaluate their responses through observations.

While I had a general set of questions, I tried not to have a fixed format. The depth interview technique helped in letting the interviewees talk about themselves, their work and how they perceive themselves within the office environment. Interviews lasted generally between forty to fifty minutes. Despite not having set questions, there were certain areas I was keen to investigate and therefore pursued in almost every interview. Questions relating to understanding the audience, news sense, notions of news, and work routines were almost always a part of the interview. Nearly every formal interview was recorded and I also took notes.[18]

Once I had an understanding of the specifics of their daily practices in the newsroom, I observed the interviewees in their material surroundings. This involved sitting in the studio or the production control room (PCR), watching the anchor read the news and the various

---

[18] Shahzi Zaman, Managing Editor of *MCCS* was the only one who refused to allow recording of the interview.

background activities that went on: how s/he was prompted when a close up was asked for; when a mid or a long shot was wanted; how much time was given to stories; which stories were dropped, what became headline news and which stories were given less importance; how at times things happen simply because there is no time for reflection; and how patterns of such moments develop. Besides being in the studio, I went out with reporters on shoots and observed how they collected shots, got bytes and acquired information. I also followed the life of the story once it got back to the newsroom and was written, edited and then aired. I sat with editors as they selected shots and used images and sound for stories. To observe the practices at different times within the newsrooms, I sat through the four shifts, morning, day, evening and night.

Building a relationship

Relationships with my subjects of study were varied. The younger journalists were always more willing to help. The more established ones were more wary and less generous with their time. To talk to the latter, it became important to lay stress on my past journalistic experience. The younger journalists quite frequently asked me if I could secure them a job in Delhi with *NDTV*, the organisation I had earlier worked for. I usually remained non-committal or evasive.

The Editorial

Broadly, the editorial team is divided into two sections: the *Input* and the *Output*. I have discussed both in detail in the chapter on editorial functions. Here I discuss the manner of my engagement with them.

Input: The Reporting Team

On the first day of research, I met with Bureau Chief Suman Dey who heads the reporting team. The team comprised of nine reporters

including Dey and also has stringers in the various districts of West Bengal who work as freelancers for *Star Anando*. The reporting team also depends on the *Star News* network of reporters across India and the reporters from the Bengali and English daily, Ananda Bazar and *The Telegraph* respectively. I spent considerable amounts of time attending morning meetings and observing how the "new agenda" was set for the day and then, shadowing reporters, I saw how the plans were executed. Besides Dey, I also formally interviewed Bitonu Chakraborty, the crime reporter in Kolkata, while accompanying several reporters as they went out on their stories. In contrast to my subsequent research in Mumbai, Kolkata was a more difficult place to work. With the benefit of hindsight, several reasons can be attributed to it, all key to who I was and the political economy of news in the state.

The journalists in Kolkata were cagey about me. This is related to the fact that their jobs were new and more prized than any they had held before. *Star Ananda* paid salaries that were significantly better than previous television channels in Kolkata, and the brand name of *Star* was prestigious. No one wanted to lose their jobs, least of all by talking to a researcher. Drawing them out in interviews was infinitely more difficult than journalists in Mumbai who were critical of their own practices and that of the organisation.

Who I was mattered a lot. I had been a journalist who headed the editorial team of *NDTV* in Kolkata, perhaps the best television news employer in the country, with generally better salaries and work conditions than their rival channels. In this regard, I was equivalent to the most senior editorial personnel in *Star Ananda*. Yet, I was trying to ask them the most obvious questions: "What is news", "who is the audience". This put them off or was met with a laugh and the response, 'but you know it'. Junior journalists seemed in awe of me, senior journalists, cagey and resentful. My academic status was also a cause for heartache: foreign education is prized. Thus there materialised a line of eager journalists who wanted to know about foreign scholarships or possible contacts in *NDTV* to secure a job. I continuously had to work through these issues.

The Assignment Team

The Assignment team was the most important section in the Kolkata bureau and was headed by Yuvraj Bhattacharya, the man in charge of all local editorial matters. I spent the most amount of time with Yuvraj, conducted three formal interviews with him at different points in my research, had several lunches and met him socially outside the office. While Yuvraj was my contact person in Kolkata, we became friends and kept in touch throughout my time in Mumbai. Yuvraj wanted to use my presence in Mumbai, and my researcher access to the heads of different sections within *MCCS*, to find out about the politics of the office, how he was favoured in the office hierarchy and what was thought of his work. I, in turn, used this to understand the kind of intra personal relationships that went on within offices and the different branches of the organisation. Yuvraj also spoke freely about the politics within the Kolkata office, which helped immensely in understanding the internal dynamics and the sometimes petty power struggles that are a part of everyday office life.

For an ethnographer, such relationships border on the dangerous. Ethically, it is a potential minefield. It can alter dynamics of research. In my case, my friendship with Yuvraj worked to an advantage. Being the senior-most, his friendship with me and easy camaraderie in office signalled to the others that it was all right to talk to me. The marked difference in attitude towards me from others in the office, before Yuvraj decided to befriend me, clearly helped me in making the choice that the friendship will go in furthering research possibilities. This of course led to the ethical question: was I using Yuvraj? I worked through this situation by explaining to him that his proximity to me was helping me immensely in my work and it was his choice whether he wanted to continue. Yuvraj accepted this and we continue our contact today which has spread beyond the remit of my research.

After the Assignment Desk, the Output Desk in *Star Ananda* is the most important wing, as it looks after all the productions aspects of the channel. My contact person here was Soumik Saha, Senior Producer. Not only did I record formal interviews with Soumik, I spent several days with him as he worked, following his routine and work practices. I joined him on night and morning shifts to observe the differences in routines in the mornings and evenings. Since he was pivotal in the production of news in *Star Ananda*, this was useful, as activity centred around him.

The Output team also consists of anchors, writers, producers and studio managers. I spent time with and interviewed several anchors and sat with writers as they wrote copy and made changes. I asked them about the changes they made and the reasons for them. I spoke to several producers of different levels of experience and observed them while they were at work, noting the various processes involved in production.

A shift for a journalist is supposed to be 10 hours, but almost everyone has to work far more: an average of twelve to fourteen hours a day. Soumik, whom I shadowed for several days, overstayed every time. His night shifts would finish at nine in the morning but at late afternoon he would still be in office, only leaving for a few hours to go home, change and come back again for the night shift. A working week consisted of six days but again journalists were asked to come in on their off days, especially reporters who were following stories in their particular beats. People grumbled about the long working hours to each other but there were never any open protests. Peer group pressure forced people to work knowing that someone else would be willing to do their job if they didn't.

Reflections

I had spent a little more than four months in Kolkata conducting my research. The first part ended in end April 2005. I came back for a short while in September of the same year. At the end of the first leg, I should have been ecstatic. From being unsure of gaining entry, my entire wish list had been delivered. I was allowed access to all parts of the office at all times of the day. Everyone I wanted to talk to had responded, though with varying degrees of enthusiasm. I had over forty recorded interviews and several hours of observation duly jotted in my diary. Yet, I was troubled. I knew I had not been able to put a finger on 'it'. I knew there were things which I could not understand. Who promoted this particular kind of news? What was the driving force behind news agenda? Who controls this set-up? The answers were to be found in the corporate room of *MCCS* in Mumbai, which I discuss in detail in the next chapter on corporate policy. While I had gathered sufficient data in Kolkata, the means of production control were still locked in Mumbai.

Mumbai

Before I start describing the work processes and how I conducted my research in Mumbai, I feel it important to stress the material conditions of my staying and living in Mumbai, which I think affected my work and its outcome. Unlike in Kolkata, where I was staying with my parents, in Mumbai, I had to find rented accommodation. Given the high price of real estate and difficulty of commuting, I chose to stay in a student hostel, which was in central Mumbai and quite close to the *MCCS* office. The advantage of the place I stayed in was that it was cheap and commuting was easy; the disadvantage, of course was that the living conditions were poor and as a consequence I ended up spending almost every waking hour in office. I did also spend several nights on the office couch while observing the work routines at night. This meant that I would reach office most days by seven am and have breakfast in the

74

office canteen and leave after having dinner by 12 pm. Consequently, the work period, though shorter than the time I spent in Kolkata, yielded enormous amounts of data.

A note in my diary on 24th May, 2006 reveals my initial reaction to work in Mumbai.

I have not been keeping a diary or going through my notes as much as I had in Kolkata. I just keep jotting down as much as I can. The reason must be that I have much more to do here. Star Anando had given me access but I was not really welcome. I had to push my way through. Though I must say Yuvraj tried harder after our marathon drinking session.

Star News is a contrast. Almost everyone smiles. You are a part of this. Carol, Aditi, Gopal, everyone has made me feel a part. Shahzi has been more than cooperative. He has introduced me to people regularly and taken me in to the morning meetings. I have sat through several of these. I have attended assignment desk sessions: through the evening as stories are planned and then a night seeing them work. This week I am going to be with Gopal and his team in IKT.

The initial reaction to working in Mumbai is obviously affected by the sharp contrast with my experience of Kolkata. As I mentioned before, journalists and managers at *MCCS* were far more comfortable with my presence than at Kolkata. However, the initial euphoria was soon tempered. Shahzi Zaman's enthusiasm dampened somewhat as he saw me spending more and more time in the newsroom. While never being hostile, he became increasingly reluctant to spend time with me. However, he was the only person who seemed aloof; everyone else I approached made time for my queries and allowed me to observe them at work.

Starting Up

I reached Mumbai at the end of April 2006. After sorting out a place to stay, I called Mr Uday Shankar who asked me to come and see him at 11am one morning. My first meeting with him, though brief, was fruitful. He called his Executive Assistant, Rushit Jhaveri, and told him

that he would be the contact person for me and a desk and computer were also to be provided. Mr Shankar then said that I could start work in a couple of days once he had informed the different heads of the departments who could then prepare to meet me.

I started work in Mumbai on 8th April 2006 in a far more organised manner than in Kolkata. Carolina Gomes, secretary to the CEO along with the Executive Assistant helped with the initial settling in. My access card, desk, computer and a phone connection were arranged on the first day. I sat on the corporate floor next to the CEO's office and this helped as a vantage position for observing the corporate world in journalism, something I had not been privy to earlier.

It was also clear from the beginning that the different heads of departments were aware that I would be working and the nature of my research. All of them, on the face of it, seemed co-operative, ready to be interviewed and to facilitate my work.

First day at office

I started work on the 8th of May 2006 in *Star News*, Mumbai. After the preliminaries of settling in: getting the right chair, making sure the phone worked, and getting passes for the canteen meals, were over, I started to make the initial forays. As far as the CEO Uday Shankar was concerned, he had told me that I could pretty much meet anyone and if there was anything I needed, I should ask his secretary or assistant. He would meet me for a formal interview when required.

Sitting in the corporate section, next to the CEO's office, surrounded by the heads of sales, marketing and research, a whole new world within journalism was opened to me. I have been a journalist for close to nine years and have worked within print media, both in newspapers and magazines and also as a television journalist, but I had no idea how what I helped produce was marketed and sold, nor how much work goes into it. This is the world I delved into and spent significant amounts of time immersed within in Mumbai.

The three most important people on the corporate floor, besides Shankar himself, were Prabal Ganguly, Head of Sales; Yogesh Manwani, Head of Marketing; and Jyotsna, Head of Research. I introduced myself to all three of them. While Jyotsna was busy, both Prabal and Yogesh offered to be interviewed later in the day. After the interviews, both of them offered to help me in my observations and they introduced me to their staff. Consequently, Yogesh Manwani and I became friends, with both us spending considerable time in each other's company. Even after my research, we have spent family holidays together and he keeps me updated on news and gossip from *MCCS* and is the person with whom I still crosscheck my findings and data, whenever in doubt.

On the first evening at *MCCS*, I met with the editorial team. Carolina Gomes, Uday Shankar's secretary took me to the editorial department and introduced me to the Managing Editor Shahzi Zaman and his Deputy Milind Khanderkar. Both asked me to start work at 9am the next day, when I would join them for the morning meeting.

Reflections

While welcoming such access, it was necessary for me to ask the question why a multinational news organisation would open its door to a researcher whose work is likely to be critical. With hindsight, I am certain it was because they did not care about the implications. I had hastened to assure Mr Shankar on our first meeting that I would be objective in my writing. He replied with these exact words: "I do not care". *MCCS* knows that a researcher's account, a doctoral thesis, in no way harms their stature. But yet, the question remains, why did they even allow me entry in the first place?

Some explanations can be offered. One, as Mr Bharat Bhushan had pointed out, the owner of *ABP*, Mr Sarkar, a "bit of an Anglophile", liked that a student from a London university should show interest. He thus requested the CEO Mr Shankar to facilitate my presence.

But ultimately it rested on Mr Shankar to allow me in and more importantly, facilitate my work. I met Mr Shankar in London, six months

after I finished my research and asked him the question: why was I allowed in? His reply was that he likes academics and academia and had he not been a journalist, he might have become an academic. His soft spot for the world of academia thus might have helped my entry.

Mr Shankar's friend, Pradip Saha had called on my behalf. Perhaps the combined force of Mr Sarkar and Mr Saha's requests helped. Maybe each of these above explanations had something to do with it. If working in Kolkata was slightly edgy; working in Mumbai was fun. Gossip, dinner, critical reflections on work practices and journalism in India made my Mumbai tenure enjoyable. My friendship with Gopal Kaushik and Yogesh crossed beyond the need to "cultivate" associations to a genuinely heartfelt concern for one another.

There are of course, ethical issues involved when a researcher becomes close to his/her subject. I had to make absolutely certain that the subjects of my study who became friends were sure about the purpose of my research, which was to critically appraise news practices in the organisation they work for. They helped me to achieve this objective with interviews, observations and by introducing me to their colleagues. I do not believe that I have compromised on my observations because of my close associations with these subjects, as the chapters on corporate and editorial practices will reveal.

Work routines and patterns

My days at *Star News* would start early. I would come in by 7.30 am, have breakfast in the canteen, read the morning papers in the editorial section while chatting with whomever was on duty at the Assignment Desk about the goings on, before joining the morning meeting at 9 am. I attended these meetings assiduously which gave me an understanding of the priorities and how they were played out through the day. After the morning meeting, I would generally arrange interviews with the people I was working with, either in the editorial or the corporate department. As with Kolkata, I divided my time between different sections of the editorial departments, working, in turn with reporters,

Assignment Team personnel, programmers, anchors and the production team unit. I conducted interviews with people in each section, then followed these up with observations

Assignment Team

As in Kolkata, the hub of the editorial activity was around this desk. I spent time in all the different shifts: morning, day, evening and night, seeing how the routines changed. I interviewed several journalists, including the Head of Input Rajnish Ahuja and his deputy Utpal, along with newcomers and mid-career journalists. Here, I must add that it was the Managing Editor Shahzi Zaman who on my very first day with the editorial introduced me to the Assignment Team, asking them to co-operate with my research. This facilitated the initial entry.

Reporters

I spent the most amount of time in the Mumbai Reporting Team of *Star News* with Jitendra Dixit, the Bureau Chief, who is also the crime reporter. Dixit is one of the most talented reporter in Mumbai, with sources in both the criminal world and police. I introduced myself as a researcher and seeing Dixit's slightly hesitant response, also spoke about my crime reporting days in Mumbai; some of the top policemen had been friends. Dixit became more inclined to chat. To test me out, he called up a senior policeman whom I had said to be a contact and mentioned my name. This took place in front of me. The policeman immediately wanted to meet up with me and this reassured Dixit of my claims as a journalist. We spent several afternoons together going on reporting assignments, talking about his work routines and his understanding of news practices at *Star News*. None of these moments were recorded, as these were not formal interviews. I did jot down the important points in my diary after our conversations. But Dixit helped me develop an understanding of how a reporter in *Star News* conforms, subverts and works in an office environment with values which s/he

does not necessarily share. I bring these understandings to my analysis of editorial practices at *MCCS*.

Programmers

According to Mr Shankar, CEO of *MCCS*, Indian television news channels do not have a history of appointment viewing. This means that news channels, given their short history, have not managed to develop programmes which have high retention capacity in the audiences' mind. For example, the BBC's *News Night* is a programme which regular audiences keep coming back to every night; that is, it creates an "appointment." Audiences in India switch on news channels to listen to the news, not to watch particular programmes. With the plethora of news channels mushrooming daily, encouraging appointment viewing to create brand loyalty is becoming a priority for organisations. Innovative programming, which people come back to see regularly, therefore occupies a primary position in organisational tactics for pursuing eyeballs.

Consequently, I devoted considerable time with programmers, in order to understand how they conceptualise and execute their work, what kind of audience they hope to target, and how. I spent time with Bivha Kaul, producer of the highly popular *Saans Bhi Aur Saazish* (*Mother-in-law, Daughter-in-law and Conspiracy*, a daily programme based around television soap opera. Besides formal interviews, we chatted frequently and I sat with her and her team as they went about their daily routines. Working with Bivha was based on mutual respect. She was keen to understand the tools of my trade, as I was keen to understand hers.

Gopal Kaushik is one of the youngest and brightest programmers in *Star News*, producing a weekly legal show called *Insaaf Ka Taarazu* (*The Scales of Justice*). Gopal became a friend and I spent the most amount of time with him and his team. Gopal and I were virtually inseparable and I stayed at his house regularly, besides organising office parties at his

place. His entire team helped me with my work and I sat with them over several days as they chose, edited and produced the show.

Anchors

Star News has celebrated anchors; some of them also experienced journalists. Unlike in *Star Ananda*, where most anchors are spoon-fed by the production unit, *Star News* anchors have a considerable say over how their bulletins should look, how they play up or down certain stories and the kind of questions they ask. Anchor-links are also written by the anchors themselves instead of writers as is the case in *Star Ananda*.

Trainees

Thirteen new recruits were inducted while I was in Mumbai. It was useful to sit through several of the induction programmes and then chat with all the trainees at once and get an understanding of what they expect, why they came to *Star News* and what their perception of news and news channels are. This entire conversation was recorded.

The Bosses

My longest interview was with Mr Uday Shankar, which ran into well over an hour and we spoke about all aspects of *MCCS* and the business of news television in India. As this interview was conducted at the end of my time in Mumbai, it was helpful to get his views on my findings. I also interviewed the Managing Editor Shahzi Zaman; his deputy, Milind Khanderkar and also the Assignment Desk Head Rajnish Ahuja. While Shahzi Zaman was cordial throughout my stay, he was unwilling for the interview to be recorded. Both Mr Khanderkar and Ahuja had to be pursued before they could be convinced to agree to the interviews though they co-operated whenever I was around them observing them work.

Corporate

The corporate section has three main divisions: Sales, Marketing and Research. I describe them individually and their work practices in a later chapter. As mentioned above, on the very first day, I met with the Head of Sales and Marketing. After this I also met with Jyotsna, the head of the Research Team. An important part of the corporate section is the Human Resources Team and I had informal chats with the Vice President Sanju Saha besides a long formal one. I also spent considerable amounts of time with the team members, especially Aditi Gowariker from Research who helped me understand the nuances of the Television Ratings Programme (TRP), which forms a chapter in this thesis. The head of marketing, Yogesh Manwani, subsequently explained to me over several sittings the unwritten rules of cable television in India; an unregulated industry filled with treachery, blackmail and deceit.

Reflections

At the end of three months in *Star News*, Mumbai, I was, to put it mildly, satisfied with the research. The questions that came up in Kolkata were answered. I got to witness the corporate sections of a newsroom, which has generally been excluded from newsroom ethnographies. I had managed to record enormous amounts of news content. Every interview I wanted was granted. I had managed to sit in for all the necessary meetings, editorial and corporate, and watch the processes at all times of the day in every section of the organisation. Once I managed to create a distance from the fieldwork, the diary entries, the recorded material, interviews and television content, helped create the framework for this thesis and also for future work.

Other Practitioners

To understand the processes within *MCCS* in the larger context of media practice in India, I spoke to several journalists, working both in television and print. Needless to say, my years as a journalist and its resultant contacts made it easier to access people.

I had formal recorded interviews with the Editor-in-Chief of *Times Television*, Arnab Goswami. Mr Goswami was my immediate boss when I was working with *NDTV* and helped give me an overall perspective of running a news channel. I also interviews Mr Bharat Bhusan, Delhi Editor of *The Telegraph* and the Mr A K Bhattacharya, Executive Editor of *The Business Standard*. I had worked for both of them as a reporter in Indian newspapers. I also interviewed Gautam Roy and Soni Sangwan, former colleagues who are now working for different news channels, for their opinions on news and how things are changing in the industry. I have not used their interviews directly in this thesis but they helped greatly in creating an overall perspective of television news reporting in India.

End Notes: The Inherent Limitations of a Doctoral Thesis

Fieldwork is much more than just a collection of data, recording of interviews and their analysis. It involves relationships, personal and emotional entanglements and sometimes, as in my case, lasting friendships. Not all data, not every emotion can become part of a formal thesis, bound as they are by a limitation on words and demands of a coherent narrative structure. Yet, these digressions add to the researcher's analysis of the material, both directly and indirectly.

A PhD thesis is almost necessarily reductive. A researcher gathers data that can be interpreted in more ways than one. In choosing a particular narrative, s/he forgoes others. At the end of my research year, I have over ninety recorded interviews, notes on over fifty informal conversations, four notepads filled with observational data, and one hundred and ten VHS tapes with recorded material from *Star*

Ananda and *Star News*. Besides these, I have printouts of several stories, news lists, insider memos and weeks of audience data. I also have memories, recollections and thoughts. Despite going through every interview, I have not used every one directly for this thesis. Some interviews have been quoted; some left out. This was necessary for pursuing a certain line of argument and to give coherence to the written work. Informal chats were helpful in understanding the work atmosphere and to plan further interviews and lines of questioning. Though these were extremely helpful, I mention but a few. But the data collected and the time spent has helped in creating an understanding of news production processes within *MCCS* in particular and news networks in India in general, which I hope comes through in this work.

As I began analysis of the material, I had to remind myself constantly of the purpose of this research and the overall research question. I intended to record television India's news practices, its politics, the internal dynamics of the newsroom, and the political economy of news production and through these understand the articulation of nationhood in the changing news ecology of the country. This meant that several other forms of analysis had to be subdued. Here, I record some of the limitations of my work, lines of argument I could have pursued but did not.

What could have been

The chapter on content analysis could be a full PhD thesis in itself. I extracted from the content an understanding of its inherent structures. The analysis does not look at the use of language, placing of advertisements across different time bands, employment of young women anchors, the dubious sexual politics of newsrooms, content comparisons between primetime and other time slots, etc. I reminded myself that I was trying to see content as a result of certain newsroom practices; the structures that emerged because of what happens in newsrooms and corporate strategies. Similarly, in the corporate section of *MCCS*, each of its divisions, sales, research, marketing, human

resources deserve far more in-depth study. Again, as a researcher I had to remind myself of my overall framework. I was attempting to put together material on an area which has little hard data. Television ethnographies of Indian newsrooms are not available. My role was to assimilate as much information on news practices as possible, rather than focus intently on any particular section. Following this line of reasoning, editorial policies and politics were confined to one chapter. It is a disservice to the number of interviews and material gathered and analysed that I did not follow a more descriptive and analytical approach. But the necessities of recording information, to give shape to an overall picture of television newsrooms, prevented this. The gender politics of newsrooms could have been an enriching line of enquiry. For example, in Kolkata, the women journalists had decided that every Wednesday afternoon they would hold an informal get-together in the dressing rooms where everyone contributed to food and drinks. The men were excluded. What prompted this? Does it still carry on? Do all women come? Who does, who doesn't, and why? Combine this with CEO Uday Shankar telling a female anchor that she must look sexy on television; compare the number of women anchors to women reporters, and more lines of enquiry could have possibly opened, leading to an interesting analysis of gender biases and politics of Indian television newsrooms. I did not pursue it.

Research into the cable television industry, its relationships with television companies, the political economy of ratings and advertising agencies and their grip on the financial aspects of the Indian media market is a rich tapestry of work waiting to be done. It interests me enough to think of going back to India for further research. But an ethnographic approach on newsrooms prevented further work in this area here.

My thesis hoped a neutrality towards news values, refraining from commenting on practices and instead, recording them. I have slipped. The fact that I argue that Indian television is a middle class production house producing for the self reflects a social concern at the marginalisation and disarticulation of millions of people. My tone is

85

judgemental, I shape my argument in a fashion to arrive at a certain conclusion, that news media in Indian television is the domain of the privileged few. I agree that despite my attempts to record practices neutrally, a certain line of argument prevailed over others. In my defence, this argument emerged from an analytical perusal of the fieldwork material and is not a line of argument I had chosen to pursue at the beginning of my work. I must mention one of my favourite philosophers here, Mikhail Bakhtin who writes: "we cannot break out into the world of events from *within* the theoretical world. One must start with the act itself, and not with its theoretical transcription" (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 50). As much as possible, I have dealt with the act.

In Conclusion: Vignettes from fieldwork

In the course of my research I encountered much that would not conventionally enter the field of academia, but I include here to provide a fuller context to my research findings. In my case, I constantly negotiated between journalistic enthusiasm for news and the neutrality of the researcher. I built friendships, I caused suspicion, I felt welcomed, I was allowed entry and at times invisible walls were erected. The activities within a newsroom are kaleidoscopic. Here I mention a few incidents that stand out in memory and in my notebooks.

Who was I? The rumours

Here is a generalisation for a billion people and will be empirically impossible to prove: Indians understand "connections". A hangover from the British Raj, the Indian bureaucracy thrives on this. One needs "connections" to get electricity, building permits, gas, telephone lines. The list goes on.

One of the questions surrounding my arrival in *MCCS* was "whom does he know to get such access?" In informal chats, during interviews,

people asked me of my "connections" regularly. They were disbelieving when I told them of my methods of gaining entry: persistent emails and phone calls. Milind Khanderkar, Deputy Managing Editor, when asked for an interview, told me that I was impossible to refuse as it is known that I was close to the Sarkars, owners of the *ABP* group and majority stakeholders at *MCCS*.

This rumour was lent some credibility by the fact that I am a Bengali and the Group Headquarters are in Kolkata, West Bengal. Also, I had worked as a senior journalist with *NDTV* in Kolkata and there was an impression that I must have become close to the Sarkars during that period. Unsure of who I was, everyone wanted to play safe and chat with me.

The other rumour was that I was a spy planted by Uday Shankar, the CEO of *MCCS* to keep a finger on the happenings within the office. Gopal Kaushik and Yogesh Manwani told me of this initially and it later was confirmed by several other members of staff. This led to further ambiguity regarding my presence.

A body of social theory has been developed and could be used to analyse and critique the term "connections" and its broad usage in India. I briefly touch on Bourdieu's exploration of "cultural capital" and the bourgeoisie's attempts to reproduce social order in a later chapter in the context of content production. It is the same "connected" people in India, the bourgeoisie, who reproduce a social hierarchy where the rules advantage them. I had to be one of them, the "connected", to gain my entry into *MCCS*. Similarly, Castell's network theory or DeLanda's work on assemblage theory could have provided interesting analysis on social networking and the "culture of connections" (see Castell, 1996 and DeLanda, 2006). However, given the direction of my thesis, I refrained from developing these themes any further.

Shahzi Zaman and the Trainees

My relationship with Shahzi Zaman, Managing Editor, was a tricky one. At the outset he was co-operative. He introduced me to people and

asked them to facilitate my work. But as the weeks progressed and he saw me spending more and more time with his colleagues and in the editorial room, I felt he started getting very cagey. The open door policy changed to "I am busy. Can we chat later?" As time went on, he avoided meeting my eye and gave me a wide berth. However, he was never openly hostile.

When an induction programme for a group of thirteen trainees was being held, I asked Shahzi if I could sit in through some of it. Shahzi refused. This was the first and only time he categorically refused permission. But by this time, I had made several other associations. I was advised by many to ignore Shahzi and attend the induction anyways, which I did. If Shahzi knew of this transgression, he did not let me know. Shahzi was also the only person who refused to be recorded during my interview with him. After a very cautious interview, he told me that he would think about what he had said and if necessary, would ask me to put some of it off record. The interview was so restrained that I have been unable to find anything substantial to use for this work. I do not know why he was so cautious or restrained. But from conversations with other colleagues of Shahzi Zaman, I gathered that he does not court controversy and prefers to be safe. His reticence is a contrast against the general friendliness from almost everyone else in the Mumbai office.

A spy or a good researcher

Researchers seek information. Sometimes it is made available to them, at other times, they pry it out. Company strategy, company goals, the closed-door meetings, these are secrets any news organisations in a competitive set-up will have. I knew it would be foolish to ask for permission to sit in a board meeting. But as I soon found out, people were willing to tell me these secrets, unofficially of course. As much as news reporters believe in sources, they too were ready to assume that role. All official emails to the CEO were routed through his secretary. Carolina, who befriended me and made sure I knew what was going on

in the office. Every time an employee in the higher echelons was rebuked for over-spending, I would get a copy of the mail. Company strategies were made available to me; short and long term goals, marketing strategies, research thrust, all found their way to my mail box. Besides this, friends took particular care to make sure I understood what was not to be openly discussed. Marketing strategies, how deals are made with cable operators, how to artificially hike television ratings, these are not common knowledge. Friends made sure I understood these over several sittings. This again was unofficial and went unrecorded.

I have not made direct use of this material. But they help me understand the uneasiness of some of the Mumbai journalists with the work they do and the news values of *MCCS*. This is reflected in my analysis of editorial practices in Mumbai and in its contrast with the work practices in Kolkata where no journalist would say anything against their place of work.

Sealing bonds

An ethnographer will find that s/he has to partake in local customs to understand them and to get close to his or her subjects. In Kolkata, it meant drinking enormous amounts of alcohol with the Assignment Desk head Yuvraj Bhattacharya. After the first three weeks of research and not getting anywhere, I decided to take him out for dinner. Dinner turned out into a marathon drinking session, which ended at 4 am. I staggered home and wrote down the mental notes I had made throughout the evening as Yuvraj spoke about the politics within the office. That one evening had been a turning point in my research in Kolkata. When Yuvraj as the senior-most started spending time with me within and outside the office, other journalists felt that they could also talk to me. This allowed for far more access than during the first three weeks.

Yuvraj's conversations were off the record and again, I have made no direct use of it. Yet, they helped me understand the work ethics of

the journalists in *Star Ananda*: the ambitions, desires and of course, the internal politics. This also helped me write the chapter on the editorial practices.

So, who am I?

I am convinced that had I not had a career in journalism, this research would have been approached in other ways and the results would have differed. My insider knowledge and my years in the newsroom meant that there were certain things I took for granted. For example, I knew of the necessity of news beats for reporters, the time constraints in television and the taken-for-granted basics of editing news stories. While this reduced the initiation time and helped me fraternise easily, a person who has never been in a newsroom would by necessity choose a different approach. I could not have this outsider perspective, given that I am implicated in Indian journalistic practice. Then again, if not for my fledgling academic career, I could not possibly have conceived of this work. A year's break for a Master's degree turned into a fascination with academia and its rigours. I do not know who played a greater role in this work; the academic or the journalist; nor do I think that measurement is important. It is sufficient to acknowledge that this duality of experience contributed to this work.

Mikhail Bakhtin talks about the concept of 'live entering' where one forgets nothing and brings everything to a new culture. "In this process one simultaneously renounces and exploits one's surplus; one brings into interaction both perspectives simultaneously and creates an "architectonics" of vision reducible to neither. This architectonics produces new understanding." (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 54). For me, when I entered into academia, I brought to it the "surplus" of my journalistic training, including a respect for deadlines and a search for the new. When I re-entered the world of television journalism, this time as a researcher, I brought to it an academic's "surplus", a critical approach, an understanding of social research tools and methods and a

rigour not present during my journalistic days. The resultant "architectonics" of these two worlds, is this work.

Chapter 4

MCCS: The corporate strategies

The next two chapters in this thesis focus on the production practices in the two television newsrooms, *Star News* and *Star Ananda* and should be read in conjunction. The first, that is this chapter, examines the key divisions within the corporate section in *Media Content & Communications Services India Pvt. Ltd* (MCCS) which owns both the channels. It analyses how they influence, control, perform and take over editorial functions. The second will focus on the newsrooms of the two channels and examine the daily news practices of the journalists.

This chapter has two immediate objectives. The first is to contextualise the editorial functions within the corporate structure of *MCCS*. The second is to demonstrate that demarcations between editorial and the corporate are largely meaningless. While corporate managers perform editorial functions, journalists, as the next chapter will show, take on the key corporate responsibility of increasing viewership and thereby, profitability. This thesis claims itself to be an ethnography of television news production in India. Both chapters, therefore, are crucial to understanding the dynamics of news production. By providing empirical material detailing particularities, it challenges, questions and interrogates earlier newsroom ethnographies and what, Cottle has called, their "orthodoxies." (See chapter 2)

These two chapters, along with chapters 6 and 7, provide data leading towards the meta-theoretical terrain of this work: how is nationhood articulated in Indian television newsrooms. I aim to show, through interviews, observational and fieldwork data, the way journalists and media managers construct an affluent India for an affluent audience.

Bypassing the laws: Formation of MCCS

In Chapter 2, I outlined the arrival of private television channels in India. The Hutchison Whampoa group, operating out of Hong Kong and

owned by a Chinese capitalist, Li Ka-Shing, originally launched *Star TV*. (See Page and Crawley, 2001: 76-77). In 1993, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation bought *Star TV*. *Star News* was launched in India in 1996. Because of the governmental regulation that disallows a person of foreign origin from broadcasting live television news in India, Murdoch had to find a way around the law. He overcame the problem in two ways. First, *Star News* was uplinked from Hong Kong and there was a five-minute delay from the uplinking to the downloading on satellite dishes in India which technically meant that it was not 'live'. Second, the entire news content for *Star News* was owned and provided by *New Delhi Television Ltd* (*NDTV*), a private production house owned by an Indian, Prannoy Roy, thus overcoming the problem of a foreigner being barred from producing news in India.

However, the archaic broadcasting laws in India, formed during the colonial period, could not stand the changing political economy of the 90's. In 1995, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the airwaves were public property "that must be used in ways that ensure the expression of plurality of views and diversity of opinions in the national community." (Kumar, 2006: 44). The immediate cause for the ruling was cricket. The Hero Cup International was being held in India in 1995 and the organisers of the tournament, the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB), sold the worldwide rights for telecasting the matches to *Transworld Image* (*TWI*) after failing to come to a mutually acceptable contract with state-sponsored *Doordarshan*. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in India, mollycoddling the state network, asserted that *Doordarshan* had exclusive rights for broadcasting in India and told the government-owned telecommunication provider, *Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited* (VSNL) to deny uplinking facilities to *TWI*. CAB approached the Kolkata High Court which, wanting to facilitate the telecasting of the matches, passed an interim order which allowed *Doordarshan* to broadcast the games while allowing *TWI* to uplink from *VSNL*. In effect, while *TWI* had to pay for the broadcasting rights from CAB, *Doordarshan* did not. The Supreme Court took the case up after the tournament and ruled that

93

the airwaves were public property, thereby paving the way in 1998 for private broadcasters to up-link from within India. This change in law allowed Murdoch the possibility of changing the production model for *Star News* and of having more control over content.[19]

Star News was 're-launched' at the end of 2002 and, as is common with Rupert Murdoch ventures, it was mired in controversy. Re-launching meant, for the first time since its inception in 1996, that *Star News* started in-house production instead of having *NDTV* provide the content. In 2002, the two channels decided to part ways and, while *NDTV* launched two news channels of its own - one in English (*NDTV 24x7*) and one in Hindi (*NDTV India*) - *Star News* decided to target the North Indian region and launched only in Hindi. The Government of India regulations, however, still states that a person of foreign origin cannot own news channels in India nor have majority shares in them. This was one of the reasons that Murdoch roped in *NDTV* in 1996 to provide content. When other news channels joined in protests against Murdoch, he made "an ass of the law" (see *The Frontline*, August 2-15, 2003), and sold off 74 per cent share of *Star News* to the Bengali newspaper house, *The Anandabazar Group* (*ABP*) in August 2003.

The resultant *Media Content & Communications Services India Pvt. Ltd.* (*MCCS*) which is a 74/26 joint venture between *ABP TV* and *Star News Broadcasting Ltd*, initially owned the one news channel, *Star News.* Eyeing the profitability of regional news channels, they launched *Star Ananda*, a Bengali News channel, in June 2005. A Marathi news channel, *Star Majha*, was launched in 2007. The then Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Uday Shankar[20] told me in an interview that *MCCS* is now trying to come out of the shadow of *Star* and promote itself as a brand in its own right.

---

[19] *Star*'s contract with *NDTV* stipulated that the latter had complete editorial control and copyright over the news content.

[20] Uday Shankar now heads the entire Star group in India and is CEO, Star India

The *MCCS* office is located in Mahalaxmi in Central Mumbai, housed in the main *Star India* complex, next to *Fame Ad* labs, whose studios are frequently used by *Star News* for specialised programmes. *Star TV* has an office complex with six floors, of which *MCCS* occupies two. The *Star News* editorial department is situated on the ground floor while the corporate offices, which handle both *Star News* and *Star Ananda* are located on the first floor. The reception, lobby, canteen and other facilities are shared with *Star India*. The uplinking facilities of *Star News* are on the third floor along with the rest of *Star India*.

The Corporate Office

The corporate office on the first floor is divided into two sections. The main section houses the Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) office and also the office of the heads of Human Resources (HR), Research, Marketing (includes Branding and Distribution) and Ad Sales (Advertisement and Sales). Besides the heads of these departments, other personnel from these departments too have their workstations here. Before I examine each of these departments individually, it is important to understand the CEO's role and functions.[21]

Chief Executive Officer: The CEO's office forms the bridge between shareholders and directors of *MCCS* and the everyday functioning of *Star News* and *Star Ananda*. The CEO Uday Shankar was earlier a journalist who moved from print to television. Uday not only heads the corporate office but is also the editor-in-chief for *Star News* and *Star Ananda*. Given conventional wisdom that the editorial should not merge with business affairs of the company and vice versa, the job should be a potential minefield of ethical dilemmas and conflicts of interest. (As discussed in the literature review, the various strands of

---

[21] The fact that I start with the CEO in the corporate section immediately blurs the distinction with the editorial as Uday is also head of the latter. I discuss him in the corporate section simply because his office is on that floor and also because I start with the corporate. Had I started with the editorial, Uday would as easily have fitted in there.

newsroom ethnographies that looked at journalistic agency (White, 1950), outside influence for news determinants (Gans 1979; Herman and Chomsky, 1998), or even those that did look at organisational practices (Schlesinger, 1978; Epstein 1973) failed to look in detail at corporate practice and its influence on news content. However, given today's news ecology, such omission will provide a less than adequate understanding of newsroom practices.)

In an interview conducted at the end of my stint in the Mumbai office, one of the first questions I put to Uday Shankar was how he viewed the "ethical" dilemmas of combining the role of editor and chief executive and does this duality compromise journalistic independence. He replied thus:

> I do not think my becoming the CEO along with being the Editor has compromised the journalistic standards at all. We are a content company and if content is your core, who else should be heading the company. This whole disqualification of journalist from heading a company because he doesn't understand business is complete bunkum. Who understand the business better than a journalist? He might not understand an excel sheet, maybe. What's so great about an excel sheet? You could get a commerce graduate to do that. But I understand the core product. And don't forget in Rupert Murdoch's companies all over the world, the heads of channels are always content persons. The head of *Fox News* is a content person, Samir Nair, the CEO of *Star India* is a content person, *News Corps* CEO is a content person. (July 5th, 2006).

Shankar's role as CEO and also as head of the editorial team means that he has tremendous control over everyday functions of the office. During my tenure at *Star News* in Mumbai, I was seated facing the CEO's office, in close proximity to his secretary and his personal assistant, I was privy, therefore to most of his and his offices' activities. Uday Shankar made sure people knew he was in charge. The staff were scared of him and the senior personnel including the heads of the different departments were no exception to this rule. If in Mumbai (Shankar travelled frequently) he had regular (sometimes stormy) meetings with

the various teams, be they in the corporate or editorial. I observed him letting his displeasure known over particular stories and he was often around in the newsroom.[22] He regularly met with the various heads to discuss corporate strategy and chaired a Monday afternoon meeting between all the heads of departments including the editorial and the corporate. Stories abound in the office about Uday's quick temper and those at the receiving end of it. I was told of his 'fearsome temper' by several of the people working in *MCCS*. I narrate an incident in my diary that has been crosschecked with several people.

> *When Star News was being launched, people were hugely overworked and everyone was stressed. Uday used to spend a lot of time in the editorial. He was frequently abusive and angry with staffers. One evening he walked in and started screaming at an editor. The editor stood up and told him that he cannot speak in this manner. Uday dragged the editor out and told security at the entrance never to let him enter again. The editor was sacked. (diary excerpt, June 3rd)*

I also include two excerpts from my fieldwork diary to highlight Uday's involvement in the everyday affairs of the news channel as well as his working style.

> *(June 1st): Tremendous amount of shouting going on as Uday is talking to someone on phone. He is in a bad mood, very bad. Shahzi, Milind,* [Shahzi Zaman and Milind Khanderkar, the Managing Editor and his deputy] *and he had a long meeting. There were closed doors meetings. Now the door is open and Uday's raised voice is clearly audible. He tells Carol[23] to close the door.*

> *(June 15th) Uday comes after a long time. Everyone immediately tenses up. A girl coming up the stairs tells Carol, "Uday is coming" and we all split from around his office area.*

The above three instances reflect the working style of Uday Shankar. The first incident, where an editor is sacked, is one of the stories which I

---

[22] The reasons for displeasure were varied, ranging from stories which the channel missed; "bad" or poor quality stories; failure to do stories he had asked for, etc.
[23] Uday's secretary.

am told by Uday's colleagues when I ask them about what they think of him. Though crosschecked with several people, the 'reality' of the story had ceased to matter as it had taken on mythic proportions. Newcomers at *MCCS* are told the story so that they know how to behave in Uday's presence.[24] Uday's authority within the office premises seemed absolute. I did not once hear anyone contradict him. The next two instances show that even the senior editorial personnel were deferential towards him, while his mere presence ensured deference.

As CEO and editorial head, Shankar not only had to undertake the important job of making profits (he is answerable to the shareholders), but also of balancing this with the 'ethics' of practicing journalism and the news production of a television channel. Uday Shankar's approach to work, its practices, again highlights the merging of corporate and editorial functions: the shared responsibility of maximising profits by the editorial, and of understanding and contributing to news content with an eye to profit by the corporate. The latter is important to understand and here I chart out how the different corporate divisions actively promote particular kinds of content with corporate goals in mind. (I will use my interview with Uday Shankar through the next two chapters as I describe and analyse corporate functions and editorial practices)

I begin by examining the Ad Sales team, primarily responsible for selling advertisement slots to potential customers, their strategies, and how these affect editorial policies and news content.

Ad Sales

Formation: Though *Star News* was re-launched in 2002, *Star India* looked after the sales. Even after the joint venture with *ABP* and the formation of *MCCS* in 2003, sales continued to be handled by the parent company. It was only in January 2005, when the prospect of launching a

---

[24] Though Uday has never been anything less than courteous to me, the stories of his temper ensured that I kept a low profile when he was in office like everyone else.

Bengali channel was assured, that *MCCS* felt the need to have its own sales team that would manage both *Star News* and *Star Ananda*.

Composition: The team was headed by the Sales Head, Prabal Ganguly, who was also one of the Vice Presidents of *MCCS*. Besides his deputy, Sonal, seven other personnel worked in the department.

Function: The main function of the sales team is to sell advertisement slots in the two news channels of *MCCS*, *Star News* and *Star Ananda* (and now *Star Majha*) to clients. Revenue earned through advertisements contributes to roughly 80 per cent of *MCCS*'s gross profits. Most corporate clients of *MCCS* who purchase advertisement slots do it indirectly through advertisement agencies. This point is important. The Ad Sales team will very rarely sell slots directly to clients.[25] The advertising agency employed by a client for their media policy buys airtime in various television channels and other media outlets for their clients. These agencies are responsible for the media strategy and publicity management of their clients and deal with various media houses like *MCCS* to purchase advertisement slots for their clients. Teams from media organisations make their sales pitch directly to these agencies, which are extremely powerful in the advertisement revenue market.[26]

Strategies of selling: Television slots are sold on two basic principles:[27] quantitative and qualitative. If a channel is viewed much more than its competitors, it becomes imperative for advertisers to be seen on that channel because of its comparatively high visibility. This, Prabal Ganguly explains, is the quantitative principle of selling advertisement

---

[25] Clients are of two kinds: retail and corporate. Almost 90 per cent of corporate customers, which are far more lucrative to do business with, will have advertising agencies negotiating for them. Retail clients, who are mainly proprietor driven, tend to do business themselves.

[26] In an interview with me, the CEO Uday Shankar calls the ad agencies "lazy" and yet talks about their vice-like grip on the market.

[27] I had a recorded interview with Prabal Ganguly and a very long chat with Sonal who explained the basic principles of television news format selling and strategies in general and also particular to *MCCS*. I borrow from these interviews here.

slots. Particular time slots are also sold to advertisers who want to be associated with a channel's unique positioning. For example, *The Discovery Channel*, though by no means a highly viewed channel in India, has a regular client base for advertising and its association with children ensures that certain companies manufacturing products aimed towards this audience will want an association with the channel. The unique position of a channel and how it is sold to clients is the qualitative principle of selling. A channel's image, its qualitative positioning, the way it wants to be perceived in the market and by the viewer; these are aspects that are handled by the marketing department of the channel. (I will discuss the marketing section of *Star News* a little later in this chapter)

For the quantitative, the entire television industry in India depends on Television Rating Points (TRP), discussed in detail in the chapter on audiences (Chapter 6). TRP ratings give the industry an idea of the number of people watching different channels at different times. Computer software can analyse the age-group of people watching, how long they watched a programme and also follow the audience patterns of other channels.

But both quantitative and qualitative aspects of a channel have to be sold to the advertisement agencies by the sales teams, and this requires different strategies. Such strategies are important because not every channel can be the 'number one' in terms of viewer preference, and nor can every news channel acquire a distinctive feature, shared with no other news channel. Given this, the teams responsible for maximising advertisement revenue come up with various strategies to boost sales. News viewing in India is traditionally seen as a male domain by the advertising market. The news genre, Prabal says, is for the "male 25 +" viewer. Television sales teams therefore target clients with male products. "The sales team looks at the product, the market which the client targets, where does he advertise, does he tilt towards English or Hindi, how does he spend, is it seasonal or all year spending." (Sonal) The spending habits of a potential client are also taken into account. Some clients are seasonal: Sonal gives the example of clients

who manufacture warm clothes, whereas a bank, she points out, would advertise all the year round. For example, ICICI Bank has become a major spender in the Indian market but *Star News*, has so far received a relatively small portion of the spending. *Star News* is now looking at the potential for doubling this account. To do this, the ad sales department is trying to come up with strategies. The ad sales people "can promise extras like stories on banking tips or credit cards to ICICI as sops." (Sonal). The bank can also be told the kind of advertisements that are being placed by their competitors in *Star News* and what can be done for them to counter this. Specific extras are promised for different clients. The closing of a deal takes several sittings with the client and the ad agencies.[28]

Most buyers want to advertise only in prime-time hours, usually in the morning before people (men mostly) go to work and in the evening, after they return. But a channel has to sell at least 20 hours of news time everyday and therefore

> "work out a very, very cost effective as well as innovative manner so that whenever a client buys, his inventory gets liquidated across various time bands. There are obvious differences in how this is handled when a Mercedes or a top of line car comes and advertises, as to make-up product targeted at women. The latter will be open to taking day slots too. Advertising sales package thus has to be created keeping products in mind and the client profile. [sic]" (Prabal Ganguly, 8/05/2006)

It is evident from the selling strategies of the sales team in *MCCS* that it must have a close working relationship with the editorial department. Sops, extras and inducements have to be offered to clients and therefore specific stories have to be covered. Also, to project a certain image of the channel amongst potential clients certain kinds of stories are required, for which the editorial and sales must work closely with the branding and marketing department. Sales personnel must also understand the selling potential of different news cycles and

---

[28] Though there is an official rate card for advertisements, discounts are available for big players who spend larger sums of money. Some discounts are not printed on the card and offered directly to the agencies.

programmes and therefore interact closely with the editorial to determine content. How is this achieved? Here, I use specific illustrations to understand the daily practices of sales and editorial teams, and collaboration between them. For this, I use the observational method and reproduce notes from two meetings that I attend. The meetings were on the subject of a new car show and were between the members of the editorial team, headed by Gopal Kaushik, Associate Producer in *Star News*.[29] I had seen the pilot episode before the meeting. The format was simple. Two lovers, a good-looking female model and a man get into an argument over how to get to Goa from Mumbai. The girl goes by train saying it will be faster than the man's car. The car, which is being highlighted in this show, wins the "race". The female model is attractive and wears "sexy" clothes, which Gopal tells me will be the main Unique Selling Point (USP) of the show.

Before a programme goes on air, the sales department has to be convinced the 'product' is saleable and they give inputs on how to make it more lucrative. Also, they need to know the kind of clients they can approach to sponsor and advertise in such programmes. I attended two meeting that took place between Gopal, his team member Preetam Bora, and Archana from the sales department. The first meeting was on June 2nd, 2006 and the next one, four days later, on June 6th, 2006. Both the meetings were held in a small room, next to the sales department in the corporate floor and usually occupied by Gopal and his team members.[30]

The first meeting

The meeting started with Archana stating that she had been thinking of clients who would be interested in car shows: she had come up with Tata Motors and Indian Oil. Gopal remarked that the programme would be a product she could easily sell, and, explaining the format, stated that there would be a storyline around the cars the programme chooses to

---

[29] I address the understandings of "programme" and "news" at *MCCS* in a later chapter on content.
[30] I had taken notes during the meeting in my diary.

highlight. There would be a section where two vehicles race each other, which was not to be stage-managed. He firmly iterated that editorial policy would not be changed on this and the race was to be 'authentic'. Archana said the car that loses the race would get bad publicity, which would affect revenues if clients got upset. The discussion switched to potential clients. Archana mentioned that besides automobile companies, other products like lubricants could be highlighted. The tyre industry, she said, is not very big on advertising in television.

Archana then asked what the branding opportunities were. Gopal replied that there would be two different formats: one would be *takkar* (battle) between vehicles and the second would be a test drive. Archana remarked that she could arrange for vehicles for test-drives from the car manufacturers. Gopal said that the branding opportunity for say, Tata Motors, in a test drive situation could be a particular segment of the programme named, for example 'Tata Motors Present'. The programme would start with a question; he added and would be the third segment which would be 'non-political.' He gave an example: "What is the naughtiest thing you have done in a car"? Archana laughed and replied "Call it how do you take a woman in a car." There was general laughter after which Gopal remarked that the answer could be given at the end of the programme and celebrities would relate their experiences on the given topic. Gopal said a 'teaser'[31] for this would be easy to produce with celebrities. Archana asked if the closing section would have tips for drivers. Gopal replied that he could include that. Archana added that if this could be done, then maintenance of vehicles could become a part of this closing section and she could get clients who would want to advertise this. Archana wanted more from Gopal regarding what she could sell from the programme. Gopal mentioned again that he had a model (Manpreet) who would wear 'sexy' clothes. He suggested that Manpreet's outfit could be sold. Archana jotted this down. She asked for a five-minute pilot presentation that she could show to clients. Gopal agreed to get it ready and asked Preetam to

---

[31] Teasers are short promos which are made to publicise particular programmes and are aired at different times through the day.

prepare it. Archana wanted Manpreet to wear a cap. Archana said that it was better to be a "bit conservative" with programmes when it comes to selling it to clients. She then explained that sales personnel in client companies are wary of taking risqué products to their bosses. Gopal said that his programme will have no jargon, there would be more action and less talk and he would provide information in the programme on how to get car finance and car registration done. The story line would be entertaining, he promised. He also suggests that the fights between the vehicles could be between bikes and cars, too. Archana liked this idea and jotted it down. They decided to meet again soon.

Second meeting: 6th June

(Gopal was not present and the meeting took place between Preetam Bora and Archana)

Archana started by talking of naming rights[32], anchor mention[33] of products and background branding[34]. Preetam noted these points down for Gopal. He told Archana that ten stories had already been shot. Archana remarked that it would now be impossible to do product placements in them. They spoke of different ways to create branding opportunities for products. Archana suggested a kind of moving wheel at the side of the screen, which could highlight the main sponsor[35]. She asked Preetam whether the show would critique new launches by the clients. Preetam answered in the affirmative. Archana stated that this might cause a big problem, telling Preetam: "these are big deals and for your honesty, my revenues will get "lammed" [hit]." She also told Preetam that the sales department would take thirteen or twenty six-

---

[32] This could mean the programme or segments within the programme include the name of a particular sponsor.

[33] An anchor might mention certain products of the sponsors during segments. So a segment on car maintenance can mention a particular product of a client related to the content.

[34] This could take different forms depending on the design and look of the show. A popular background branding is to use a revolving logo with a sponsor's name on it.

[35] An example of background branding.

week commitments from clients and they could not hit these long term clients with negative publicity. She then asked about the shooting expenditure per episode. Preetam stated that it was approximately 300,000 Indian rupees[36]. Archana got upset, saying that it was too high. "Do you think sales can do some rocket science and bring in Rs 2 crore? That is just to break even," she remarked. She kept repeating "you have overshot." Preetam, I noticed, started making sketches of guns on his note pad. The meeting broke up soon after.

---

[36] 100,000 (a lakh) Indian rupees (Rs) is approximately 1200 pounds. One crore is a hundred lakhs which would be approximately one hundred and twenty thousand pounds.

Points to note

A programme first has to recoup money spent on it and then make profit. For this, it needs to be sold to clients for sponsoring or advertisements. The sales department therefore has ample say over content as is evident from the above meetings. The editorial also understands these demands and works with the sales team. At times however, the demands for selling a programme and what 'sells' can result in interesting situations. Gopal having internalised the necessity of selling his programme has felt that an attractive model in 'sexy' clothes will sell better. But Archana thinks that too "risqué" a product has problems selling. When I speak to her later, she tells me that a lot of the oil and rubber companies for which this product is ideal are public sector enterprises. This means that the top people tend to be older than those in a corporate firm and selling "sexy" products can become a risk.[37]

Archana's comments on "editorial honesty" being detrimental for selling a product must raise eyebrows given that *MCCS* is a news channel. Selling a programme is the responsibility of the bosses. Gopal, who is heading the show is far more eager to see that the show goes on air and is profitable. Preetam's reactions to Archana's suggestions are sometimes hostile, and often indifferent. He makes sketches of guns as she works out the cost factor.

Appointment viewing is a nascent, not yet large-scale practice in Indian news television; audiences switch on to news channels randomly rather than wanting to watch a particular one at a particular time. For example, in the UK there is a large dedicated audience who would switch on to BBC for *NewsNight.* While English news channels in India have started the trend of appointment viewing, Hindi and other regional news channels have yet to catch up. This is indicated by the audience ratings where regular programmes do not necessarily have a similar viewing pattern.

---

[37] I was told that in a meeting of all department heads, the Managing Editor was asked by the others to tone down the "sexiness" of the channels as it was affecting the image and companies felt shy of associating with it.

Uday Shankar and Head of the Research department, Jyotsna, both told me that *Star News* and *Star Ananda* are pushing hard to make appointment viewing a habit with the audience and thus placing a lot of stress on programmes and their promotion. At times, however, it is not sufficient that a programme garners very high audience ratings or that it is popular. Associations with the programme can be such that advertisers shy away from it. An example is the extremely popular daily crime show on *Star News* called *Sansani*. The programme is one of the most watched across all Hindi news channels but several top brands refuse to advertise in it owing to certain associations of a crime based show. Therefore, the branding of a particular programme and also that of the channel are extremely significant in their saleability. The job of brand management is the responsibility of the Marketing department.

Marketing

Job definition: The primary job of the Marketing department is image management, i.e. finding ways in which a certain perception of the channels can be created and maintained amongst the audience in general and the media market in particular.[38] This is generally achieved by three broad means: influencing content, through promos and the placing of advertisements and finally, through public relations exercises.[39]

Context: When *Star News* re-launched in Hindi in 2003,[40] there was one established Hindi news channel in India: *Aaj Tak*. The fight for second place was between *Star News* and *NDTV India*, which were both

---

[38] By market, I mean the clients whom *Star News* and *Ananda* sell advertisement slots to and also the advertising agencies who act on behalf of the clients.

[39] In an interview and subsequent conversations, Yogesh Manwani, the gentleman heading the branding department, explained the various ways his department works. To understand how branding works in *Star News* and *Ananda*, I use this interview along with discussions with Prabal Ganguly, as sales and branding work closely together.

[40] *Star News* had to face the difficulty, termed "residual equity", of being an elite English Channel due to the several years of being produced by *NDTV*. A broad range of marketing gimmicks, such as hoarding, advertisement in television and print were launched to change that impression.

launched around the same time. *Zee News,* was also establishing itself and *Sahara India* was on the verge of being launched. Three years later, television news channels were a dime a dozen in India. The competitive overcrowding of news providers means "there is a fragmentation in the news genre, especially in Hindi news (Prabal Ganguly)." In this context, 'fragmentation' means that with more and more channels sprouting, they are fighting for an audience base, in which though there is a net increase because of more cable connectivity, the actual number of viewers per channel is shrinking. Given this overcrowded scenario, branding of a channel assumes tremendous significance to make it stand out from others of the same genre.

Aaj Tak, being the first to establish itself in the market, branded itself as the fastest to get the news. Not unlike *CNN,* which comes with the tag line "brings you the news first," *Aaj Tak* came with the line *Sabse Tej* (The Fastest). *NDTV India,* which had been producing news for almost two decades and had a recognisable face in the form of its proprietor Prannoy Roy and other established anchors, was perceived to be a serious channel. It used this perception and the catch line *khabar wohi joh sach dikhaye* (news is that which shows the truth). Yogesh Manwani, Marketing Head, of *MCCS* said that in coining the phrase *Aapko Rakhe Aage* (Keeps You Ahead), *Star News* became the first and only customer centric news channel: "Our approach therefore, editorially, was that we will report keeping your [the audience] interest at heart, we will report keeping you in mind, we will report news that affects you." The positioning of *Star Ananda* was relatively simpler given that it was the first Bengali news channel viewed nationally.[41]

As I mention in the chapter on editorial, every journalist I interviewed at *MCCS* answered two questions almost identically: how do you select and reject a story? "I imagine what my audience would like to see?"; how do you know what the audience would like to see? "I

---

[41] This audience oriented approach was obviously intended to maximise sales and garner higher TRP ratings. But its effect is evident in editorial policy. The Managing Editor Shahzi Zaman vets stories for two things: *jan heet aur jaan ruchi* (public good and public taste). Several times when I sat with him and reporters came with their stories, he would ask them to justify why the stories should be on air in terms of these two points.

imagine what I would like to see, what my friends and family would like to see." Imagining the self as audience has given rise to several consequences which I have picked up in other sections of this work. My assertion is that the one of the reasons the Indian media continue to articulate a "promised land" of affluence and wellbeing where the poor are wished away (Chakravorty and Gooptu, 2000:91), is that middle class journalists imagining themselves as audience articulate a notion of India relevant to themselves. At best, it is wishful thinking; at worst it is a "symbolic annihilation" of 400 million people who live below the poverty line in India.

Branding opportunities and editorial support: According to Manwani, once decided upon, the impression of a 'customer oriented' channel needs to be continuously reinforced through content. This requires collaboration with the editorial. Marketing also comes up with programme ideas that further the desired image of the channels. Giving an example, Manwani states that on March 31st, 2006, *Star News* had a programme that was completely developed by the marketing team. It was called *Khabar Hamari, Faisla Aapka* (Our News, Your Judgement). He describes the programme as a way to show their audience that the news is for them and that they have a say in it, thereby furthering the idea that they come from a viewer centric position. The programme had a section where viewers could call in and give their response to the various stories and feel empowered. Marketing regularly works with the editorial on such ideas.

A new development in Indian media is that almost every major Bollywood production now has its media partners and this will include at least one news channel. This is a strategic tie-up which allows the movie producer to have 'unlimited' air time on a news channel to promote the movie while a news channel has rights to 'exclusive' interviews with the actors, access to film footage and other exclusive rights. These are primetime news material as films occupy a very

significant chunk in every news wheel. Yogesh Manwani makes these strategic alliances.[42]

Points to Note

News content is no longer the sole prerogative of the editorial team and this must be taken into account if news production processes in Indian newsrooms are to be understood critically. Smythe has argued that content is "free lunch". (1981) I would argue that news content in India is aimed at securing maximum eyeballs and as that is the route to achieving higher ratings and therefore secure more advertising, it has its purposes. These purposes, however, do not fit in with a traditional understanding of news media's role, which sees it as "as a responsible institution that disseminates information and promotes debate," (if the news media ever played that role) and "obliterate[es] the distinction between the editorial and business functions in a publication..." (Bidwai, 1996: 6). As can be seen from the above two examples, the corporate section, here specifically the marketing team of *MCCS*, not only asks for specific stories but actually 'organises' content. While it can be argued that programmes like *Khabar Hamaari, Faisla Aapka* do not strictly fall into a *news* category, no such excuses can be made for the tailored news of Bollywood organised by the marketing team. Part of what is termed "infotainment," Bollywood stories are an important feature in the general news cycle in *Star News* and *Star Ananda* as indeed they are in every other news channel in India.

Marketing in news channels also rely heavily on Public Relations (PR) to promote brand awareness. Manwani says that PR is conducted on a daily basis and a PR company, Vaishnavi, has been hired by *MCCS* to promote its channels. This involves letting clients know of certain exclusive stories or of new programmes coming up. It will include sending out press releases, putting up hoardings on the streets advertising either the channels or their contents. These require close

---

[42] Manwani, during a chat, told me that though the film correspondent should fix up interviews, he prefers to do it himself as he can get close to the stars and producers of Bollywood.

co-ordination between marketing and editorial; the latter must let the former know in advance of stories which can create 'impact' so that advertisement campaigns and PR exercises can be planned in advance. Manwani, during his interview, told me that he makes it a point every evening to go to the newsroom and chat with the editorial people.[43]

It is evident that the theoretical frameworks through which news production practices have been analysed until now need to be reworked. Scholars have argued that journalists need to hold on to notions of objectivity for professional purposes (see Lichtenberg, J. 1996). But objectivity is an empirical impossibility. The above examples show that journalists may no longer hold on to such "strategic rituals". (Tuchman, 1978) What can be objective about reporting a Bollywood cinema production when your organisation has set up a strategic alliance with them?

Both the Sales and Marketing departments depend heavily on data and inputs provided by the research team at *MCCS*. This team also plays an important role in deciding news content. It gives analysis of audience data on which the sales, marketing and editorial team rely to maximise their impact and profit. An audience-monitoring agency, *TAM* (Television Audience Measurement) Media Research, provides 'gross data' to most of India's media industry.[44] The research team uses this data for analysis while providing the inputs on which much of the editorial and corporate decisions are based. Before a discussion of the functions of the Research desk and the particularities of ratings methods in India, it is necessary to understand the key concepts of the system and its functions.

Rating the Audience

As mentioned in the literature review, the ratings system developed in the United States in the 1920s in response to the economic challenge posed by the introduction of radio, and its resulting commercialisation.

---

[43] The Marketing team also handles distribution, which will be discussed in a later chapter on audiences and TRP's.
[44] The only exception to this is Zee Television which does not use the ratings.

(Smulyan, 1994) Commercialisation almost immediately established a need for audience measurement, because advertisers and programme sponsors needed to know how many people were listening to justify their advertising expenditure. The first audience research tradition to develop, therefore, was ratings research (Beville, 1998).

Webster (et al) consider the ratings system to be "indispensable to the media's interest in building audiences and to the society's interest in understanding mass media industries." (2000: 1) However, as Ross and Nightingale point out, they (Webster, et al.) describe ratings analysis as "commercial audience research and situate it alongside social and cultural audience research traditions, rather than the field of marketing. (2003: 44). We do not necessarily have to agree with Webster et al (2000) to see the value of ratings as a basic media knowledge required to understand "what media services, products and texts are produced and distributed, and how audience interests are taken into account (or not) in making those decisions." (Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 45). Ross and Nightingale, identify four types/uses/methods of analysis:

> *Applied* - ratings analysis sets out to provide answers to specific questions, like 'how many people watched the programmes we broadcast last night?' or 'what percentage of the people who watched the programme were women aged 18 to 35?' In this sense it is a pragmatic rather than theoretical research.

> *Adminstrative* – ratings analysis contributes directly to the decisions broadcasters make as to how to operate as a business (what types of programmes to buy, when to schedule them, what pricing policy should be adopted for selling advertising spots, and so on). The analysis helps broadcasting companies operate more efficiently, and in this sense it is not *critical* of the media – rather it is part of the communication system.

Quantitative – rating analysis relies on sampling procedures, and on adding up instances of audience behaviour described as *'exposure.'* (I will explain this in detail) Qualitative information about audiences is outside its scope.

Syndicated – ratings analysis is used to generate reports that are offered for sale to companies and individuals involved in the media industries. It is not designed to solve social or cultural problems, but to deliver immediately usable information to the industry.

All four approaches are based on techniques developed for counting and statistically analysing a single audience behaviour, referred to in the media as "exposure". "Exposure" is defined as "open eyes facing a medium." (Sissors and Bumba, 1996: 467-8). Industry leaders have chosen a measurement of media audience – exposure – that is less than perfect, but that can differentiate media vehicles on the basis of their audience sizes. (ibid 1996: 69)

Ross and Nightingale write:

> In an industry dependent on advertisement, media industries can be understood as existing to generate exposures. In this sense, audience exposures are the commodity at the heart of broadcasting. Exposure is, in effect, the only *commodity* produced by the broadcasting industries. All other products of broadcasting (the programmes, the newscasts, the personalities, the advertisements) are *services* designed to generate audience exposures. From this industry perspective, exposures are counted and analysed in ways that allow them to be pre-sold to advertisers and others. The capacity to predict, and therefore to pre-sell, audience exposures provides the cash flow for commercial broadcasting. And the capacity to predict audience exposures for particular media vehicles is based on another mass-audience behaviour: the loyalty demonstrated by the inclination to view additional episodes of programmes enjoyed. (2003: 45-46)

As I mentioned above, this "exposure" is analysed in two different ways: gross and cumulative. The gross analysis data in India is provided by *TAM* for almost the entire media industry. On this data, each television company or media agency conducts cumulative analysis. While television companies try to highlight higher numbers or niche audiences being exposed to their particular channels and their respective programmes, media strategists or advertising agencies try to spot audience viewing trends to advertise or plan campaigns on television channels for their clients and products.

The Indian context

TAM Media Research, a joint venture between *AC Nielson* and *Kantar Media Research/IMRB*, provides the quantitative data or the gross analysis on audience and viewership to the Indian television industry and also the advertising market. The company collects audience data and viewing patterns by placing monitoring boxes in cable television viewing homes. This data is then loaded onto Media Express, a computer software that offers customers (television companies, advertising agencies, etc) different and tailor-made ways to look at the numbers (to conduct cumulative analysis).[45] Data collection is an urban phenomenon and boxes are placed only in towns that have a population of 100,000 plus. The states of Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar and the seven states in the North-East of India are excluded from this survey. All towns that are surveyed are divided according to population into two groups: under or over a million.

The gross data records audience sizes and includes three key parameters: ratings, share and gross rating points (GRP); the last being of interest only to advertisers. I discuss them briefly here before contextualising them in an *MCCS* scenario where this exposure data is used repeatedly in diverse combinations to generate the type of information the Sales team can use to pitch the channels to advertisers; the Marketing team to promote certain specifics of the channels; and

---

[45] At the time of writing, the company had 4500 monitoring boxes in India. The cable television audience in India is estimated to be 69 million

the Editorial team to understand audience reactions to programmes.

Ratings: The most well known measure of an audience is the ratings. It basically means a count of the number of people *exposed* to a programme. Exposure data is collected at 15-minute cycles. Webster and Lichty define ratings as "the percentage of persons or households tuned to a station or programme out of the total market population" (1991: 255).

For example, at a given point of time, 50 per cent of the sampled population might be watching television. If a programme broadcast at this time receives a rating of 10, it means that 40 per cent of the sample was watching something else while the remaining 50 per cent was not watching at all. The ratings indicate the percentage of the sample watching a particular programme. By themselves, ratings are just figures and mean nothing. They therefore have to be understood in comparative analysis along with other channels and programmes. The research teams at *MCCS* do such analysis to make this data relevant.

The second and more useful context to analysts is "share" or what in the Indian television context is known as *market share*. For example *Star News* and *Star Ananda* focus on different markets: the former focuses on the Hindi Speaking Markets (HSM)[46]; the latter on Bengal. A generic ratings number in these cases is unhelpful, as it will include regions which both channels are not focussing on. For example, a general 10 rating will include television viewing homes in South India which is not the target area of either of the news channels and is therefore meaningless. Market shares also allow niche channels, here news, to compete with other channels of the same genre. For example a sudden drop in *Star News's* viewership at a particular point could be explained due to a cricket match on a sports channel and shares of all news channels are expected to go down. The drop therefore needs to be contextualised. Market shares numbers allow region- and niche audience-based analysis for television producers and advertisers.

---

[46] This includes 15 states concentrated around North and West India and some of the East.

The third concept in gross measurement rating is of interest only to advertisers and it will not be dealt with in detail here. "Gross Rating Point" measures the number of times an audience is exposed to a particular advertisement.

The Research team

Job definition: The research team is an integral part of the corporate department within *MCCS* and its primary job is to analyse the quantitative data provided by *TAM* and provide inputs to the editorial, sales and marketing teams. Since this chapter is concerned with corporate influence on the editorial, I will mainly discuss the research team in terms of its impact on editorial matters. The particular ways the *TAM* data is analysed and understood, termed "cumulative analysis," will be picked up in detail in chapter on audiences, to highlight how ratings and understandings of the audience influence content.

Data analysis and editorial input: To analyse the data, *MCCS* focuses on "15 markets" for *Star News* which constitute the Hindi-speaking markets (HSM). *Star Ananda*, catering to its audience base, focuses on the Bengali market in West Bengal. Not only are audience targeted in specific regions, niche audiences within these regions are also "imagined." Jyotsna, head of Research, told me in an interview:

> In a broad sense the genre is news, but within news it is amazing what are the
> possibilities. It could be a news show based on automobiles, a news show on finance, or it could be a news show targeting the women or youth. So programmes are completely slotted based on viewership data, and also on past experience and on what the competition is showing at that time. (09/05/2006)

Analysis of *TAM* data for news channel audiences throws up different profiles for depending on the time of day. Accordingly the research team advises the editorial for programmes which targets these

116

particular groups. For example, housewives are the target audience in the afternoons as data shows that women who are not working in offices tend to watch television after 2pm. The popular news programme in *Star News* based on television soap operas and highlighting the lives of soap opera stars *Saans Bahu aur Saazish* (*Mother-in-law, Daughter-in-law and Conspiracy*) is aired at 2pm. *Star Anando* does a Bengali equivalent: *Hoi Ma Noito Bowma* (*Either the Mother-in-law or the Daughter-in-law*) Similarly, *Star News* tries to provide 'hard news' between 8am and 9am, targeting the office-going male. The attempt is to provide a tailor-made product targeting a specific audience.

The *TAM* data shows how programmes have fared on ratings over a period of time. It also takes into account what the competition, the other news channels, are providing to the audience. Jyotsna gives an example. A crime show at 11pm might not attract the best viewership if *Zee News* is showing a popular Bollywood based programme at the same time. The research team might ask the editorial to shift the timing or to come up with a similar programme to counter *Zee News*. Or it could also ask the marketing team to adopt various strategies to promote the programme. The team, Jyotsna said, might ask for the programme to be scrapped or suggest improvements.

Sales, Marketing and Research Analysis: Though not a particular focus of this thesis, it is necessary to state that an important function of the research team includes providing data analysis to the sales and marketing teams. The data and spending profiles of companies spending on advertisements are collected by *TAM* through monitoring of the advertisement schedules in the various news channels. A computer software, Ad Ex, is used to analyse the data and how clients are spending money and on which television channel.

> "That data also comes weekly so not only do I know who the spenders
> on my channel are but I can also actively monitor what are their
> spending patterns. I also know what the spenders are spending on our
> key competition so that we can actively target them and try and divert

117

the money they spend in other channels to ours," (Jyotsna, 09/05/2006).

While there is an obvious logic to the fact that a news channel has to sell advertising slots to survive in mainstream media, the active participation of the corporate in newsroom policies and decisions (and to a certain extent, editorial in the corporate), is new. In *Paper Tigers*, Coleridge (1998) identifies this trend in India in the Bennett and Coleman Group, which publishes *The Times of India (TOI)*. Samir Jain, the owner of *TOI*, removed newspaper editors and replaced them with corporate heads, making the Editor a managerial position rather than journalistic. But it was not until 2003, with the sudden explosion of private news channels, that selling, branding and concepts like 'core audience' started to be taken seriously by the editorial and journalists.[47]

The human resources (HR) management department ensures that corporate values are imbibed and incorporated into editorial practice. Responsible for recruitment and promotions, the department has control over punishment and reward and it is important to understand the functioning of HR and its policies at *MCCS* to understand how editorial practices are controlled by the corporate.

Human Resources, recruitment and policies

Anyone studying news organisations or working in them understands the classical divide between the corporate and the editorial. In a sense, it is taken for granted. The vice president of human resources at *MCCS*, Sanju Saha, told me however that he actively seeks to discourage this notion. The company now tries to have periodic workshops, which bring together heads from both corporate and editorial to promote the idea of 'team.'[48]

---

[47] I was a correspondent and editorial head of West Bengal with *NDTV* from August 2000 until January 2003. I never met any sales personnel or advised on *TRP* ratings. Nor did any of my colleagues in the editorial in New Delhi or elsewhere. But programmers and journalists in *NDTV* are now acutely aware of selling their programmes and are conscious of the *TRP* ratings of their shows.

[48] The conferences are managed by McKenzie, one of the top management firms, leaving no doubt of the corporate structure which *MCCS* is trying to achieve..

There should be no differences between us to the extent that the corporate objectives need to be met. We should have open and free communication with each other, we should be able to access information, we should share information with each other, we should share knowledge and we should build the spirit of togetherness, bonhomie and all of that, so that we can rise up to any challenges." (Sanju Saha, 14/06/2006).

The corporate objective, which Saha spoke about, is focussed on targeting the 'core audience', a term increasingly used in today's newsrooms. It refers not to the entire audience watching a particular television channel, but a certain portion which the channel wants to target. In the corporate world of *MCCS*, the audience who has the money to buy the products advertised on the channel is defined as the core audience. (see Appendix 1 for how the audience is broken up into various segments in accordance with the income generating capacity of the chief wage earner (CWE) of a household and his or her educational status. The criteria has been devised by *TAM*) For example, a person from a 'low income group' might be watching *Star News* regularly but will not have the purchasing power to buy a car. The advertiser is not interested in him/her and thereby nor is the channel. The 'problem' of people watching the channel and yet not having purchasing power is being slowly eliminated as increasingly, audience boxes are only being put in homes above a certain economic criteria.

At *MCCS*, the HR department is trying to change the profile of the editorial personnel which it feels is necessary to meet their target audience group. The logic behind this, according to Saha, is that personnel hired from the same background as the core audience will have a better understanding of the audiences' tastes, likes and dislikes. With this in mind, Hindi news channels set a precedent by recruiting a substantial majority of their editorial personnel from the rural Hindi heartland of North India, the target region of these news channels.

However, *MCCS* is now making a conscious change to the concept of core audience by targeting an upmarket clientele that was not previously associated with the Hindi speaking belt. Saha wants a

119

significant proportion of the new recruits to be from the affluent classes and from big cities, to fit in better with *MCCS*'s new audience focus. Saha said he also felt that this would reduce the schism between the 'product' which can sometimes be "LS" (low society) and help the ad sales to sell it their upmarket clients like car and lifestyle manufacturers. For example, as stated earlier, despite being highly watched, *Sansani,* the crime based show on *Star News* is considered an "LS" programme and top advertisers are not keen to associate with it.

> "Of late we realise that even within our top target audiences or target consumers, there is a certain niche. There are a lot of English speaking people who watch news; hence what is relevant to them requires a little change in the sort of profiling of our editorial people. We need journalists who are able to understand lifestyle, who are able to understand big city issues, big city stories, and stories which are of interest to a different mass. I will have a very hard look at the profiling of people, in terms of background, classification; define them as per the TAM classification.49 I will have to do that. For example, if I am looking at SEC A, I will be looking at someone with a good academic background, has English speaking capability, has gone to respectable college, has had a fair bit of influence of party circles and then see how they perform." (Sanju Saha, 14/06/2006).

The 'corporatisation' of the editorial is also achieved at other levels; especially the way rewards and bonuses are handed out. These are what the HR at *MCCS* term as 'key result areas': how many stories a reporter files; how many exclusives; what the ratings to particular stories are, and particular programmes. The HR proposes to link firmly the increments and annual salary hikes to a corporate structure of bonuses and performance based indices and says that the ratings of stories and programmes should be the measurement of the journalist's worth. This means that if the viewer does not watch a news story or more specifically, a story does not get a high viewer rating, it's worth is diminished, at least within *MCCS*. This also means that editorial

---

49 *TAM* classification of audiences is done keeping the socio-economic criteria or SEC in mind. The richest audiences fall in the SEC A category, the middle classes in the SEC B and B + category and so on. *MCCS* by seeking to recruit the rich, aim to target the rich audience.

judgement of a 'good' and 'bad' story, however erroneous, is being done away with and the 'worth' of a story is being decided by ratings which prima facie, has little to do with news values.

> "We are actually now taking the key result area concept right to the last employee in the organisation. By defining key goal areas. Or telling you at the beginning of the year, what you are supposed to be doing. If I take a reporter, he is supposed to have five niche stories say, hypothetically speaking, in a month. He is supposed to do things different from what the others are doing. We are going to build parameters for assessing these. I am clearly not going to reward employees for doing what they are supposed to be doing anyway." (Sanju Saha, 14/06/2006).

In the following chapters on editorial, content and audience, I will show how journalists in *MCCS*, have come to view the worth of their stories and programmes through the ratings system. While a few dissenting voices might have scoffed about ratings with me in private; come Friday morning when the numbers come in, almost every senior journalist in *MCCS* is anxious to know how their particular shows or programmes have fared in the unpredictable world of TRPs.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this chapter was to argue that the sphere of newsroom ethnographies must expand beyond the editorial to include corporate practices which have direct bearing on news content. By providing detailed empirical evidence of corporate practices and how editorial responsibilities are now taken up by sales and marketing teams, this chapter aims to interrogate the "orthodoxies" in media theory generated by the first wave of news ethnographies. (Cottle, 2000) When news is generated by a marketing manager, how can we understand theoretical formulations around notions such as journalistic objectivity and news values? Who now is the audience and how is it understood? In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I shall review the empirical material from this chapter and the next three and

discuss how new practices in television news production can call into doubt what has become taken for granted categories or orthodoxies in news media theory. (For more on the orthodoxies, see Chapter 2 or Cottle, 2000)

This chapter also provides the first bit of data towards this research's ambition of understanding the construction of nationhood in the genre of news television in India. The empirical data provides evidence that the affluent, those with money to buy the products advertised on television, are a news channel's core audience. The HR team now is attempting to recruit journalists from the same section of society as that of the core audience. An affluent news producer, it is presumed, will better understand what an affluent audience wants to see. Not only does this throw conventional understanding of what makes news out of the window, it also shows how the elite in India are constructing a nation relevant only to themselves and their kind. How this vision finds expression in newsroom practices is the subject matter of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Editorial Processes: *Star News* and *Star Ananda*

Production processes necessitate control and domination. While power, its loci and its use are easier to study for assembly-line production processes, (say a car manufacturing unit), in a television news channel manifestations of power are more nuanced and subtle. Both the news channels *Star News* and *Star Ananda* are headed by the same parent organisation, *MCCS*. Their relationship, their similarities and differences and how they operate within the broader corporate structure of *MCCS* are critical for our understanding of their newsroom practices. In the previous chapter, we analysed how the corporate division enters the domain of the editorial within *MCCS*. In this chapter, we look at how corporate policy influences editorial decisions and work flows and how journalists understand their role of profit maximisation for the organisation. Such understandings alter, at times dramatically, sometimes in more subtle ways, how news, news values, its ethics and its role in the public sphere have come to be viewed. While academics have questioned journalistic agency in news production, this thesis agrees with Schudson that "there is no question that members of the media have some autonomy and authority to depict the world according to their own ideas" (2003: 18)

As in the previous chapter, this too brings empirical evidence of journalistic practice to the foreground to question categories of "orthodoxies" (Cottle, 2000). Answering the central research question, this chapter also asks: who articulates nationhood in the newsroom, for whom is it articulated and what are the modalities of these articulations? It therefore builds on the previous chapter to understand the imagination of the nation and the construction of the idea of 'India' in news television. As it is impossible to go into every editorial detail of two news channels in a chapter, I will focus on the processes of content selection and how corporate strategies influence these processes and journalists' understanding of 'what makes news'.

123

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault identifies the crucial link between power, the control over discourse and the social construction of spaces (1979). Though not developed to any degree in this thesis, I make spatiality the entry point into my present investigations, starting with an examination of the physical space of the two editorial offices. This, I hope, will elucidate the power structures and relationship both within and between the two channels.

Description of workspaces

Mumbai[50] is the financial capital of India; Kolkata, under a communist government for over thirty years, is only just beginning to invite and attract capital investment. The physical fact of being present in Mumbai[51] means that *Star News* is housed in the same office as *MCCS*, within the *Star India* premises in Mahalaxmi in Central Mumbai. The difference in the buildings which house the office of *Star Ananda* in Kolkata and that of *Star News* in Mumbai could not constitute a clearer illustration of the power relations between the news channels. *Star News* enjoys the amenities of being housed with *Star India* while *Star Ananda* occupies a floor in an office building called Business Towers in downtown Kolkata. In Mumbai, one walks into a spacious reception area where two young receptionists meet you and you are seated in plush, comfortable leather chairs and two plasma screen television channels broadcast the *Star News* channel; in Kolkata, by contrast, there is no designated reception area. The veranda has been converted into a makeshift reception, which is crowded with journalists smoking and security guards doubling as receptionists.

The senior personnel: the CEO and Editor Uday Shankar, the Managing Editor Shahzi Zaman, the deputy Managing Editor Milind Khanderkar, sits in Mumbai along with the entire corporate division which has close personal links with the *Star News* editorial staff, being

---

[50] The Bombay Stock Exchange and the glamorous world of Bollywood are situated in this city as are most of India's millionaires.

[51] At the end of 2006, *Star News* shifted its headquarters to Delhi, rather its suburb, in NOIDA, Uttar Pradesh. Every national channel has its headquarters in Delhi and *Star News* had started out with being an exception.

housed only one floor above them. Kolkata's corporate wing consists of a sales division for area specific work but major decisions and the daily work practices of the editorial team in Kolkata are controlled from the Mumbai headquarters. Senior Mumbai journalists make several trips to oversee work in Kolkata. No one in Kolkata, however senior, is in charge. And Mumbai lets Kolkata know this by despatching journalists to the city to take charge before any big event, like the elections in West Bengal or the football World Cup. Several of the reporters in Kolkata have never been to Mumbai and are in awe of the city of dreams and films. The pay packets of the Mumbai journalists are discussed in hushed tones and sometimes take fanciful proportions. The arrival of a temporary boss from Mumbai to the Kolkata office results in a change of work pattern. Everyone seems more wary and quiet. In response to my question regarding the change in people's behaviour during one such visit from a senior journalist in Mumbai, Yuvraj Bhattacharya, the Assignment Head of *Star Ananda* told me: "It is very similar to how school children will behave when a headmaster arrives." The metaphor of a classroom situation which Yuvraj uses brings to the fore the system of control and order within this newsroom and the knowledge that the power lies with the Mumbai journalist or manager.

The different ways in which the offices reacted to my presence in their midst is indicative. The Mumbai office, assured of itself and its position was far more welcoming towards my research and scrutiny. In Kolkata, I did not get a permanent place to sit.[52] In Mumbai, I had a workplace in the CEO's office with computer and phone connections. Journalists and corporate heads in Mumbai were friendly and informal while in Kolkata they were more wary and officious. The difference I felt between the two offices is highlighted in a diary entry I made after starting work in Mumbai, also mentioned in the Methodology chapter, but worth coming back to:

---

[52] This also has a lot to do with the fact that Kolkata has far fewer resources in terms of space and work stations than Mumbai.

I have not been keeping a diary or going through my notes as much as I had in Kolkata. I just keep jotting down as much as I can. The reason must be that I have much more to do here. Star Ananda had given me access but I was not really welcome. I had to push my way through. Though I must say Yuvraj tried after our marathon drinking session. Star News is a contrast. Almost everyone smiles. You are a part of this. Carol, Aditi, Gopal, everyone has made me feel a part. Shahzi has been more than cooperative. He has introduced me to people regularly and taken me in for the morning meetings. I have sat through several of these. I have attended assignment desk sessions, through the evening as stories are planned and then a night seeing them work. This week I am going to be with Gopal and his team in IKT.

The diary extract highlights the energy I felt on arrival at the Mumbai office, where the 'action' was. I had spent four months in Kolkata previously and was feeling that my research was stagnating since decisions were being taken elsewhere.

As we start examining the daily practices of journalists in both cities, it will be helpful to keep in mind the power relationship between *Star News* and *Star Ananda*. I will look at both news centres simultaneously and examine their news processes in light of both the corporate strategy explained in the earlier chapter and journalists' understanding of their own practices.

The Editorial

The editorial department in both cities is divided into two basic groups: input and output. The input department includes the assignment desks, reporting desks and programmers. The news bureaus[53] and their reporters around the country and stringers (freelancers) form part of the input team. *Star Ananda* has stringers in several districts of West Bengal and uses *Star News* resources to tap

---

[53] *Star News* has 13 bureaus across the country.

into a nationwide network. Reporters from *Ananda Bazar Patrika*[54] also provide editorial support to *Star Ananda* and many of their reporters who are well known in Kolkata act as experts in different areas, in particular sports coverage.

Editors, scriptwriters, and the entire production control team (PCR) form the output department, which is responsible for producing the bulletin and the 'look of the channel'. Broadly speaking, the input is responsible for gathering news and content while the output is responsible for putting it on air; its production aspects. Though the emphasis is on the input department, concerned as we are with the processes of news selection, I will look at some particular functions of the output, which are to do with news selection, for example, the foreign desk,[55] as well as anchors. The camera team is part of an operations outfit and does not strictly come under editorial control though they work with reporters and producers. The operations team handle the various technical aspects of television channels, including equipment and its maintenance, movement of vehicles and outdoor broadcast vans (OB vans).[56]

At the heart of the news selection process and its daily 'routine' is the assignment desk. As the name suggests, this desk assigns. It assigns stories; it assigns resources and by default becomes the nerve centre of editorial operations. The assignment desk literally never sleeps and has a round the clock manning. As we focus on the editorial, this becomes the obvious and ideal place to start our description of the newsroom. After a physical description and detailing the work routines of the desk, through interviews of journalists, I will analyse how television ratings, the journalists' understanding of audience and

---

[54] The largest selling Bengali daily.

[55] The foreign desk is in the output section as such stories are generally picked from the agencies and no reportage is involved. The desk helps in packaging these stories for viewers.

[56] The assignment desk decides on the movements of OB vans and where they should be stationed. OB vans are used to link to the studio directly from the "field". They are mostly employed for news stories expected to happen at a certain place, for example parliamentary proceedings or a major political rally, and are stationed accordingly in advance. Being few in number, their employment is controlled by the assignment desk in both the channels.

corporate responsibility of making profits influence the practices of the desk. I start with *Star News* and then *Star Ananda*.

Assignment Desk, *Star News*, Mumbai

A physical description

The news floor in *Star News* is located on the ground floor and the assignment desk is immediately to the left as one enters. At any given time through the day and evening, there are at least four people manning this desk. At peak times or when a story is breaking, there can be as many as ten people gathered here. Through the day, as news breaks or new developments happen, all the various department heads gravitate towards this place to discuss and decide. Several television sets are placed here which monitor all the major news channels and people often just gather here to watch the news, giving the small space a crowded feel. Though not the only possible way, I thought it best to break the functions of the assignment desk into a 24-hour cycle to understand its daily functions and the responsibilities of each of the shifts.

The Shifts

There are four shifts, which operate in the assignment desk,[57] of ten hours each. On the night shift, which is the last shift, there is just one person. The maximum number of people will be on duty between 10 am till 8 pm, at times five, including the head of the desk.

> *Morning shift:* 7am to 5 pm
> *Day shift:* 10 am to 8 pm
> *Afternoon shift:* 2pm to 12 am
> *Night shift:* 12am to 10 am

---

[57] At the time of research, the assignment desk in Mumbai had 12 people.

128

Functions of the Assignment Desk:

a) Planning and co-ordination: The main function of the desk is to co-ordinate with the reporters on the filing of stories and to follow newsbreaks. It co-ordinates with the reporter on what s/he is filing and keeps the output desk informed of new material coming in so the latter can process and broadcast it as quickly as possible. It will also let reporters on the ground know of new developments. The reporters also have to be told if they are going to be on air for a live broadcast so they can be prepared. It will also ensure that camerapersons are available to reporters and OB vans are allocated depending on the 'importance' of the news.[58]

b) To monitor all news agencies: At least one person at the desk will continuously check news wires to keep abreast of developments. If there is a sudden important newsbreak, the assignment desk will alert the output desk and the production control room so a 'news flash' can be aired. Depending on the story and its place of occurrence, a reporter might also be assigned to cover it.

c) To plan news bulletins every day: The desk has to build the 'news list' for the next day and does this through staying in touch with reporters and stringers across the country and finding out what each is doing. If there is a story which the editorial bosses would like a reporter in, for example, Bangalore to cover, the assignment desk would alert the reporter in that city.

Each shift has its own primary responsibilities and it is important to understand them separately to see how it all fits in with the larger purpose of daily news production. Here I will briefly explain how the shifts work and how responsibility is divided.

---

[58] At the time of research, MCCS had 12 ob vans deployed across the country. Two were stationed in Delhi and Mumbai each and one in Kolkata. Other vans were moved around from place to place depending on newsbreaks or pre-planned coverage.

I start in the evening around 8 pm, because it is around that time the next day's news list starts getting prepared. As explained in the methodology section, I have spent a lot of time with the assignment desk covering every shift several times. From my field notes, I describe a situation that could be any evening in the newsroom.

Assignment Desk, Night Shift (8pm)

It was time to build the run down for the next day. One journalist from those on duty on the shift between 2 pm to 12 pm would start the process by calling the different bureaus across the country at random to get reporters' story ideas for the next day. For some of the bureaus, the assignment desk journalist would have story suggestions. Most of these ideas had emanated from the bosses in Mumbai, been told to the assignment desk, and then conveyed to the reporter. The assignment desk journalist could refuse a story idea suggested by the reporters; reporters could disagree with the views of the assignment desk; and at times, a senior journalist on duty might have had to intervene and decide. The final decision, however, rested with Mumbai. While a certain amount of 'routinisation' was bound to develop in practices that occur every day, it is germane here to remember that inter personal relationships played a considerable part in such processes. A lot depended on who was making the calls and who was taking them. If it was a junior person in Mumbai, s/he would not be able to refuse a senior reporter's story idea and vice versa. Daily evening conversations also meant that some became friends and it was easier for a reporter to push his or her story ideas through. Personal dislike could ensure that story ideas got blocked. Speaking from my own experience as a television journalist, it is also important to remember that reporters were loath to come up with story ideas and most relied on 'news breaks'. This would result in some reporters avoiding the evening phone calls, particularly if they had no story ideas to put out. Sometimes, if a reporter was unavailable, they either called back or sent their story ideas via email. Delhi, however, had a separate bureau

130

meeting each evening after which they sent their story ideas directly via email to Mumbai. The process of calling up each bureau, locating the reporters, asking for story ideas and approving them, finding out at what time of the day the story could be expected, giving story ideas to reporters, suggesting possible follow ups, calling back reporters who could not be contacted or were busy the first time, could take from one and a half hours to two hours and sometimes even more.

A preliminary list was then drawn up and handed over to the journalist that would be taking over at 12 am for night duties. Besides tracking stories through the night on news agencies[59] and monitoring what the other news channels[60] were showing,[61] the person who took over for the night kept 'building' the list. Besides the continuing preparation of the news list for the next day, the night duty journalist on the assignment desk had several other tasks. They had to prepare fresh stories for the morning bulletin. A list of unedited stories which had come in from the bureaus but had not yet been aired would be given to them by reporters from the earlier shift. They would co-ordinate with the output desk on getting these stories edited and readied for the morning bulletin. None of the *Star News* bureaus had editorial facilities except Delhi so unedited footage and scripts sent in by reporters were edited in Mumbai. Quite a few of these stories were 'readied' through the night and the assignment desk journalist kept a track on this with the night editors. Besides stories from the bureaus, the assignment desk journalist would also select stories from the wire agencies for broadcast. These stories also needed to be edited and the assignment desk and the output desk would coordinate to get the stories ready for the morning bulletin.

---

[59] All the major news agencies like Reuters, APTN, AFP and AP are constantly monitored. Indian news agencies include ANI, PTI and UNI.

[60] All national channels are monitored, though closer attention is paid to the other Hindi channels that are in direct competition for viewers with *Star News*. There is no national equivalent yet for *Star Ananda* and the local Bengali channels are monitored by the Assignment Desk in Kolkata.

[61] The last live bulletin in *Star News* is telecast at 12 am, after which recorded programmes are telecast until 5 in the morning when live broadcasting takes over again. Of course, in case of any major news break, live bulletins will take place.

Morning Shift

The morning person on duty at the assignment desk came in at 7 am and would check on the main developments of the day. The night shift reporter would be in office until 10 am and would co-ordinate and bring the morning duty person up to date with the expected events of the day. The morning reporter would have to keep an eye on the big news events of the day, how the cameras and camerapersons would be deployed[62] along with the outdoor-broadcast (OB) vans. The OB vans which can broadcast directly from the ground are used only for major events. The events could either be a breaking story or a story or event which was planned for coverage. In the case of breaking events, assignment desk personnel would have to take the call of assigning the OB vans. At times, this might have meant mean moving it away from a pre-decided event to somewhere else.[63] While the morning journalist on the assignment desk got the handover from the person on night duty, s/he would have to check on what was happening to decide whether changes needed to be made to the list. S/he would then advise the night person who is still finalising the news list of the day for any changes that needed to be made. The news list was ready by nine am when the morning meeting took place. The journalist who had been on night duty would leave by 10 am.

Day Shift

Three to four more people joined the assignment desk at 10 am for the day shift. The morning person would also be on duty until 2 pm. The news agenda had been decided at the 9 am meeting of the editorial heads. The assignment desk would follow the progress of stories from the various reporters in Mumbai and the bureaus, keep checking for news breaks by monitoring agencies and other channels and coordinate

---

[62] Shortage of camerapersons seemed to be a constant in both Kolkata and Mumbai and it was for the Assignment desk to juggle them between different reporters and stories.

[63] Mumbai and Delhi have two OB vans each. Eight others are stationed around the country and move from one destination to the other depending on situations.

with the output desk and with ground reporters for live coverage of events. One person at the desk would be constantly working in tandem with the production control unit which aired the shows, and the Link Room, which handled the live feed, and connected all the reporters on ground to the PCR. Since only four live feeds could be taken at one time, it was the assignment desk's job to co-ordinate and ensure that the most important feeds, that is those which needed to be aired the quickest, got priority.

Evening Shift

At 2 pm, the evening reporter came in. S/he would work with the main team as the morning reporter leaves. Around 8 pm, the evening reporter would start building the news bulletin for the next day and the cycle would be repeated.

A look at the structure of the 24-hour schedule of the assignment desk team makes it amply clear how crucial they are to the functions of the editorial team in *Star News*. They are at one level the "gatekeepers" deciding news selection; they are also situated as the interface between output and input, besides being the managers of resource allocation. Being the fulcrum around which editorial practices revolve, how do the journalists at the assignment desk understand their own practices, how do they articulate them, what are the assumptions behind their routinised chores and how much, if any, pressure does the corporate arm of *MCCS* generate? Do the journalists internalise such pressure or is there resistance and subversion?

To proceed with answering these questions, some key tropes must be identified and journalists must be allowed to articulate their understandings towards such. As we are examining a news channel and news production processes and practices, it is convenient that we start by examining what journalists mean by "news" and "news sense". We have already identified in a previous chapter on the corporate division, news is seen as a product that is to be sold. We must therefore examine

journalists' understanding of the audience or consumer. In other words, what is news and for whom is it produced?

News:

News and *what makes news* can be significantly different in their understandings. News can be any event which makes its way into newspapers, television, internet and any other mode of delivery by which an event can be conveyed to a larger audience. However, what makes news or news sense is dependent on several factors: the political economy, production conditions and as we discuss here, the journalist's understanding of it.[64]

Both in *Star News* and *Star Ananda*, I found that journalists' response to both news and news sense was derived from their understanding of what the audience likes. How they make this link needs further examination. In the chapter dealing with the corporate section, we saw that the brand positioning of *Star News* (Aapko Rakhe Aage) advocates an audience centric policy. We can thus start to understand the internalising of the corporate goals by the journalists. Head of the assignment desk, Rajnish Ahuja describes news sense thus:

> As a news channel we have to communicate with the people in a manner they want. We are here to provide information in the way they want. News sense is giving people what they want. There is a new generation of viewers who have come up. They are so stressed out in their jobs in BPOs[65] (Business Process Outsourcing) and stuff that when they want to watch TV, they want to relax and have some fun. (03/07/2006)

His deputy, Utpal states:

> Today news is based on whatever the consumer likes. If we show something that people do not like, something that is too political, then the channel ratings suffer. If we open a bulletin with a hard political

---

[64] Before I am accused of imparting limitless agency on journalists, it is pertinent to mention that their understandings, however mediated, must play a significant role in news production and therefore there is a need to understand and analyse them.
[65] The most common examples of BPO's are call centres of which there has been a flood in most major cities of India.

134

story and another channel opens with a story on Abu Salem [a well known Mumbai gangster and an accused in the Mumbai blasts case of 1993, who was recently been deported from Portugal to India], it is evident that viewers would look at the other channel. (06/06/2006)

From both the above responses of the heads of the assignment desk, it is clear that the notion of news and what makes news in the channel is dependent on what the journalist thinks the audience wants. While Utpal makes the case that crime sells more, Rajnish assumes that the audience wants to "relax" when they watch television. Both indicate towards a dumbing down of content. Besides crime, Rajnish adds another category to what sells in news channels: cricket. Political stories, he states, have taken a backseat to cricket. However, he indicates that the concept of news keeps changing and what is important today may not be so tomorrow.

A political reporter finds it difficult to get his stories on air. People want to watch cricket. That has become more important than politics. If I had my way, I would say that if we have twelve political correspondents, we should also have twelve cricket correspondents who will cover all aspects of cricket. Today I do not need political correspondents as much as I need sports and entertainment reporters.

We have a research team, which collects data. We know which time is male viewership, which time is female viewership. We take their research. News keeps changing. Till even last year, all channels focussed on crime stories. That is changing. How much crime will people watch. I think the more crime you show, the more crime you have. When we have the next elections in February, people will again watch politics. So news, idea of news keeps changing. (Rajnish Ahuja, 03/06/2006)

The assumption of what the audience likes is based on TRP data and it has become the defining factor in determining which story does 'well', and what does not. While the mechanics of TRP data collection and its impact on journalists will be discussed in the next chapter, here we will look at how the journalist understands his/her 'audience' to show how the corporate goal of getting more eyeballs becomes the primary editorial policy.

135

The Audience of Star News

The "imagining of the audience" has been an important debate in both production and audience theories. In this thesis, I have approached the notion of the mass audience as it is understood by news producers, hoping thereby to shed some light on how this "missing link" can influence news content (Schlesinger, 1978: 1). Cottle states:

> 'Mass audiences', by definition, are 'unknowable' whether to news producers or news academics, notwithstanding the production of institutional audience research ratings or academic surveys. In other words, large audiences are always going to prove elusive as empirical, complexly differentiated, objects of inquiry; and research instruments, at best, are destined to produce blunt findings only. This is not to say though, that ideas of 'the audience' cannot, or do not, feature within the journalists' thinking and professional practices. Approached as a discursive conceptualization or typification inscribed by the news producers into their particular news form, rather than as an empirical object 'out there', the 'imagined audience' of the news producers may well literally be 'at work'. As such this 'imagined audience' is worthy of ethnographic inquiry and can reveal much of interest about the different constructions and appeals of different news forms as well as their selection and inflection of particular news stories. (Cottle, 2000: 35)

During interviews conducted with journalists in both *Star News* and *Star Ananda,* I asked every journalist who they thought the audience was. The responses from the journalists were identical in both cities. Every journalist described the 'self' and their immediate surroundings, family and friends, as the audience. News sense therefore became producing what the 'self' or the family would like to see.

> I think of what I would like to see, what my family wants to see. I forget that I am a journalist. I think of what I would want to see as an ordinary viewer or I think of what my wife wants to see. One has to remember that the woman of the house has the most control over the television set. So if we can think from the angle of a woman, it will be the best to garner more TRP ratings. (Utpal, 06/06/2006)

Utpal's response highlights two things: that audience and the self are closely connected, and that there is an unequivocal focus on TRP by the journalists. Even when there is no direct reference to ratings and profits in my question, it becomes a part of the journalist's answer. While both the notion of news and audience articulated by the journalists in the assignment desk seem to flow seamlessly from the corporate objectives of *MCCS*, there are resistances. Though journalists seem keen to work towards higher ratings, they themselves do not seem to like the idea of an obsessive focus, at least in Mumbai as the next quote from an interview with the deputy head of assignment in *Star News*, Utpal, indicates.

Rating the Ratings

It [rating] is very important. After all, this is a business. But I feel bad when we give superstitious stories prominence. Aaj Tak recently did a story on someone who claimed to have died and went to heaven. Yamraj (the God of Death) took him to heaven on a golden staircase and then told him he was brought there by mistake and sent him back. Now this story also came to us. I refused to carry it. I said whatever happens, I will not carry it. But when we saw the ratings for that day, that story got the maximum. From that day, I started thinking that we have to change. The game is all about TRP ratings. We keep showing stories of Dawood [Mumbai gangster allegedly living in Pakistan and recently declared an international terrorist by US], which are meaningless, but it sells. For example, Dawood has started smoking 555 cigarettes, this becomes a half hour programme in our channel. This is wrong, but we have to do it. Viewers like it. No one wants to know what the politburo is discussing. (Utpal, 06/06/2006)

Once I switch my recorder off at the end of the interview with Rajnish Ahuja, the head of the assignment desk, he states his disappointment with television news in India. While I could not take notes of the conversation, I make a note later in the diary:

Met with Rajnish. The real interview really started after I switched my recorder off. He feels journalism has been

137

compromised. There is no direction and everyone is running after what the other is doing.

Analysis:

There are some key points that come to the fore in the above interviews that need to be expanded here and analysed. They highlight both the pressures of selling news as a commodity and a resistance to the idea amongst the journalists in *Star News*, Mumbai.

a) TRP ratings and the audience: Both Rajnish and Utpal talk about the pressures of getting high ratings. The audience is understood in two ways. One is the quantitative element, provided through the ratings data. The second is imaging the self as the audience and producing news for it. Utpal mentions that he imagines himself as an ordinary viewer, or thinks what his wife would want to see. The important thing to remember here is that the audience or consumer is uppermost in the minds of both men and this obviously has an effect on the kind of stories selected and aired. The effect of the corporate department is evident. As stated earlier by Yogesh Manwani (head of marketing), *Star News* has taken the position of an audience centric channel with the catch phrase "*Aapko Rakhe Aage*" ("Keeps you Ahead"). Here, we see how news selection processes and routines are directly affected by such an approach.

b) What is news: In any beginner's guide to media studies or a similar reader swamping the book market, the most frequent question which the writer addresses is: what is news? Journalists in *Star News*, while agreeing on certain key parameters like "what the audience/self wants to see", "stories which sell or get ratings", confirm that in a fragmented market where television news channels fight over a limited audience, the concept of news keeps changing and evolving. News, what should be aired, what sells; these notions are never constant. They differ in different times and even from person to person. Utpal gives high credence to crime as a genre for news coverage.

Rajnish, feels that crime stories are not as popular anymore[66] and talks about the popularity of cricket. Both also lament the lack of political coverage but feel that it does not sell.

c) Dissatisfied journalists: Both Rajnish and Utpal express dissatisfaction with the quality of news in Indian television, especially in Hindi channels. When asked if he had a wish list, Utpal said:

> We always have to keep an eye on the TRP. Sometimes one should force oneself away from these ratings. If we could move away from TRPs, say for two months and just focus on stories, on being reporters, then we can experiment. No one should say a word if ratings go down. That would be great. We have internalised the ratings. We feel bad when ratings go down. I do not know how it happened, how we got so involved in ratings. (06/06/2006)

This was something that I found throughout the Mumbai editorial office. While Rajnish initially spoke of what news should be and how one must communicate with the audience, once the recorder was switched off he told me that there was no direction in Indian news television today and every channel follows the other. Utpal kept mentioning that how at times the journalists in *Star News* told each other of doing "some hard stories" and felt embarrassed by what was being aired on the channel. [67]

Rajnish and Utpal's dissatisfaction with news values in *Star News* must be understood in the context of press history in India. While television journalism in India is a relatively recent phenomenon with imported technology and almost no precedence to fall back upon[68], newspapers in India have a long history rooted in the freedom struggle and the anti-colonial movement. In post independence India, the press,

---

[66] Though they may be at another point of time.

[67] I have noted several times in my diaries journalists laughing at *Star News* stories within the office. There are no illusions about their own practices; rather they are sarcastic of the stories aired.

[68] While *NDTV* asked us reporters for a BBC-like diction, *MCCS* has *Fox News* as a role model, given Rupert Murdoch's influence. This is not to say that television news always follows western models. On the contrary, vernacular channels in India have developed, experimented and survived very much on their own with no role models or tradition to fall back on.

closely aligned with the Congress Government during the pre-independence years, was a prime vehicle for the task of nation building. Its own independence severely tested by the declaration of a state of emergency by Indira Gandhi's governance in the early 70s, the Indian press had to survive both a battle of legitimacy as a watch dog against governmental excess and also a ruthless governmental campaign which attempted to control the news media.[69]

When television channels and news agencies started proliferating across the Indian skies in the mid nineties, most of them relied on and recruited experienced newspaper journalists to give direction to a new medium.[70] Needless to say, with print reporters defining and charting television news' path in India, much of the inherited values of the print tradition seeped into television news. However, the corporatisation of news channels, prioritising a profit oriented approach, as described in the previous chapter, seeks to overturn this. So when Rajnish Ahuja laments where television news is headed, he is comparing a news culture which is at odds with his own background as a print reporter. Utpal, speaking of "hard stories", is also relying on his print reporting experience where political stories took precedence over others.[71]

The growth in the television industry in the last fifteen years has meant that several hundred journalism schools have spawned across India. While recognised universities have started offering mass communication degrees, private colleges have spurted in big cities and small towns alike. Television channels like *Star News* and *Star Ananda* now recruit directly from such institutions. Such recruitment sits in with the *MCCS* Human Resources department's policy – mentioned in

---

[69] *The Indian Express* earned its crusading anti-establishment newspaper status mainly during the emergency years by refusing governmental diktats.

[70] The most well known faces in television news are people who had their reporting skills honed in the print medium. CEO of *MCCS*, Uday Shankar was a reporter in *The Times of India*, head of *CNN-IBN*, Rajdeep Sardesai was a correspondent with *The Telegraph* and Arnab Goswami, Editor- in-Chief of *Times Television* is an experienced print journalist.

[71] This is not to suggest that the print medium in India remains unaffected by the new political economy in India. As Coleridge has suggested in *Paper Tigers* (1998), Samir Jain, the owner of *The Times of India* was the most market oriented newspaper baron he had met. Both the journalists here are idealising or harking back to a pre-liberalisation era in Indian newspapers that no longer exists.

the earlier chapter – of recruiting youngsters from the affluent classes who "understand the audience better" and can afford the higher fees in private institutions. Importantly, there is a presumption that these young recruits will have no "ideological baggage" of the earlier print reporters. Yuvraj Bhattacharya, head of the assignment desk in *Star Ananda,* tells me that he "prefers youngsters with a clean slate as a mind, which I can mould how I want to. I do not want baggage."

d) If Utpal and Rajnish and the rest of the journalists are aware and cynical of their own practices, can they be unwitting, unconscious agents, the mere cogs in the wheel, "reproducing the dominant ideological discursive field." (Hall, 1982: 82). Simon Cottle argues:

> Journalists arguably do what they do for the most part knowingly and purposefully, which is not to say they are on an 'ideological mission' or, in idealist terms, that they somehow escape the structures in which they work. But it is to argue that they are more 'consciously' and 'knowingly' involved with, and purposefully 'productive' of news texts and output than they are often theoretically given credit for. (2000: 24)

My aim is not to argue for the existence of a heroic "journalistic agency". Rather, it is to question the often-quoted academic position of condescension towards journalists as people who do not know what they are doing or to put it more academically: "unconscious agents." Several of the senior journalists I interview have adapted remarkably from print to television, have spent several decades in their profession and are seemingly intelligent people who move from one news organisation to the other, quickly understand the demands and work accordingly. They are critical of their own practices yet, understanding the demands of their jobs, perform as is required of them. Not unconsciously, but being aware and critical and sometimes sarcastic of the news values and news production, they practice of their profession.

I next start a comparative understanding of news values, news and editorial processes between *Star News* and *Star Anando*, to tease out the differences in approach between Kolkata and Mumbai journalists. As stated earlier, Kolkata - under a Leftist Government for thirty-five years - has recently opened up to capital investment, while Mumbai has been India's financial hub since independence. This has meant that journalists in Mumbai have naturally more job choices and opportunities.[72] Also, given the plethora of channels in Hindi, in Mumbai, journalists frequently change jobs. This also means that there is competition amongst employers to retain journalists or poach them from other channels. Journalists in Kolkata have less options of moving from one channel to the other. *Star Ananda* was the first 'national' channel[73] and until it started broadcasting, news channels in Bengali were hourly broadcasts in the evening on general entertainment or state channels. Consequently, a journalist in Mumbai is paid a much higher salary than his Bengali counterpart. Given the paucity in opportunity, I assert that a Bengali journalist is more compliant to corporate demands. The resistance that we see in the journalists in Mumbai, however muted, is in contrast with its total absence in Kolkata. To work towards a comparative analysis of the two news channels, in *Star Ananda* too, I start with the assignment desk.

Assignment Desk, Star Ananda, *Kolkata*

While the assignment desks in both the cities have similar shifts, the desk in Kolkata has more responsibility. The head of the assignment desk in Kolkata is Yuvraj Bhattacharya who effectively runs the daily

---

[72] Every national channel has its main headquarters in Delhi, the capital being the political hub. *Star News* also moved its headquarters to Delhi in 2007. However, all news channels have their largest bureaus in Mumbai which accords more job opportunities for journalists.

[73] The understanding of "national" is open to interpretation. Given that every news channel now has target audiences, there is no pan-Indian channel. The English channels, to a certain extent cut across language barriers but are also targeting an elite population. The journalists understanding of the "national" in Kolkata means a channel with a better quality of production, pay and reach.

Rajnish Ahuja, when I asked him whether he considers *Star News* to be a national channel replied: "No, I do not think so. I think we are a West and North India centric channel. We do not even take the audience data of other regions or English channel audiences into account."

activities of *Star Ananda*'s editorial section in Kolkata, though there are frequent visits from senior personnel in Mumbai.[74] The work practices of *Star Ananda* journalists in Kolkata revolve around the assignment desk. Suman Gharai, a journalist at the Desk whom I interview, explained the functions and responsibilities of the desk:

> We understand from the reporters, local or national, the stories they are filing. We tell them then what to do with the stories, how they should do it. We also give them our contacts to do particular stories. We tell them what questions to ask, how to go about it. Once they send the footage, we take it to the Output or what we call the Copy Desk. We explain to the writer how to write the story, what angle to be taken and how we are presenting it, how we are planning. Then the story is aired.
>
> We also decide on which stories should have live chats, which stories should be given precedence. Now when a reporter is going live, hour after hour, we provide him with all the information, tell him what to say, how to say it, tell him what questions will be asked. The assignment desk is at the heart of the editorial functions in Kolkata; it runs the channel's daily activities.[75] (07/02/2007)

From Mr Gharai's observations, one can understand the centrality of the assignment desk in *Star Ananda*'s editorial processes. An understanding of how the Assignment Head, Yuvraj Bhattacharya views his own practices and that of the channel, therefore assumes significance. Yuvraj and I had several meetings, informal chats and social evenings, but here I make use of the formal interview to highlight some key themes.

On Star Ananda *and its relevance: Customising the news*

> For the Bengali living in Kolkata, national news and whatever is happening in the Hindi heartland is of less importance, unless there is

---

[74] This is also because the former Executive President of *Star Ananda* defected to a new venture and took with him several key players. This vacuum means that Yuvraj and the Assignment team have more responsibility.

[75] One of the first impressions I had of *Star Ananda* is that it confirmed to a classic assembly line news production house. The reporters get the footage, the copy desk writes the story, the assignment desk decides content and structure of the story and when and how it should be aired.

something earth shattering happening. So for them, Kolkata news is not there [in national channels], they have to go through local newspapers [for Bengali news]. For the up market Bengali, they find it through English newspapers. Therefore, in Kolkata there were a whole lot of people who did not have any source of relevant television news. So when we were moving into a 24-hour news genre, we found a space easily as we were delivering relevant news. (Yuvraj Bhattacharya, 04/04/2006)

Like Utpal and Rajnish in Mumbai, Yuvraj also talks of particular kinds of news for particular sets of people. What makes news therefore is not the event, but depends on who the target audience is. Who is the audience in Kolkata and how is it understood in the newsroom?

The Audience and Ratings

The channel has its own data on this (TRP Ratings). Let me give you a simple anecdote on how I think of it. For the last ten years, I was in Mumbai. I never got any Kolkata news despite having access to internet, radio and all the news channels. I got only Kolkata news only when I called home. The national news channels never gave me any news or rarely. Imagine people, all these software guys who stay abroad, all the women who get married and go away; there was no Kolkata news for them. I used to come back during my vacations and get surprised to see how quickly this city is changing. So I felt this vacuum. When I was joining this channel, I knew there was this vacuum to be filled. Last week data showed that we have 51 per cent market share. (Yuvraj Bhattacharya, 04/04/2006)

As with Utpal, Yuvraj defines the self as the audience and brings in the notion of a certain economic class of people who are the target of the channel: the software engineers, the non-resident Indians (NRIs). In short, the target audience of the channel is the middle class and the rich. While we already see a pretty strong identification with the corporate aims in Yuvraj's notion of news and audience, it becomes firmer when we move to understanding on what the goals of *Star Ananda* are.

We have filled a certain vacuum in the market. Now our challenge is to do it better and then the challenge will be to go deep. For example, if you take Anandabazar [Bengali newspaper which has majority stakes in MMCS] for example, the Bengali language that is written is of a very high quality and because it is written, it requires a certain amount of education to understand it. But see the depth of the paper. If you see the readership data, everyone from A1 to B [These are socio-economic criteria based on monetary power to classify the audience and used by ratings agencies], everyone reads it. Ultimately this should be the aim. It is like Coke, to build a brand like coke, that everyone refers to it as the gospel [sic]. Though because the vacuum was in the middle and upper middle class, that is where we have gone in. Gradually definitely we would want to eat up ETV [a rival news channel] and everybody else, we would want Star News to be representative of entire Bengal. That is our secondary target group, we will also target the non-Bengali people in Kolkata who so far have not been represented. We are familiar with their lifestyle. So we want to catch them. (Yuvraj Bhattacharya, 04/04/2006)

It is important at this stage to consider the background of Mr Bhattacharya. Given that he practically runs the show, owing to the importance of the assignment desk in Kolkata, his professional background takes significance in understanding the editorial practices of *Star Ananda*. He is a chartered accountant by profession and has been successful in the corporate world of Mumbai. He had not been a journalist before his posting at *Star Ananda* and thus is devoid of the 'ideological' baggage carried by Rajnish Ahuja and Utpal. His understanding and positioning *Star Ananda* as a brand and comparing it with Coke are significant. Terms like "eating up *ETV*" are stated without irony and with utmost earnestness. In Yuvraj's understanding of his own practices with *Star Ananda,* the corporate and the editorial of *MCCS* have merged.

Analysis:

a) The workflow description of *Star Ananda* represents an assembly line production. The reporter, writers, editor are all

performing specific functions for a news story with no one really owning it. Journalistic agency is deliberately taken away.

b) Yuvraj Bhattacharya's background as a corporate professional is mentioned earlier. His insistence on journalists having a "clean slate" of mind and no ideological baggage reflects an irritation with anything coming in the way of *MCCS*'s corporate goals, least of all journalists.

c) The assignment desks in Mumbai and Kolkata have similar understandings of news and news sense. For both, news depends on the audience and what the audience likes, and should be customised through understanding viewer preferences. Preferences can be understood by examining the self and what it wants to see. The self also extends to family and familiar surroundings and Yuvraj applies an economic definition to "familiarity".

d) In Kolkata, however, there is no visible sign of the self-reflexivity which we identified in the Mumbai journalists. This marked difference becomes manifest in the work practices of journalists in both the cities. *Star Ananda,* like *Star News*, employs senior journalists with print background. However, my assertion is that the limited opportunities available in the city and a rise in salary mean that journalists in Kolkata prefer to embrace the *MCCS* corporate direction even more than journalists in Mumbai. We will examine this further in this chapter.

e) Both *Star News* and *Star Ananda* refer to themselves as national channels. However, as Rajnish Ahuja states, he understands *Star News* as a North and West India centric channel. Yuvraj Bhattacharya talks about targeting specific audiences, especially the Bengalis living in West Bengal and other parts of India. He also makes classifications according to the socio-economic criteria of television ratings. Leading from this, a question we are constantly dealing with, and will pay specific attention to in the content analysis and audience chapters, will be that if there is indeed a "split audience" why is there homogeneity in news.

News Programmes

Attempts at Audience Loyalty

As mentioned in the previous chapter, news channels in India being still a nascent industry, appointment viewing is not widespread. Unlike the *BBC* where a *Newsnight* will have a guaranteed loyal audience, news channels in India are still trying to establish programmes that ensure a reliable returning audience. From the analysis of weekly television ratings, there is a presumption that it is easier to create appointment viewing with programmes than with general news bulletins because retention of programmes in audience memory is seen to be higher. The advantage of a loyal audience base for particular programmes means that a channel can demonstrate this to an advertising agency and clients with products for the particular audience base can advertise on the channel on that particular time.[76]

News bulletins and programmes have generally been regarded as two separate genres in television channels. Given the importance attached to creating a loyal audience base through appointment viewing, successful programmers who can garner high TRP ratings are highly valued within *MCCS*. For the purposes of this thesis, it becomes crucial to understand how the programmers understand their own practices, their work patterns and how they visualise what is expected of them at the workplace.

This chapter will now try to understand what the differences are if any, between programmes and general news, as understood by the *MCCS* personnel. It will then attempt to contextualise these understandings by focussing on two highly rated programmes and their producers in *Star News* and *Star Ananda*.

---

[76] However, as we saw in the earlier chapter, a high returning audience for particular shows does not necessarily guarantee advertisers. Programmes, like the crime show *Sansani*, could mean a branding for the channel which the advertiser would not want to associate with. In the British context, *Channel 4*, despite garnering very high ratings for Big Brother, saw several sponsors dropping out after the Jade Goody/Shilpa Shetty race row.

Programmes or News

Technological changes, the incredible pace of change in the Indian television industry, and competition amongst television channels have opened up new questions on content and content format. What are the differences now between a news bulletin and a programme in a news channel in India? Are there any? If so, are they changing? I start with quotations from the interviews of Uday Shankar and Rajnish Ahuja, in that order.

> The differences are getting blurred and I think that is the way it should be. Such categories have become completely irrelevant. They go back to the pre live, pre 24x7 news days. Why did we need to tell people that this is a news bulletin and this is a programme? Because news was where you told them the day's happenings. You did that in the days of Doordarshan. It was one channel and then a few others, which were all omnibus channels primarily viewed for entertainment and then there was a couple of news bulletins. There was this 8.30 news bulletin on Doordarshan, which for several years' people used to make an appointment and watch. But before and after that people were watching entertainment programmes. But in the days of 24x7, it doesn't really matter what people are watching. People know they are watching a news channel. The primary identity of Star News, Aaj Tak, NDTV are that these are news channels; the viewers do not sit down and make those subtle differentiations. In fact, I have got impatient of those differentiations. These are meaningless intellectual exercises that journalists get into in most newsrooms and are only useful for academic and research value. They do not actually mean very much in terms of creating a programme from the point of view of a journalist or offering a programme from the point of view of a viewer. It does not really mean anything to me. It doesn't really matter. Why are we talking about it? (Uday Shankar, 05/07/2006)

> I don't think there is any difference left today between programmes and news. Earlier we had programmes like "The World This Week"[77] on Doordarshan. It was a round-up of the weekly events. But now I have the resources to put such programmes everyday. What happens now? You

---

[77] A popular weekly programme on world affairs that revolutionised the concept of primetime television viewing in India.

take the main news of the day. Look at it from all aspects, get the background and put together a half hour programme. Now I can make a "World This Week" everyday. I have enough resources. Today in Star News everything is news cum programme. (Rajnish Ahuja, 03/07/2006)

24-hour news television channels are still relatively new to India. It is not very difficult to recall the days of state-run television and news viewing at appointed hours to which Uday Shankar refers.[78] Both Uday Shankar and Rajnish Ahuja's arguments about a blurring of lines between programmes and news are derived from changes in technology. However, it is important to note that journalists will be less aware of the differences in the making of news bulletins and programmes, as their bosses seem keen to encourage the ending of such divisions. This has given rise to a category of news programmes, which, while having weekly or daily schedules, deal with 'newsy events.' Their treatment is more stylised than daily news bulletins; they have certain themes and easily identifiable features like regular anchors and dedicated promos.[79]

One such news programme, which we shall analyse along with its Bengali counterpart, a programme that *Star News* has claimed as its own 'concept' and which has got spectacular ratings is "Saans, Bahu aur Saazish" (SBS) ("Mother-in-law, Daughter-in-law and Conspiracies"). The name is inspired from a popular long running serial on the entertainment channel, *Star Plus*,[80] "Saans bhi kabhi bahu thi" (The mother-in-law too was once wife). It started on 11th October 2004 and *Star News* became the first news channel in India to dedicate a news programme exclusively to television soap operas, stars and their lifestyles.

---

[78] I can easily remember that the evening news bulletin on *Doordarshan* would be broadcast at 7.30pm, while programmes, few that there were, had their own viewing timetable. The 9pm serial each weekday was the big draw and several years later, I can remember most of the programmes well.

[79] Promos are short clips inserted between news cycles to advertise particular programmes and their schedules. They also help fill gaps if no advertisement is available.
[80] Part of *Star India*.

The programme is aired in the afternoons, keeping housewives in mind, and is a good example of targeting particular sets of audiences at different times depending on viewing habits.[81] According to TRP reports, audience research in India shows that it is mostly women who watch television during the afternoons and are fond of soap operas. SBS targets this category. Following the success of the show, several other Hindi news channels have adopted similar news programmes. But how do journalists working in news channels reconcile to reporting or making news out of soap operas on television? I took this and other questions about news channel programming to Bivha Kaul Bhatt, the producer of *SBS*.

> Initially I thought it was a very stupid idea. In the sense that how can you show serials and all that. I mean, a news channel is supposed to be serious. But understanding the kind of market you have now, you have to understand that there are different sets of viewers. Women would not be interested in news. (Bivha Kaul Bhatt, 01/06/2006)

Bivha's response to her own practices highlights first disjuncture and then reconciliation with her work. She aligns herself with the corporate goals of securing advertisement and viewership. We must remember that when *SBS* was being conceived, inputs from the research team regarding viewing practices of women and timing were taken into account. As the producer, Bivha has formed an imagination of her audience (the house wives) who would not like to see 'news'. I asked her how she could know this.

> I will tell you from personal experience. My mother when she watches television, she watches news and all that but she would like to know about it in bare headlines. She would not want details. Given a choice between news and these kinds of programmes, I am sure she will go for SBS. You have to understand that women are also very important. If you want them in your fold, then you have to give programmes which are exclusively for them. You have news throughout the day. Why can't you

---

[81] In the preceding chapter on the corporate section, the research team head refers to similar tactics of targeting particular audiences based on quantitative data.

give half an hour, which is totally dedicated to them. It is an appointment viewing. Sales show that right from 2pm till 3pm people switch on Star News. The women have their lunch at 2pm and then from 2.30pm they have SBS. And if you have a 3pm breaking news then they sit through that too. (01/06/2006)

Audience is again the 'familiar' mother; an extension of the self. From Bivha's earlier reaction of such programmes being incompatible in a news channel, there is a move towards justifying the same. The necessity of such programmes is legitimised by their saleability. If it sells, it must be right, and the initial hesitation is brushed away. The alignment with corporate goals and the editorial is a process and we can see the gradual shifts in Bivha's responses. By taking on corporate goals and prioritising the need to sell a "product", there is guilt in Bivha's responses. She needs to justify her work and how and why it should be part of a news channel.

> At the end of the day, everybody has to remember that this is a business we are doing. Fine, you need to be a very good journalist, but at the end of the day if I make a very good thing, but it doesn't sell then what is the point of doing this. The ground floor always has some kind of a grudge against the first floor where all these people sit, the marketing, research and ads, they say that you have to sell this and you have to understand that you have to sell it and you have to give those features. We feel that we need to be creative and all that but if you can't sell that thing, even if it is the best thing that you have done so far, and it gets you a TRP of 13 or 14, then what is the use. It is very sad but it is true. Uday has introduced the concept of "teams" for all the programmes and all of them are TRP driven. Initially nobody was bothered. Earlier, I used to give my story and that's it. Now as a producer, I feel the need to know that it is adding value to the channel's TRP. It has to be good quality but it has to sell. For everything there are teams who are responsible for their TRPs. Even if TRP goes down by one, the whole team is so depressed. They take it on themselves that 'shit, we haven't delivered and that is why TRP has gone down.' (01/06/2006).

151

Bivha's response prioritises ratings. We see the corporate influence directly affecting the editorial personnel and how members of each team "take it on themselves" to produce programmes which can garner high ratings. Despite this internalisation of corporate goals, Bivha continues to talk about the "grudge" the ground floor (editorial) has against the first floor (the corporate).

Continuing the comparative analysis, I now look at the Bengali equivalent of SBS on *Star Ananda*: "Hoi Ma Noiba Bouma" (HMNB) ("Either the Mum or the Wife"). As I have mentioned earlier, in Kolkata, journalists identify with MCCS's corporate goals more easily than journalists in Mumbai. The producer of HMNB finds it easier to justify her work and the tension, already muted in Bivha Kaul Bhatt's response, is absent from Moumita Tarafdar's. I asked her how she felt about a programme like HMNB on a news channel.

> "Finally it's a product. You are not here for social services. Only thing I understand is that if TRP is down, money is down, that means you are a bad producer." (Moumita Tarafdar, 30/01/2006)

Moumita's response refuses to even entertain the notion of news as a social tool for disseminating information. In fact, she is speaking against it in saying "You are not here for social service." Her identification with the corporate goal is complete and the understanding of the "good" and "bad" producer is firmly linked to the ratings.

As mentioned earlier, in Kolkata the coming of *Star News* as the first major news channel provided journalists not only with a job opening, but also the "professionalism" of an international media organisation, besides the name recognition or branding factor of *Star* which, as the journalists told me, gave them access to celebrities who would refuse a less well known news channel. For journalists in Mumbai, working for big news organisations had become routine, whilst journalists in *Star Ananda* were still entranced by it, as Moumita's following response suggests:

Here the quality is important. I know what I am supposed to produce which is a television programme, which is my jurisdiction and no one is going to poke their nose in it. If there is any problem, my higher authorities in Mumbai will talk about it and if the quality is good then again the higher authorities will give me a positive feedback. That's very important. In my earlier work places, I never got such guidelines whether my work was good, bad, ugly. Also things, here it is very gender friendly. In my last place, I got an appointment letter addressing me as Mr. They could not believe that they were giving such a high designation to a woman. Here it is not like that. (30/01/2006)

Analysis

a) Bivha's response to imagining the audience is no different from the responses of other journalists and we will find a similar thought process through most interviews. The "familiar" and the "self" is for whom news is produced.

b) Bivha also indicates a strain of remorse for a TRP driven news production house, though she understands the necessity of it. However, Moumita remains convinced that a news channel is not for "social services."

c) Moumita expressed exuberance at working for *Star News* that is reflected in every journalist interviewed in Kolkata, unlike Mumbai, where several journalists, especially reporters and news editors, express dismay at their work practices.

d) Both journalists again highlight how the corporate goals of higher TRP, targeting audience through research ratings, and linking the understanding of good journalistic practice to high ratings have been firmly etched into editorial practice.

News Bulletins and Reporters

From programmes and programmers, I will now examine the practices of journalists who work on the regular news bulletins. I continue with the comparative and start with the reporting section. The reporter is an

153

important link in the news chain as it is s/he who physically goes out to get the story. How do they understand and perceive news, news sense and their own role in producing it in the two channels?

As is the case in every newsroom, reporters are assigned news beats. A perpetual shortage of reporters, however, has meant that in most television newsrooms in India, reporters cover other areas besides their principal beats. Also, covering night shifts, Sundays and other holidays where only one or two reporters are on duty, means that a reporter in a television newsroom has to be far more versatile and more broadly connected than their counterparts in print journalism. This also means that reporters have to share their sources and contacts with other reporters, something they were traditionally shy of doing, as they remain in print journalism.

Crime reporting has emerged as the single most popular genre in television news in India. I examine how the crime reporters of *Star News* and *Star Anando* understand their work in this section and try to analyse them in the context of editorial choices and the corporate influence of *MCCS*.

Mumbai Bureau

The Bureau Chief of *Star News* Mumbai is also one of two crime reporters in Mumbai.[82] My interactions with Jitendra Dixit went beyond formal interviews; our conversations took place in tea stalls, during assignments, lunches and dinners. It is pertinent to mention here that we saw each other as colleagues[83] and often he would forget my position of being the researcher. While I did not record interviews with Jitendra, he was happy to let me jot down notes and points.

The primary feeling that Jeetendra conveyed to me was of disappointment with *Star News*. He spoke of the sensationalism that grips news television, especially Hindi television channels. This is an interesting point because crime reporting has generally been seen to

---

[82] This shows how important a crime reporter's post has become. I started as a crime reporter and was the junior-most in the newspaper's hierarchy.
[83] I have spent some time reporting in Mumbai on organised gangs and the underworld.

cater to sensationalism. He told me of an incident where he heard the CEO Uday Shankar telling a female anchor to acquire sex appeal while on camera. Jeetendra termed this as "deplorable."

Several television journalists who started their career in newspapers or magazines construct print journalism as a utopian world to which they will return one day. Several journalists I spoke to in Mumbai state that once they earn enough money, they want to return to print journalism. Jeetendra was no exception. He said that he was already looking for openings in print where he feels that there is more space and time for research. Jeetendra mentions that the forced rapidity with which television journalists in India are asked to churn out stories leaves no room for research or introspection. Given the competition, frequently stories are followed just because they appear on another news channel. He tells me of an incident when a story was aired on a rival channel about a bus full of school children that had met with an accident resulting in several casualties. *Star News* felt forced to carry it as it was being flashed as a breaking news story. One of the reporters ran the same story without cross checking and it was later confirmed that there were no casualties. Several other channels followed the same story and made the same mistake.

Jeetendra kept mentioning that journalists in *Star News* got almost no time off and even valid leave taken is frowned upon. He mentions that he had taken five days annual leave to go out of town when a top Mumbai police officer was arrested on corruption charges. The second crime reporter, Umesh, was also unavailable and *Star News* was late on the story. Jeetendra was served a show cause notice for being out of town on sanctioned leave.

While Jeetendra, two years after our conversation, continues with his job at *Star News,* he made several mentions of going back to print journalism which would allow him more free time allowing him to write a book on the Mumbai underworld.

Kolkata Bureau

My meeting with Bitonu Chatterjee, deputy head of the Kolkata Bureau who handles the crime beat in *Star Ananda* along with another reporter, was formally arranged. One evening, after several requests, we met in the office and I recorded the interview.

If Dixit seems unhappy with the way things are at *Star News* and editorial policies, Bitonu Chatterjee is at the other extreme as far as loyalty to the company is concerned. This is a trend, which I have mentioned above, and which we will continue to see through the interviews and observations.

The notion of objectivity and its "rituals" is an integral part of how a journalist, especially a reporter, understands his or her work. I asked Chatterjee what his position on objectivity was. Chatterjee stated that company policy should be a reporter's objectivity. To be clear on whether Chatterjee had confused 'objectivity' with 'objective', I rephrased my question.

> "Every media company has a policy. That policy should be any journalist's objectivity. I must remember that I am first an employee and then a journalist, never the other way around. According to me, there are two points to being a good employee. First, to never do anything that harms the employer. Secondly, to work as hard as is possible." (Bitonu Chatterjee, 30/04/2006)

While Chatterjee continues to misunderstand an academic query on objectivity, his loyalty to the company is unflinching. Such expressions of loyalty, surprising at first, became commonplace amongst *Star Ananda* journalists in Kolkata. Still intrigued, I asked Bitonu what happens when a company has no objective on a story, what will objectivity then mean for the reporter.

> "Then it must be about maximising sales. After all, this is a business we are in and we must never forget that." (30/04/2006)

Bitonu refused to entertain questions about journalistic commitment and integrity saying that "these ideas are from another age and here we are in a business."

Analysis:

As we examine the responses from journalists in both the news centres across the departments, there are some clear patterns that emerge, patterns, which we will continue to find as we look at the other areas of the Editorial team.

a) Journalists in Mumbai are more prone to voice their dissatisfaction with editorial policies while in Kolkata there is a general feeling of euphoria about working for *Star Ananda*, the first major 24-hour news channel in the city. Chatterjee's response again highlights how much he is in sync with the corporate goal of selling a product and maximising business. The delight at working for *Star Ananda* is evident in his comment on the ideal employee. Jeetendra, however, seemed critical about choices of stories, presentation and the profit maximisation ethos of *Star News*. We will see and examine further this point of difference between the two offices. The above point is further reinforced by Jeetendra's complaint of no time away from work compared to Bitonu's stated desire to work hard as possible.

b) Jeetendra's comment that news channels follow each other echo the sentiment of Rajnish Ahuja who earlier told me that he felt television journalism in India was without any direction, with channels running after each other's stories. The frustration with working for *Star News* continues to reveal itself.

c) The interviews of both the journalists highlight the changing values of news reporting in an increasingly competitive scenario like Indian television. Basic journalistic values of cross checking facts are giving way to coming out with stories as quickly as

possible. The competitive edge is being defined by the best researched or correct story but by those that come out the quickest. Both Rajnish and Jeetendra decry this.

Output

Our work on the editorial has until now focussed on the Input department, which decides on the selection of stories in the offices of *Star News* and *Star Ananda* in Mumbai and Kolkata. By showing the work patterns of various divisions within this department, I hope to have established how the corporate goals have infiltrated editorial decision making and policies.

The Output department, which includes several key areas, including Production Control, editors and writers, is concerned with the production of content and plays a key role in the general news bulletin that we are now discussing. There are some desks within Output which also work on story selection, for example the foreign desks in both Kolkata and Mumbai.[84] I will contextualise the different departments within the Output desks, following the same method for both in Mumbai and Kolkata, and then examine the responses from the journalists in both offices.

In media theory, the imagining of the foreign, here "international news," has been much theorised. In the context of *Star News* and *Star Anando,* this imagining of "what makes international stories" is closely linked with the journalist's understanding of audiences and the larger goal of *MCCS.* In the beginning of this section, I examine the practices of journalists who deal with international stories in both channels and how they understand their work.

The "foreign" in Star News

Desh Videsh (At Home and Abroad) is a one and a half-hour programme from 5pm to 6pm and then from 7pm to 7.30pm each evening. The *Star*

---

[84] Given that the foreign desk does not have reporters and selects stories from the wires, one team in both the cities covers both input and output. Specialised areas like the sports desk will select their own stories and then decide how to produce them.

News website (http://starnews.indya.com/programmes.htm) advertises the programme thus:

> *Desh Videsh captures the essence of national as well as international news happenings in a unique two-host, two-hour format. An early evening bulletin, its stylised delivery and racy format provides a heady synopsis for the viewer on every domestic and international news happenings until that hour.*

We will discuss the different aspects of the programme in detail in the content analysis section of this thesis. Here I look at the work practices of the desk and how the journalists understand their work.

I spent three working days with Assistant Producer Manish Kumar, who is a former print journalist and has been working on *Desh Videsh* for six months. Here I sketch out his average workday routine.

Work Routine

Manish comes in around ten am in the morning and goes through all the news rundown or news list of the morning. The rundown comprises of all the stories that are being aired. For example, a 10am to 11am rundown would have all the stories which are aired during that hour. This gives Manish an idea of the news stories that are being currently shown and are viewed as important by *Star News*. He then reads the newspapers and looks at the stories coming in from Indian news agencies or wire services and makes a list of what he thinks are important but not being aired. From the Assignment Desk, he then gets the news list and "agenda"[85] for the day, which has been decided in the morning meeting. After this, he looks at the international wire copies from *APTN (Associated Press Television Network)*. He also checks the *BBC* website for important stories. Manish looks particularly at stories in *APTN* that have good visuals. He then selects some stories and gives them for ingesting[86] while he writes the voiceover for them. He will also then talk to the Output Desk head, apprise him of the main international

---

[85] In the morning meeting, it is decided what will be the main story or stories and its/their "treatment" for the day.

[86] Ingesting puts the story in the server from which it can then be edited and aired.

159

stories and get feedback on what can be included in the programme. Around 3.30pm, he starts building the rundown and at 5pm the bulletin *Desh Videsh* starts.[87]

Reflections on practice

> "News is that piece of knowledge which makes people aware of their rights, of their society, it tells them of what is going on in this global world" (Manish Kumar, 06/06/2006)

Manish's response to what he understands by "news" is classical and almost textbook in nature but diverges widely from what he understands to be the news practices of *Star News*, which is explained in terms of his own background of being a print journalist.

> "I was aware that the people from electronic media do not have in-depth knowledge of anything. But in Hindi print media, I was less paid and only due to money factor, I shifted here. It has been almost six months and I have not understood what according to my bosses is news. Maybe it is their compulsion, ratings compulsion or whatever. This despite knowing that we are not giving our viewers any added information. According to me, there is no clear-cut definition of what is news according to Star News. Anything that will fetch ratings can be shown as news." (Manish Kumar, 06/06/2006)

> "Every person in a news channel will realise that a four-rupee hike in petrol will affect the common man. But we did not give much coverage to it because people here believe that it will not fetch high ratings.:[88] (Manish Kumar, 06/06/2006)

The disillusionment which we saw in Jeetendra Dixit with work practices in Mumbai, is reflected in Kumar's understanding of *Star News* and its editorial policies.

---

[87] Putting stories in the rundown in no way ensures that they will be aired. The final choice of stories lies with the bulletin producer who chooses what s/he wants to air from the rundown prepared or from previous rundowns. The producer can also ask for stories to be included in the rundown.

[88] A day before the interview, petrol and diesel prices were raised by the Indian Government.

160

"Producers here have no right to think or decide what is right or what is news. For example, even if I think that something makes a good news story, I am told that it will not go." (Manish Kumar, 06/06/2006)

International stories are not a priority for *Star News*. While the details of content will be analysed in a later chapter, it is sufficient here to say that in a programme of one and half hour titled "Desh Videsh" ("At Home and Abroad") at an average has no more than five minutes of international stories.

"Since I have joined here, I have been moulded or motivated by my seniors to selects stories, especially international stories, with an eye on good visuals, even if there is absolutely no news peg to the story. Initially, I tried to get good stories, which were headlines in the BBC, into the rundown. But I soon realised that these stories will not be carried. No point wasting energy and time on things that are unproductive. So I do what is expected of me now."89 (Manish Kumar, 06/06/2006)

To draw out a comparative understanding between the two desks in Mumbai and Kolkata, I will now look at the Bengali version of "Desh Videsh": "Baire Dure" (Abroad and afar). The work routine is similar to Mumbai. In Kolkata, however, a trainee nineteen-year old journalist, Oly, handles the work, which is indicative of how much importance is given to international stories. While I will examine Oly's responses to analyse how she reflected on and her practices, I also look at the responses of Soumik Saha, senior producer in *Star Ananda*'s Output desk, to understand the wider practices of the department. Oly, like Manish, looks for colourful stories for her bulletin.

"I go for colourful stories, which have several different kinds of pictures. I also try to find scripts which are small so that I can fit in

---

89 The day I interview Manish, the international story on *Desh Videsh* was on a oil depot in Cairo where a fire erupted. There were no casualties nor were their huge losses. The visuals, however, were striking.

161

more stories in the rundown. This, I think, gives variety to the news-wheel." (Oly, 07/03/2007)

In the interview, Oly gave an example of a skiing story in Switzerland. She justified the selection by saying that there were lots of snow shots, which looked "very pretty." [oh god]She gave another example of a fashion show story in the United States that she chose the day I met her.

> "Fashion shows are always very colourful and I found a news peg too. There was a designer who was over seventy and still going strong." (Oly, 07/03/2007)

Oly is supervised. A senior producer will have a look at her selection of stories. She tells me that recently she had omitted a story in regards to the attack in New York on September 11, 2001 and was told to include it.

> "I thought I would do it after I finished editing a fashion show story, but I was told to do the September 11 story first," (Oly, 07/03/2007)

Oly's understanding of the audience is no different from the other journalists I have spoken to in both the cities.

> "I myself am an audience. Before I became a journalist, I used to watch television so I know what people want to see. I never wanted to see something that is too heavy. That's what I try to do here. I try and keep it very light. If it is too heavy with information, it will not take a minute for the people to reach for the remote." (Oly, 07/03/2007)

Oly was a trainee journalist and her views might not be indicative of wider practices in the news channel. It was therefore important to understand the views and responses of other senior journalists in the Output Division in *Star Ananda* to analyse their understanding of audiences and how they reflect on their daily work practices.

"Target audience for Star Ananda is very urban, though we would like to penetrate the districts in Bengal. So our primary target is the urban Bengali. Before Star Ananda started, Bengal did not have a 24-hour news channel. So we first had to inculcate a news viewing habit in the Bengali viewer." (Soumik Saha, Senior Producer, Output, 20/12/2006).

"I understand what the viewer would like to watch by asking the question 'would my mom, the retired people in my house, would the kids who watch television, want to watch this story.' Thus you have the answer. If you have got a very clear view about your viewership throughout the day, which part of the day who is your target audience, then the business because very easy. For example, from six to eight in the morning, news watchers are mainly working people. So political, economics, more of hard stories, those would cater to them. At the end of the day, they want a wrap up. So between nine and ten at night, news should be very fast and informative and wrap up the day's event." (Soumik Saha, Senior Producer, Output, 20/12/2006)

Soumik's notion of the target audience reinforces the notion of tailoring news for "sets of audiences". As a senior producer, he is in tune with the corporate goal of maximising viewership. That apart, his own imagination of the audience is similar to other journalists I have spoken to: the "self" and the "familiar".

As I have noted earlier, journalists in Kolkata are happy with *Star Ananda*; happy working for it and excited at the prospects. Such allegiance to the organisation has also resulted in wanting it to do well, in other words, empathy with the corporate vision.

"It all depends on the schooling. I think it is the mantra of modern day business where an employee grows with the channel. So we are all in a way working for ourselves. If the channel does well, we do well. I think that is why we are so bothered about the ratings. Not everyone understands the numbers but whenever the ratings are up, our bosses are happy. So we know we have to keep the ratings up. It's told to us from the very first day we are here. "(Soumik Saha, 20/12/2006)

Analysis

An analysis of the Output Department in Mumbai and Kolkata, specifically the Foreign Desk throws up some interesting points besides reinforcing some of the trends that have already started to emerge.

a) The importance given to international stories is evident by their lack. Not only are junior personnel employed at the desk, the time given for international stories in a news bulleting purporting to cover them is scant.

b) Manish's dissatisfaction with the Mumbai office and its practices are not different from crime reporter, Jeetendra Dixit while Oly and Soumik echo Bitonu's sentiments on Kolkata.

c) Soumik makes a case for target audience, maximising viewership and aligning the success of the company with his own. His view of his own practices highlight an internalisation of corporate goals, and on the other that news is now being looked at as a commodity that can be tailored depending on the imagining of the audience by the television producers.

Anchors

Television news anchors are the latest living room celebrities and this has resulted in a proliferation of young professionals aspiring to join news channels. In this section I look at the practices of news anchors in Mumbai and Kolkata and then, as I have done previously, examine their responses to their practices and finally compare and analyse them.

Practices

Anchors in Mumbai are more experienced in their craft than their Kolkata counterparts. This is not due just the simple fact that *Star News* has been around for longer than *Star Ananda*, though that is definitely an important factor. When *Star News* was launched in 2002, Hindi

164

private television journalism had already been around for some time. *Aaj Tak* had set the standards in fast paced, breaking news television reporting. *NDTV*, though, primarily branded as an English news channel had half hour Hindi news cycles. *Doordarshan*, the state-run television, had its evening news bulletins in English and Hindi for a few decades. *Star News*, prior to its launch, tapped into this talent pool of experienced news practitioners and launched an advertising campaign wherein it invited senior anchors and journalists to apply for jobs. Several of the top anchors of *Star News* had ample previous experience and brought in their own sensibilities to the job; *Star Ananda*, conversely, relied on recruiting freshers. As I mentioned above, Yuvraj Bhattacharya, head of the Assignment Desk in Kolkata, told me in interview that he wanted people with no "baggage"; young people who could be "moulded." This means that anchors during the shows in Kolkata have to be prompted constantly by the panel producers to ask the right questions during chats shows and other live formats of news television.[90]

> "We keep telling the anchors that they must at least read the morning newspapers before coming. They are the faces of the channel, if they do not know it looks as if the channel does not know." (Soumik Saha, Senior Producer Output, Star Ananda, 20/12/2006)

During several days that I spent in the PCR in both cities, I did see that in Kolkata, all anchors, except the chief of bureau Suman Dey who is an experienced reporter, needed questions they could ask guests or their own reporters who were reporting live. In fact, before a guest or a reporter came on, a panel producer would quickly brief the anchors on the story and then give them the questions they should open with. And as the guest responded to a question, the panel producer would give the anchor the next one. This was almost always the case. In Mumbai,

---

[90] Panel producers are responsible for producing the particular bulletin and sit in the production control unit from where every bulletin is aired. They have a talk back facility with the studio anchor.

anchors seemed far more informed on the stories. They formed their own questions as much as panel producers prompted them.[91]

Besides their role as anchors, several employees at *Star News* double as senior correspondents. They thus have their own understanding of how a story should be reported. In *Star Ananda*, however, though several anchors want to go out to report stories, they are inexperienced compared to their Mumbai counterparts.

Reflections on practice

Shazia Ilma is a Special Correspondent and also an anchor of prime time shows. She is a graduate of the prestigious Jamia School, a premier media studies institution in New Delhi. Describing what makes news and news sense in *Star News*, she states that the primary criteria in *Star News* for news is how many "eyeballs" a story will catch.

> "It is the three c's formula, crime, cinema and cricket. Anything related to these three sells really, really well. Crime sells like nothing else does. We choose news thinking what will sell. We go by that rather than what we ever thought news was." (Shazia Ilma, 23/06/2006)

As with Manish Kumar, Shazia's professes a different notion of "news" or what "news" should be.

> "Anything which is newsworthy should impact all of us, be it social, political. Everybody has a different bent of mind but where I come from, (I am from Jamia),[92] we were told that if we are in the media you are supposed to critique policies, bring information to the people, create awareness, create consciousness about right to information, create awareness about injustice. But some of the things do not work.

---

[91] But experience has strange side effects and produces a kind of cynicism towards news. At least one anchor would regularly play solitaire on her computer through the bulletin. Just as soon as she finished reading an anchor link and the story would start, she would start playing solitaire on the computer before being told to get ready to read the next link.

[92] Jamia Millia Islamia is one of the most reputed media schools in Delhi.

Like developmental journalism does not work." (Shazia Ilma, 23/06/2006)

The pressure of ratings is always lurking. Being a senior journalist, Shazia has some say in how her bulletin is presented but has to keep the ratings in mind.

> "Every week there is a review. Friday is a bad day, because TRP ratings come in. People see what did well and we see stories of superstition, ghost stories, film stories and cricket comes again and again. I can only decide on how to play the story, what to say, do I tone it down, do I sensationalise. But, that's all. It does not work at the assignment level. I cannot decide what story to do or get done." (Shazia Ilma, 23/06/2006)

The target audience is defined by its purchasing power. Shazia's notion of "news" and a certain amount of self-chastising guilt cannot and does not override the concerns of the Corporate Division, which has to get "eyeballs" and so the "three c's" if it can get viewers becomes news.

> "Although I hate the word, it is frequently used here. Quite a few times, a story is mentioned as "low society" and dropped. For example, an incident that happens in the slums will not be reported while a similar incident occurring in Marine Drive will be played up. We cater to the cable-viewing households and it shows in our programmes." (Shazia Ilma, 23/06/2006)

Considering Shazia's concern about targeting a particular social class as audience, her self-image of the anchor in *Star News* is interesting.

> "An anchor is someone who is upmarket, educated and aware, concerned. We have to dress formally. I do political shows. I am the only woman who does serious political shows so I have to dress formally and therefore the upmarket feel." (Shazia Ilma, 23/06/2006)

Mehraz Dube, another senior anchor, echoes Shazia's notion of the

167

upmarket clientele and by the now familiar way the audience is viewed.

> "Understanding audience is simple. I just think of my nephews, my sister, my mother in the kitchen, my friend who is a chartered accountant and I think of what they want to watch, what should they be informed about." (Mehraz Dube, 29/06/2006)

Concerning what is news sense and who is the audience, he says

> "The BBC knows its audience, they produce for it. We do a similar thing here. Who is the audience? What does it want? The answer is news sense." (Mehraz Dube, 29/06/2006)

With the audience defined as the "self" by the journalists, news sense is delivering what the "self" wants. Journalists in both Mumbai and Kolkata seem to concur on this, but what are the other points of departure or similarities between anchors in the two cities?

Work Practices in Kolkata

During my four month stint at the *Star Ananda* office in Kolkata, I have often thought an assembly line news production house would look exactly like this. Everyone doing their bit and the final product is television news. In one sense, one could call it well managed; in another, you have reporters and anchors who all seem to play a bit part in every story with no one really owning it.

Anchors in Kolkata read the news, they do not write the anchor links. A minute or two before they go on air, they practice the delivery. Since they do not know most stories well, the panel producer is required for constant prompting on what questions to ask. The news in *Star Ananda* is not actually live. It is done in sections, recorded and then put together for half hour bulletins. This means an anchor can read all the anchor links at a go, reread them if necessary and then put together with particular stories during the bulletin, allowing the channel to keep producing fresh stories in between bulletins. Anchors can just read a link for any new story that has just come in without having to read

through the entire bulletin again. Various clips, therefore are inserted together with the stories to form a news bulletin cycle.

Keya Ghosh is one of the more popular young anchors in *Star Ananda* and also does entertainment reporting, which means she reports on celebrity events and film stars. She is a hotel management graduate and also runs a confectionary business. She says that being an anchor in *Star Ananda* means she gets "direct access to the celebrities":

> "You can know them very well and they talk and give exclusive interviews to you. Also, I feel I enjoy the power of being a journalist. If you have a problem, I can tell someone I am from Star Ananda, and my work gets done quickly. I realise it can be said to be misusing power but I think journalists enjoy it. It feels nice. I also like that we anchors are also celebrities and people come up to us for autographs and invite us to events." (Keya Ghosh, 04/02/2007)

Star Ananda pays a lot of attention to celebrity news and has employed senior producers to cover this.

> "Celebrity news is important because it sells. People want to know what the stars do beyond the television serials, what is their daily life like. We bring it to them. People recognise us. No one refuses to give us a byte. It is these two big groups, Star and Anandabazar whom everyone knows here. This is a very professional place. It is prompt, it is fast." (Keya Ghosh, 04/02/2007)

On an anchor's role:

> "You have to make people believe. They must believe that you are telling the truth; that you are not bullshitting. I read from the anchor link and depend on them but I have to read a political story differently from an entertainment story. That comes with experience." (Keya Ghosh, 04/02/2007)

Analysis

Despite the obvious differences in attitude towards "news" and news values, Shazia and Keya share similarities.

a) Keya is open about enjoying the trappings of celebrity status. Shazia too, sees herself as well dressed, informed and upmarket.

b) The discontent with "news" in *Star News* is not stretched or does not cross over to professional practices for Shazia. Both she and Keya perform very similar functions for the particular news channels.

Conclusion

As in the previous chapter which tried to establish how the corporate section of *MCCS* performs editorial functions and influences decisions, this chapter emphasised how editorial decisions are taken and influenced by corporate objectives. Through an examination of the Input and Output divisions of both the channels, the work processes of the various departments and interviews with journalists, I have emphasised the ratings driven content production in both channels.

I have argued that given their particular economies, journalists in Mumbai and Kolkata react differently to this corporatisation of the editorial. In *Star News,* both senior and junior journalists express regret over news values and news standards. In *Star Ananda,* however, journalists feel complete empathy with this corporatisation.

In both channels however, with or without the complete approval of the editorial, the corporate goals of *MCCS* are the prime driving factor behind news selection. The disgruntlement of the Mumbai journalist in no way spills over to actual editorial content or a difference in news production.

The journalists' understanding of audience in both channels drives the production of content. News value and news sense are derived from an understanding of what the audience wants to see. This understanding is validated by the ratings industry and its quantitative approach to news content. To comprehend the news content in *Star News* and *Star Anando* more substantially, the next chapter focuses on the perception of the audience in the two channels and the ratings industry.

Chapter 6
Audience Matters

In this chapter, I approach, in greater detail, the television journalist's understanding of the term 'audience' and how such an understanding affects news content. Therefore, classical audience studies; the competing definitions of the audience and the various methodological tools employed by social and media theorists to understand the audience, are not part of this study.

I start with the presumption that mass audiences are by definition unknowable.[93] Given this, television producers must imagine their audience. I argue that this imagination of the producers of their audience has an impact on the content produced and therefore deserves serious empirical study. "Approached as a discursive conceptualization or typification inscribed by the news producers into their particular news form, rather than as an empirical object 'out there', the 'imagined audience' of the news producers may well literally be 'at work'." (Cottle, 2000:36) The emphasis, therefore, is not on the fact that the mass audience is imagined, a position which is now an "orthodoxy" in media studies but how this imagination works to produce content; in this context, news content in Indian television.

This chapter concerns itself with the various ways through which a television journalist imagines his/her audience. I term these as processes of "knowing the audience." I shall argue that the Indian television news journalist, because of these processes, claims an intimate knowledge of the audience, its likes and dislikes and defends. News content is defended as "this is what the audience wants. We simply produce what they want." I will argue that the journalists' certainty of knowing the audience results because the journalist imagines the audience in terms of his or own "self" and that of the "familiar".

This chapter will chart out the different processes of knowing the audience: the television ratings system in India; the management

---

[93] See Chapter 2, section three.

practices of *MCCS* and its interpretation of the ratings, and finally how the newsrooms of *Star News* and *Star Ananda* internalise these ratings as the marker and rationale behind news stories and news programme.

Television Rating Points (TRP), *TAM* Media Research and Indian television newsrooms

The privatisation of Indian television since the 1990s, and the phenomenal rise in the number of channels ushered in a phase of commercialisation of the media market that necessitated audience measurement. As in the US in the 1920s, the commercialisation of radio almost immediately established a need for audience measurement, because advertisers and programme sponsors needed to know how many people were listening to justify their advertising expenditure. (Ross and Nightingale, 2003, 21)

In the Indian context, advertising revenue constitutes almost seventy per cent of the total earnings of television companies.[94] With the continued rise in the number of channels and an increasing competition for advertising revenues, audience preference and their demonstrated loyalty to particular channels through ratings (TRP) have become important markers by which television channels attempt to corner the advertising market.[95]

Given that the term TRP has come to symbolise so much in Indian television newsrooms, including efficiency, programme quality, saleability, branding and marketing, it is pertinent to understand the dynamics behind the production of these numbers and contextualise their meaning through case studies.

---

[94] Figure quoted by Yogesh Manwani, Vice President, Marketing, MCCS.
[95] Such selling strategies are detailed in chapter 2.

172

TAM *Media Research*

A company called *TAM* (Television Audience Measurement) Media Research controls almost all of the ratings in Indian television and advertising and nearly every television channel subscribes to them.[96] The company profile in *TAM*'s official website begins thus:

> A joint venture company between AC Nielsen & Kantar Media Research/ IMRB, TAM Media Research is the TV Viewership analysis firm of India. Besides measuring TV Viewership, TAM also monitors Advertising Expenditure through its division AdEx India. It exists in the PR Monitoring space through another division – Eikona PR Monitor.[97]

The company's claim of being the "TV Viewership analysis firm of India" cannot be faulted if merely statistics are taken into account. It has near complete monopoly over a lucrative Indian market and television channels, advertising agencies, corporate clients and public relations firms all subscribe to the *TAM* television ratings. However, such monopoly over the market has opened them to accusations of data manipulation; stories of leaks and subterfuge abound. The data collection procedure of *TAM* Media Research also is much criticised and being directly linked to this chapter's primary concern with "the process of knowing the audience", needs to be discussed here.
CEO, *MCCS,* Uday Shankar states:

> TAM is inadequate, completely inadequate. I don't think either the methodology or the physical resources for data gathering is adequate or representative of Indian viewing behaviour. Also there are other serious issues with TAM. It is only telling you things when the television is on. TV has a lot of background activity. TV may be on but it does not mean that someone is seeing it. (05/07/2006)

Shankar makes two important points regarding *TAM*'s data collection procedure. The first point regarding "methodology" is a general critique of the rating system as a tool for understanding audience response.

---

[96] *Zee Television* is the only company which states that it does not subscribe to *TAM* ratings.
[97] http://*TAM*india.com/*TAM*india/Company_Profile.htm

Television, as Shankar points out, has a lot of "background activity". A television might be on, but might not be viewed by the people in the house who could be pursuing other interests. An audience monitor does not take this into account. The remote control through which the monitor is controlled is ill-equipped for several reasons. For example, the adult male of the sample house might switch the television on through the use of the appropriate button on the remote that identifies him as the audience. But his wife or children could be watching the television after he has left and again the data collected will not reflect this change in audience.

Shankar's second point is the particular "physical" dynamics of *TAM*'s data collection procedures which is directly related, I argue, to how journalists in *Star News* and *Star Ananda* construct their audiences. This therefore, needs elaboration and analysis.

Critique of TAM's Data Collection Processes

TAM's data collection procedures have been much critiqued by prominent media practitioners (such as Shankar above) and scholars. I present four points of critique, which I argue, results in a skewed understanding of the audience and affects news content produced keeping this audience in mind. At the time of this research, Indian homes fitted with cable television had exceeded 69 million. *TAM* records audience activity through their "people monitor" in just 4,500 homes. "..., the sample size is too miniscule for a country as diverse as India" (Mehta, 2008: 180). Though TAM claims that "[I]t is the largest such measurement system in the world, but it is still fairly inadequate as a barometer for a heterogeneous country with over a billion people, six major religions, 18 official languages – with an additional 96 documented ones – and hundreds of dialects" (ibid) This incongruity between population and sample is the first point of critique. The sample size cannot account for the most of India's population and yet the ratings have become the sole marker of audience judgement of

television content. Journalists and media managers also see the ratings as indicative of editorial quality. With ratings deciding good and bad stories, journalists produce for an audience the sample size of TAM, ignoring rest of the country.

The second critique is that TAM sample measures only urban areas. "India's entire rural population, consisting of an estimated 145 million households, is totally ignored" (ibid: 180. 181) Moreover, even in urban areas, only towns with a population of more than a hundred thousand are taken into account. This focus on an urban audience results in content which marginalises vast regions of the country and its population. Mehta points out that till 2007, TAM "reserved 25 per cent of its meters outright for SEC A householders, defined as the highest earning socio-economic category" (2008: 181). TAM's focus on the urban rich and the television news producers' obsession with the ratings has created an imagined India of affluence and prosperity, oblivious to the material and physical surroundings of the millions who live in poverty and squalor.

The third critique is that while the cable viewing homes are spread across all the twenty-five Indian states and seven union territories, *TAM*, till 2007 excluded ten Indian states from its survey. Predictably, the states excluded are amongst the poorest in India and most of them are geographically peripheral like the seven states in the North-East of India. Along with Kashmir, which has a history of separatist movements, these states are considered too volatile for survey. Bihar and Orissa, the other two excluded states are amongst the poorest in India. This focus on particular states helps not only in producing the myth of the affluent nationhood but also creates a nation where certain groups or languages achieve dominance while others are marginalised.

These three points of critique about *TAM*'s physical resources of data collection indicates a certain understanding of audiences which the company's sampling procedures create and which the television journalists, given the importance accorded to ratings, inculcate. The geographical area and sample size excludes peripheral areas and the

poor. If we consider that the ratings system evolved as a need for advertisers to have an understanding of audience responses, it is logical that advertisers want to understand the responses of that part of the audience who are able to afford their commodities. (see Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 21) The poorest states of India therefore do not interest the advertising market and *TAM* keeps them out of their survey. *TAM* Media Research targets a specific audience group; the affluent Indians residing in the big cities of the country. All television producers across the various channels, dependant on ratings, produce for this particular audience, and a homogenous content emerges where the "the nation is a community of citizens who are enfranchised by freedom of choice, consumption and material gratification and a lifestyle of enjoyment and pleasure" (Chakravorty and Gooptu, 2000: 91). The emergence of this singular narrative is a result of the importance given to the ratings and produces a homogenous content across television channels.

Ratings and the newsrooms

As detailed in the chapter on editorial processes, journalists rely heavily on the ratings and associate the success or failure of a programme through numbers. Here I quote from some of my interviews with journalists to reiterate their positions regarding television news, ratings and the purpose of news channels.

> Today news is based on whatever the consumer likes. If we show something that people do not like, something that is too political, then the channel ratings suffer. It (ratings) is very important. After all, this is a business. (Utpal, Deputy Head, Assignment Desk, *Star News,* 6/06/2006)

> Even if TRP (Television Rating Points) goes down by one, the whole team is so depressed.98 They take it on themselves that, 'shit, we

---

98 TRP ratings are done in percentage points and a drop of a single digit can symbolise a massive down turn in audience numbers. With increased competition, sales team

haven't delivered and that is why TRP has gone down.'" (Bivha Kaul Bhatt, Senior Producer, Star News, 10/6/2006)

Both Utpal and Bivha's comments highlight the fundamentals of news production in Indian television today. Firstly, news has to be tailor-made for an audience, the sample size of rating companies. Secondly, the success or failure of news programmes is linked to these ratings and not any intrinsic editorial judgment or value, and the journalist has internalised this. Journalists from *Star Ananda* go a step further than those in *Star News* in reasoning the purpose of a news channel. The insistence that it is a market product to be sold and from which profits should be made is intrinsically linked with the television ratings that aid this selling process.

> "Finally it's a product. You are not here for social services. Only thing I understand is that if TRP is down, money is down, that means you are a bad producer." (Moumita Tarafdar, Producer, Star Ananda, 30/01/2006)

> "...it must be about maximising sales. After all, this is a business we are in and we must never forget that. "(Bitonu Chatterjee, Reporter, Star Ananda, 30/11/2006)

The methods of data collection, the ways in which the numbers are interpreted within the newsrooms and how journalists and the *MCCS* management internalise this play a major part in constructing the journalists' imagination of the audience and thereby news content, which is tailored for it. Understanding these will help us in deconstructing the journalists' processes of 'knowing the audience'. It will also help to understand how the journalist's notion of the "self" and the "audience/viewer" are equated.

---

now highlight movements to a few decimal points to signal advantage over a rival channel.

The TRP analysis and its surrounding practices

TAM's sample homes are fitted with a 'people monitor' or 'meter' and a remote control used by the family records viewing modes and preferences. These are transmitted to a central *TAM* database for analysis. Data is collated through the week, and sent to customers on the following Friday. The first week of the year, starting the first Sunday, is termed Week 1 and so on. Software called *Media Express* allows customers, the various television companies and advertisement agencies to customise this data depending on their particular needs and relevance. For example, *Star News* would only look at the audience in the Hindi Speaking Market (HSM) and not bother about the rest of the country while *Star Ananda* would take into account the Bengali speaking population. *Media Express* allows such customisation.

The ratings come in early each Friday morning when, across the media industry and television organisations in India, analysis of the numbers begins. As mentioned in the chapter on the corporate structure of *MCCS*, it is the research team, which handles the *TAM* data and analyses it for the editorial and the corporate. On this analysis, the future of programmes, news, marketing and selling strategies are based. I spent several Friday mornings with Aditi Nayak, a member of the research team in charge of the first analysis. From the notes in my diary and interviews with Aditi, I reconstruct two consecutive Friday mornings, in contrast to each other in rating performances.[99]

The first Friday: May 12th

Aditi comes in twenty minutes later than her promised 7 am. She greets me and goes off to get a coffee after starting her computer. She is back in five minutes and begins looking at the numbers. She looks at me and smiles wryly saying, "Today is a bad day; we are down to 16 per cent." She calls the Research team head, Jyotsna, to let her know and tells me that her boss is very tense. In half an hour's time, there is a text message from Uday Shankar on Aditi's phone. The message is a general one to

---

[99] Since the analysis took place in Mumbai, the reactions of *Star News* journalists were immediately available to me.

178

everyone at Star News, which states "Hi, we seem to have taken a beating in last week's ratings. I am sure we will bounce back this week. Cheers"

Bivha Kaul Bhatt, a senior producer, comes in at 8.20 am. She asks tensely of Aditi: "How is my programme doing?" Aditi gives her the ratings which are apparently low. Bivha, who was standing, slumps and sits down on the floor. She is very upset. Gopal Kaushik, another producer comes in a bit later and after getting his figures, looks at me and says that it is time he started looking for a new job. Aditi finishes her preliminary analysis around 9.20 am and sends it to the different department heads.

The second Friday: May 19th

Aditi is at her desk when I come in at 7 am. She smiles and says she has good news. Star News ratings are 21 per cent.[100] I pull up a chair and she lets me know that the channel is number one in Delhi. She says it has been an average news week and there have been no big stories. This has helped the channel. When there are several newsbreaks, she says Aaj Tak, a rival channel, which is perceived as the "fastest with the news" gets high ratings. At 7.30 am, Sanjog, (Producer, Sports Desk), calls up to find out the ratings for his programme. Aditi tells him that it is 21 per cent. He screams a "wow" on the phone which I could hear. They chat for a minute. Aditi then calls up Jyotsna, her boss and head of the research team to convey the news. Jyotsna says she is very happy. Aditi, looking at the numbers for the highest rated programme, clutches her head and says, "thank God, the top programme is Sansani" which is a telecast by Star News.

She tells me that the Input Editor Rajnish Ahuja used to sit with her during the analysis which she found extremely irritating, and to avoid him, she has started coming in earlier. As more and more numbers show up, Aditi is gleeful. She tells me "Star News is very ratings oriented. It was not like this before but now numbers is a motivating factor." At 8.40 am, Vinod Capri, head of the Output team calls and is delighted. I hear his voice over the phone screaming "What? Really?" as Aditi gives him the overall figures. He asks the figures of other rival channels. Immediately after, head of Input, Milind Khanderkar calls and has very similar reactions and questions. By 9 am, the report is complete and Aditi sends it to the various department heads.

Analysis

The two Friday morning scenarios sketched above make it amply clear how important the television ratings are at *MCCS*. What is interesting to note is how the employees, the journalists in particular, have

---

[100] 21 per cent is the market share *Star News* has garnered in comparison to other Hindi news channels. The numbers are relative to how other channels in the same genre are performing. On this particular week, *Star News* was the leading channel in its category.

internalised this. People call from early mornings, text messages are sent back and forth and even a slight change in numbers can mean mood swings. The CEO has to send messages of encouragement to bolster spirits after a bad week of ratings. As journalists like Bivha have stated in their interviews, the entire production team feels depressed when ratings are down. Gopal Kaushik reveals the pressures when he says, only half jokingly, it is time he found a new job. Journalists whose performance seemed excellent one week can, like Bivha Kaul Bhatt appear "slumped on the floor" in another.

However, along with this concern for ratings is juxtaposed another sentiment which I found in Mumbai: a healthy disregard for the practice. People admitted that they chased the numbers; they wanted programmes to garner high ratings, but somehow felt it diminished and made them lesser journalists. As I had mentioned before Utpal, the Deputy Head of the Input Desk made plain his reservations:

> The game is all about TRP ratings. We keep showing stories of Dawood,[101] which are meaningless, but it sells. For example, Dawood has started smoking 555 cigarettes, this becomes a half hour programme in our channel. This is wrong, but we have to do it. Viewers like it. No one wants to know what the politburo is discussing. (06/06/2006)

And Manish Kumar, producer of *Desh Videsh*, the programme which claims focus on international stories, had stated:

> Every person in a news channel will realise that a four-rupee hike in petrol will affect the common man. But we did not give much coverage to it because people here believe that it will not fetch high ratings. (06/06/2006)

Bivha Kaul Bhatt, producer of one of the most successful programmes on *Star News*, links performance with ratings, but does so with regret:

---

[101] Mumbai gangster allegedly living in Pakistan and recently declared an international terrorist by US

180

We feel that we need to be creative and all that but if you can't sell
that thing, even if it is the best thing that you have done so far, and
it gets you a TRP of 13 or 14, then what is the use. It is very sad but
it is true. (10/06/2006)

The CEO of *MCCS*, Shankar himself wants to believe that he does
not accord much importance to TRP ratings and spoke of the practices
surrounding it in derogatory terms:

It is completely irrational and broadcasters are themselves to
blame. I do not think television should be seen as a weekly game
and frankly I am not interested. In my previous job I never did that.
Here I am forced to be a little more responsive because of external
factors and as a challenger, you have to take a bit more notice.102 In
my previous job, my team was given the ratings briefing only every
quarter. I do not think journalists should behave like stockbrokers,
sell now because ratings are high or buy because they are down. My
only job is to create good programming. The only benchmark we
should have is to create our own qualitative parameters or filters to
understand the television viewing audience in India. (05/07/2007)

Impressive as Uday Shankar's claims are to disregard ratings and
concentrate on "qualitative parameters", this is not borne out in
practice. Bivha Kaul Bhatt tells us that Shankar has created teams of
programmers who are responsible for the ratings of their shows.

Uday has introduced the concept of "teams" for all the programmes
and all of them are TRP driven. Initially nobody was bothered.
Earlier, I used to give my story and that's it. Now as a producer, I
feel the need to know that it is adding value to the channel's TRP.
(Bivha, 10/6/2006)

Uday Shankar's journalistic disregard, even contempt for the ratings in
theory, and yet the importance accorded to them in practice, is a
contradiction which faces most editorial staff in Mumbai's *Star News*.
Mr Shankar does not want journalists to behave like stock brokers but

---

102 Uday Shankar was earlier working with *Aaj Tak* which heads the ratings game in
Indian Television news.

has created a situation where quantitative analysis is the only way a programme's value is judged at both *Star News* and *Star Ananda*. I have discussed this in detail in the chapter on editorial processes and will pick up on this again a bit later. But before I move on further in understanding a journalist's reaction to ratings and their resultant practices, it is important to understand the intricacies of the figures thrown up by *TAM* and how *Star News* and *Star Ananda* interpret the figures and customise the data.

Television Ratings and their interpretation

To understand how *MCCS* interprets ratings data, a brief understanding of audience measurement and how ratings research works, is required. Two types of analysis are used: gross and cumulative.[103] Aditi's interpretation of figures each Friday is a gross analysis while cumulative research involves tracking audience figures and movements over a longer period. The research team in *MCCS* performs cumulative analysis on the gross figures and gives advice on programme planning to the editorial.

Gross measures, which record audience size and will be our main focus here, are described in Webster et al. (2000: 46) as "snapshots" of the population and reference to audience viewing is termed as "exposure". Ross and Nightingale (2003: 46) describe "exposures" as taking "snapshots of audience button pushing, and extrapolating general pictures of programme and channel selection from that data." "Exposure data", Ross and Nightingale continue, "is used in diverse combinations to generate the type of information advertisers or broadcasters need for media planning and programme scheduling." (2000: 47) We will discuss the various combinations used by *MCCS* to understand the data a bit later in this chapter.

Gross measures include two key concepts: *ratings* and *shares* and a third, which is of interest to advertisers: *gross rating points*. Ratings, the most publicised concept, are described as "the percentage of persons or households tuned to a station or programme out of the

---

[103] For more on ratings, see Chapter 4, under section on the research team.

total market population." (Webster and Lichty, 1991: 255) Taken alone, a rating is just another number and makes no sense. It only becomes meaningful in comparison with other ratings. Aditi's analysis only became meaningful for *MCCS* as ratings of other channels come into play.

While rating figures are based on the whole television viewing population, a more useful concept is *share*, which looks at the percentage of the population watching television at a particular time and works out a channel's share of that audience. As audience numbers change through the day, media analysts find *share* a more useful concept to understand programme 'health' or how a programme is faring in comparison with others.

Gross Rating Points (GRPs) are "the gross impressions of an advertising schedule expressed as a percentage of the population." (Webster and Lichty 1991, 250) Only of importance to advertisers and not part of our study, GRPs record the number of exposures an audience has to certain advertisements over a particular period of time.

Again, *Ratings, Shares* or GRPs by themselves are mere numbers. To understand the particularities of analysis conducted by *MCCS* on the data collected by *TAM* Media Research and filtered through Media Express, I will examine the various permutations and combinations applied to the figures by Aditi Nayak every Friday morning. There are several sheets of paper, which present the data in different ways. Here I examine the various categories.

Points to be noted

When it comes to a comparative analysis, only those considered competitors are taken into account by *MCCS*. Thus *Star News* will only look at other Hindi news channels and *Star Ananda* at other Bengali news channels. In the *Star News* chart, besides *Star News* itself, the closest competitors *Aaj Tak* and *NDTV India* are highlighted. For *Star Ananda* this practice is not followed as it heads its competitors by a comfortable margin. There are slight differences in the ways the figures of both the channels are analysed and I will look explain these

individually. The days of analysis are always from Sunday to Saturday of the previous week. (The next section is to be read in conjunction with appendix 2 where, as an example, I have included Week 23 of 2006 as a point of reference)

Page 1:

Star News

The first page, termed the "daywise analysis" is divided into two categories. The first section shows the *channel shares* of all the channels being looked at. This means the average share of *Star News* in comparison with all other channels including the General Entertainment Channels (GECs) are taken into account. These are shown according to the days of the week and an overall weekly average.

The second section, which is more relevant to the research team in *MCCS* for programming, looks at the *market share* of the channels. This means the share that channels have got compared each other in their own categories. So *Star News* figures are looked at vis-a-vis other Hindi news channels, the average market share is worked out for each day of the week, and a weekly average is also given.

The big stories *Star News* is covering for particular days of the week are provided below these averages. This helps in understanding how these stories or the "*Star News* agenda" for particular days have done in comparison to other channels. If there is more than one story followed at different times of the day, a time band is also provided to look at the different stories being tracked.

Analysis

For the editorial department, the most important feedback from the first page is how their big story (or stories) of the day has fared in comparison to other channels. In the morning editorial meeting, the top bosses decide on a particular story to follow and give prominence to it throughout the day. Sometimes more than one story becomes part of the "day's agenda". Of the several factors that influence their choice, a

significant one is what has got high ratings in the past. If a story has worked, several similar stories follow. Another important factor is what stories have garnered high ratings for rival channels. With each channel wanting to replicate the other's 'successful stories', news channels start to look similar. For example, *Star News*'s successful programme *Saans Bahu aur Saazish* (SBS), a programme based on popular television soap operas has spawned numerous similar programmes on other channels. Similarly, rival news channel, *Aaj Tak*'s success with cricket-based programmes has resulted in *Star News* and other news channels producing similar programmes.

The point to note is that "success" in ratings decides on what stories are given prominence. Certain kinds of stories, as I shall show in the next chapter on content, are welcomed. News is not necessarily about the events which unfold, but what journalists believe will work well with their audience. The belief is based on past ratings and thus a cycle of similar stories develop.

Star Ananda

The first page of the *Star Ananda* analysis, similar to *Star News,* looks first at the channel share and then the market shares of Bengali news channels. Immediately below that are further two sections. Under both channel share and market share, two new sections are added. The first one looks at the shares in towns with a population under a million and the second one looks at the share of channels in towns with more than a million.

Analysis

Star Ananda analyses the two new sections for marketing and sales reasons. By dint of being the first Bengali channel, it has already captured the urban market of Kolkata and the other major towns of West Bengal. Given that the majority shares of the channel are with *ABP Group* which is the leading publication house in West Bengal and has a reach all over the state, the news channel wants to emulate this performance. As the assignment head of *Star Ananda,* Yuvraj

Bhattacharya told me, the channel's bosses wanted to capture the entire Bengali speaking market.

> Ultimately this should be the aim. It is like Coke, to build a brand like Coke, that everyone refers to it as the gospel [sic.]. Though because the vacuum was in the middle and upper middle class, that is where we have gone in. Gradually definitely we would want to eat up ETV [a rival news channel] and everybody else, we would want Star News to be representative of entire Bengal. That is our secondary target group, we will also target the non-Bengali people in Kolkata who so far have not been represented. We are familiar with their lifestyle. So we want to catch them. (04/04/2006)

By making a demarcation between towns of a million plus (the bigger towns) and less than a million (the rural areas), *MCCS* wants to make sure that the numbers in the rural areas are clearly reflected and that any increase or decrease in either category is noted by the strategy teams.

Page 2

Star News

The second page is a "story wise" analysis that looks at the main story of the day across different time bands and sees how it has been rated in comparison to competing channels. Two different time bands are used: the first one looks at stories after 5pm, while the second looks at stories, before 5pm, that is, through the day.

On this page, we see the main story (or stories) at different times highlighted in green and below that the ratings of other channels viewed as competitors, indicating how the story fared in competition to the other channels. In certain sections, when time bands are not mentioned, they are replaced with the name of the particular programme that is aired at fixed times in the evening. For example, after 7pm, the next mention is of "National Reporter" which goes to air at 8 pm and then the 9pm band is included. This page helps the analysts understand what kinds of stories do well in particular time slots and

whether there is a need to shift programmes to different time bands to maximise viewership.

Analysis

For the research team, which gives advice to the editorial regarding programming, this page is of particular interest. It shows which stories do well at what times and also indicates which stories work for rival news channels. Based on this information and tracking this page over a certain period of time, advice is given to the editorial teams to shift programmes, develop programmes on lines which seem to be working for rival channels or scrap programmes which are consistently doing badly.

Star Ananda

The second page of *Star Ananda* looks at the various programmes across the week in all the Bengali news channels and their different ratings. Again, the focus is on the rural/urban divide; towns that have a population of under a million and those that are over a million are put in two separate columns.

Analysis

As with *Star News,* this particular page focuses on individual stories and how they have fared in the ratings. A focus on the rural/urban category allows the analysts to help in strategising emphasis on the rural market on the basis of stories that have fared better in towns with less than a million in population and to try to have more of the same.

Page 3

Star News

Entitled "Programme Health", this page looks at all the programmes on the channel (regular news stories and news bulletins are excluded) and sees how they have fared in the ratings compared to other channels across particular time bands. This is not looked at in terms of individual weekdays, but a weekly average is shown. Some programmes, which

come only on weekends, are looked at separately. To keep track of the consistency of a programme, data of the previous week and some from previous months are also included. There is no mention of other channels' programmes on this page.

Star Ananda

This is similar to the page 3 of *Star News* except that data from the previous six weeks are also available for tracking a programme's performance.

Analysis

This page in both channels allows for a *cumulative* analysis. Unlike news stories which are decided every morning and are also dictated by daily happenings, programmes and their performance ratings need a longer time frame for analysis. Programmes take a longer time to plan and build audience loyalty, or what is known in television parlance, for the audience to begin "appointment booking". In this page, the strategy team of *MCCS* seeks to understand which programmes are working well across which time bands and whether there is a necessity to shift them around, shelve or plan new programmes.

Page 4
Star News

This page looks at the top 100 programmes and their ratings across channels in the Hindi news universe. There are several different categories into which the analysis is subdivided, including target audience for particular programmes, "reach"[104] of the programme, market share and the various genres.

Star Ananda

Star Ananda for Week 23 (which is included in the appendix) also has a special analysis of the football World Cup programmes across the

---

[104] When the audience stays with a particular channel for more than a minute, it is described in marketing parlance as having "reached the audience".

Bengali channels which are examined in this page.[105] The rest of the analysis is similar to *Star News*.

Analysis

For the Research team, after having concentrated on programmes on *Star News* and *Star Ananda,* this page offers a comparative analysis where programme ratings of other channels are also shown. Seeing how competitors are doing across the various channels allows *MCCS* analysts to plan and advise the editorial staff and re-think programme schedules.

Quarter-hourly audience movements: **Star News** *and* **Star Ananda** *and their analysis*

In addition to the above-mentioned ways of looking at audience ratings, *Star News* and *Star Ananda* also look at graphs of audience behaviour every quarter of an hour for each day of the week. These are looked at in relation to other channels of the same linguistic genre: Hindi news channels for *Star News* and Bengali for *Star Ananda.* Each day of the week is shown in these graphs, tracking figures from 5am every morning until 1am at night. These particular pages allow analysts to track audience behaviour at any given point of the week and also see how other rival channels are faring. Any sudden movement in the graphs can lead to an examination of its reason. For example, if there is a sudden upsurge in viewer ratings at 7.15pm on *Aaj Tak* on a Monday, *Star News* analysts will look at the news patterns on the channel and what the channel aired to cause the change.

Making sense of ratings and their importance in India media

One of the first things to note as we try to understand the ratings analysis is that it is tailored for specific audiences. Both *Star News* and *Star Ananda* advertise themselves as national channels. When it comes to understanding their audiences, however, they either look at the Hindi

---

[105] Football is very popular in Bengal and thus the special focus.

Speaking Market (HSM)[106] for *Star News* and the Bengal market for *Star Ananda*.

The ratings also look at target audiences. News is viewed as a 25+ male viewing genre.[107] *Star News* and *Star Ananda,* trying to create a market amongst the younger generation also look at the viewing habits of 15+ males from the data that *TAM* provides. News content, especially programmes, is made keeping these specific audiences in mind. *Saans Bahu aur Saazish* in *Star News* and its Bengali equivalent, *Hoi ma noi ba bou ma,* are examples of high ratings garnering programmes, which have done well targeting women audiences. The surprising thing that comes across after speaking to the journalists and media planners is that while almost no one seems to believe in the efficacy of the rating system, the entire media industry is dependent on it. Uday Shankar states:

> There is no alternative to this (TAM) because nobody wants to create an alternative. The broadcasters very stupidly for their own short-term games have fallen for it. When Aaj Tak was up, their ad sales team was shouting these figures from the rooftop. That is the time they should have moved away from these quantitative methods to qualitative parameters. Everybody has made the same mistake: Star, Sony. If you see any marketing communication in this country, it is sad that it is only quantitative. While quantitative marketing communication is important because that is the only way delivery can be measured, qualitative parameters can give you quantitative value. (05/07/2006)

This dependence on *TAM* generated figures has resulted in advertising agencies and cable operators assuming tremendous importance, as Shankar emphasises.

> The real concern is the complete skulduggery that the advertising agencies indulge in based on the TAM data. The competence of Indian media buyers is so pathetic. There is so much laziness that goes into it, there is so much bureaucracy involved. Most of the

---

[106] These include 13 out of 25 states in India.
[107] The Deputy Head of the Sales team at *MCCS* tells me this and it is mentioned in the chapter on the Corporate team.

advertising agencies want to buy the silence of the client. They could not care less what values they offer as long as they can throw some numbers at the client which will lull the client to be quiet. Regardless of what you are told this is how it is. Discount anything else you are told, because we deal with them every day and that is how it is. It is because of these ad agencies that the power of TAM has been so disproportionately hiked, this power, which is so unscientific and has got such rickety legs to stand on. Because it suits them and they just save their backsides. (05/07/2006)

Ninety per cent of media advertising in India is routed through advertising agencies, which act on behalf of the clients. (see Chapter 4 for more on selling strategies of *MCCS*) Post liberalisation in the 1990s, and with the media boom in the country, agencies have developed which also act as media planners for big corporate houses. Media planning for a client is a long term process and at the very minimum will be a twelve month contract with an agency and can go up to five years. This means that agencies have funds to plan the company's media strategies, a large chunk of which will include buying advertisement slots in television channels.

As Uday Shankar indicates in his comments, these agencies wield enormous amounts of power, as media houses have to keep them happy to get advertisements. Advertising agencies rely on ratings, as Shankar states, which they can show their clients to justify their choices for advertising in certain channels and leaving others out. Getting a favourable rating thus becomes important for the television companies and therefore the importance of *TAM*. But despite claims of a scientific basis for the research, the methodology of data collection has attracted severe criticism which I have recorded above. Along with the criticism of the "physical" aspects of data collection, *TAM's* integrity has also been questioned.

The opacity of information from TAM and Nielson is very disturbing. The method is not completely transparent. The sample is not up for scrutiny. For any scientific statistical process, it should be in the public domain. The muscle that the cable operator has

191

acquired is largely because of TAM because TAM doesn't tell you where those boxes are, but every cable operator seems to know. (5/07/2006)

The credibility of *TAM's* data collection process rests on this one moot point: that no one knows where the boxes which monitor audience behaviour are placed. This is to avoid being able to influence the audience through any direct methods from television companies. But as Uday Shankar points out, every cable operator seems to know this. This knowledge gives cable operators enormous clout over television companies.[108]

The cable wallahs

To understand the importance of *knowing* where the audience meters are placed, the cable operator system need to be explained. Here I give a brief background on how they operate. (For more on the cable operators in India see Thomas, 2005: 118-124).

Neighbourhood cable operators, known locally as "cable *wallahs*" were around long before the satellite invasion happened in India. Providing cheap entertainment to a mostly urban population, the cable industry in India has been operating since 1984. A lack of laws governing their operations accentuated their growth and by the mid-nineties, when *Star* and *Zee* entered the Indian market, cable *wallahs* were in control of a delivery system to individual homes. "Cable operators had created the market for *Star TV* and *Zee TV* and were considered able to ruin their market if the satellite broadcasters did not accede to their demands."[109] In theory, cable operators have to declare the number of their subscribers and pay television channels for every house they connect to. In practice, cable operators routinely under-

---

[108] Not only cable operators, but even marketing personnel of television companies claim to have knowledge of where boxes are placed and when they are moved to new locations.

[109] In the past couple of years, the television companies have been pushing the Direct to Home (DTH) satellites to viewers in an attempt to break the cable operators' monopoly. Cost of individual satellites was the reason for the cable operators' success, but with prices falling, the television industry is hoping that customers will take the option for better quality broadcasting.

declare their subscriptions and pocket the money directly from their subscribers without passing it on to the television companies. If a television channel protests or threatens to take action, the channel is blocked. Owing to solidarity amongst cable operators black out by one operator would certainly mean a black out by most other operators in the same state. This results in significant drops in ratings as audiences are unable to see particular channels. Thus, the television industry follows a general rule of appeasement towards cable operators despite knowing that they are being cheated.[110]

The clout of cable operators and under declaration of subscription results in a corresponding increase on the dependence on advertising agencies and advertising revenues. Being unable to make money through subscription, the television industry relies on advertising and therefore ratings assume an increased significance.

Continuing this policy of appeasement, while launching two new channels in 2003 - *NDTV 24x7* and *NDTV India, NDTV* decided to pay cable operators "carriage fees". Carriage fees are an undertaking between a television company and a cable operator through which the company's channel will be kept on a particular bandwidth for higher visibility. The higher the money paid, the greater the bandwidth a channel will receive, resulting in more visibility. Following NDTV's policy, other channels, to remain competitive, were forced to follow suit. The money a cable operator charges is not fixed by any law. It depends on a combination of market factors that create the "weightage" of the cable wallah.

The "weightage", which literally means the *importance* of a cable operator, is worked out through the complex dynamics of *TAM* classification, market knowledge, claims and counterclaims and of course, the omnipresent factor in Indian television markets: rumours.

    a) To start, *TAM* assigns a "weightage" to every cable operator depending on the demographic area the operator serves. The

---

[110] I was present at a meeting between an influential cable operator in Mumbai and the Vice President of Marketing at *MCCS* Yogesh Manwani. During the meeting, Manwani cajoled the operator to show a slight increase in the number of subscribers. After some good natured bargaining, they settled on a number. What was evident was both Manwani and the cable operator knew that the number declared was incorrect.

demographic factor is dependent on a *TAM* calculation of average income and education of the area's population. The higher the income and education levels of residents in a particular area, the higher the "weightage" of the cable operator of that area.

b) If *TAM* classifies an area as having high weightage, cable operators will then start making claims on how many *TAM* boxes are in their area. The higher the number of boxes, the more channels will pay to be visible on your bandwidths.

c) Every channel employs their marketing team to pick up intelligence on the "actual" number of boxes in areas and where they are deployed. Between cable operator's claims, intelligence gathered by television houses and the demography of particular areas, a carriage fee is negotiated between the cable operator and television channels.

The clout of the cable operator is also intrinsically linked, as I explained earlier, to the fact that s/he can black out any channel, a power that is frequently exercised. If a cable operator with a high number of boxes in his or her area blocks a channel, TRP ratings plummet. If this happens to be an area which advertisers target, that is a high-income group, channels are in trouble as far as ratings and revenues are concerned. However, even if all television companies paid money, not all could be accommodated in the most visible bandwidths. Here, I offer an explanation of what it means to be on particular bandwidth or frequency.

Understanding the bandwidths

Every television channel operates on certain bandwidths provided by the cable operator. Depending on which bandwidth a channel is shown, a channel's visibility can go up or down.

These are the different bandwidths:

Prime: This is the best bandwidth to have a channel on, as all television sets have this bandwidth. The first 11 channels on a television will generally be on this band. The fight for this bandwidth is intense as numbers are limited. Out of the 11 slots, 3 are reserved for *Doordarshan*; at least three of the top channels[111] select themselves because of viewer demands; the cable operator keeps two bands for showing movies privately and the fight is on for the remaining three channels.

Colour: This is the second best along with S Band. This bandwidth has 6 channels and also comes at a high premium depending on the cable operator's weightage.

S(pecial) Band: Most television channels will have these bands. 17 channels can be viewed on this bandwidth and it usually commands the same price as the colour band.

Known as PCS, Prime, Colour and S Band are the most sought after bandwidths on which channels want to be aired. This has resulted in a price war or hike in carriage fees. Generally channels will have a one-year contract with cable operators and a lump sum of money will be paid as carriage fee for an annual contract.[112]

There are two other lower bandwidths or frequencies:

Hyper band: Quite a few of the old colour television channels will not have hyper bands. The quality of reception is poor on this bandwidth.

---

[111] These would usually include two general entertainment channels and, in some areas, one news channel. This varies from state to state, depending on language and viewer preference.

[112] The contract is not legally binding. Cable operators are known to renege on contracts if some television channel offers more money than the one with which they have a contractual obligation.

195

VHF: Black and white television will generally not have these bands. Again, reception quality is poor and some of the channels are on radio frequency, which means the quality of visuals is detrimentally affected.

Most television companies, depending on their budget, will balance visibility, target audience, and monetary factors before deciding on carriage fees to cable operators. In areas of low weightage or areas which are not the primary target areas (for example, areas outside the Hindi speaking market (HSM) for *Star News*), television companies will generally not pay carriage fees.

The Marketing strategy for ratings:
The way that ratings data is gathered makes it clear that if the sample size is watching a particular channel, ratings for that channel will be high. The difficulty in ensuring this, and the credibility of the ratings, lies in the fact that the location of the audience monitor meters remains secret. CEO of *MCCS*, Uday Shankar, makes no bones in his interview about that fact that "every cable operator seem to know" where the meters are placed. Most marketing personnel in television channels, as gathered from my conversations with Yogesh Manwani, Vice President Marketing in *MCCS*, and his team will also have a fair idea or make "informed guesses" regarding the location of the meters.

Going by their own guesses, the claims of cable operators, analysing previous data on how boxes have been placed, and understanding the demography of the audience, the marketing team of *MCCS* will target the specific areas where they think the boxes are. Lucrative target areas will be where the audience profile is fairly wealthy. Cable operators in these areas are lured by high carriage fees and care is taken to see that visibility is high. This involves a complex process of negotiations and dealings between marketing personnel from the channels and cable operators. Limited bandwidths mean that visibility comes at a premium and every channel vies for the same spaces. Moreover, the cable operators can be quite unscrupulous in

196

their dealings and make multiple offers that they are unable to keep later. It is a continuous process.

The marketing team at *MCCS*, while trying to improve visibility, will pay extra attention to where the boxes are believed to be placed and try to ensure that the channel is placed in premium bandwidths in those areas. Higher TRP depends on how successful they are in this particular endeavour.

Analysis

Given the data collection procedure of *TAM*, the obsession with ratings and dependence on advertising revenues, one can presume that a very small minority amongst the general cable viewing population in India is the target audience of television companies. Even within this small minority, a higher weightage is accorded to demographically affluent areas, which are of particular interest to the advertisers. The editorial, concerned with ratings and equating them with the success and failures of news stories and programmes, concentrate on this miniscule minority and produce content targeting them.

But how much does audience taste and choice, and therefore content, matter? I recount below an incident at the corporate office of *MCCS* in Mumbai which will help to highlight the importance of news content when every channel produces news which looks similar.

A story: July 3rd, 2006

Star Ananda, which since its launch had been heading the ratings simply because there were no other comparable 24 hour Bengali news channels, came in for a fair bit of competition during the football World Cup, 2006. Two new Bengali news channels had been launched a month previously, and one of them, *24 Ghanta (24 Hours)* had shot up to number one in the midst of the tournament. This was taken as a huge setback as Bengal is a football obsessed region and *MCCS* was hoping to capitalise on this. The ratings showed a spectacular fall in *Star Ananda*'s numbers and a corresponding rise in those of *24 Ghanta*.

197

An emergency meeting was held in the corporate office in Mumbai. head of the research team, Jyotsna, head of marketing, Yogesh Manwani and head of sales, Prabal Ganguly, attended the meeting. The Kolkata assignment head, Yuvraj Bhattacharya was on the phone. The meeting was to try and assess why there had been a sudden swing in the ratings. Yuvraj blamed the World Cup coverage, saying that his reporter was in another town while matches were taking place elsewhere and because of a lack of money, the reporter was not being allowed to travel. Several other theories were being thrown in the air. At the end of the meeting, Yogesh Manwani, marketing head, claimed that he would get the ratings sorted by the following week.

The next week's ratings indeed showed that *Star Ananda* was back at number one position while *24 Ghanta* had dipped to its previous levels. Yogesh explained to me why *Star Ananda*'s ratings had dipped and, equally suddenly, shot up again. According to him, the contract with the main cable operator in Kolkata was coming to an end. To put pressure on *MCCS* and to hike carriage fees, the operator changed *Star Ananda*'s bandwidth to a lower visibility frequency, while placing *24 Ghanta* on the higher one. Viewers watched *24 Ghanta* given its higher visibility and their ratings went up. Once Yogesh Manwani concluded a new deal with the cable operator, *Star Ananda* regained higher bandwidth visibility and the ratings went up.

Analysis

This incident brings to the fore the question, do particular news channels matter? Given that all television channels target a similar audience, imagining them in similar ways, content hardly varies. This homogeneity in content allowed *Star News* and *24 Ghanta* to be switched, while the audience continued to watch unperturbed.

Yogesh Manwani used the above incident to justify to me that what matters is the "visibility" of a channel. As news content hardly varies across channels the audience hardly distinguishes one from the other and therefore the lack of audience loyalty.

"I am the audience" - A journalist's imagination

TAM data collection methodology; the analysis of this data by *MCCS* and other television companies; the importance of advertising agencies and cable operators; journalists' obsession with numbers: all these factors rarefy the imagined audience to a very small, affluent section of the Indian cable viewing population.

Ratings are meant to inform advertising agencies and their clients of particular channels' audience profile and behaviour and thus the viability of advertising in them. Advertisers are interested in consumers with spending power and there is definitely a strong feeling amongst media commentators in India and also its practitioners that it is the more affluent middle class and the rich that become the sample for data collection. The poorer areas are less represented or ignored entirely. This claim is given credence by the fact that the poorer states of North East India: Orissa, Kashmir and Bihar, were not part of the sample. As we have already noted, journalists produce news content keeping this middle class in mind. We revisit a statement from Rajnish Ahuja by way of example:

> As a news channel we have to communicate with the people in a manner they want. We are here to provide information in the way they want. News sense is giving people what they want. There is a new generation of viewers who have come up. They are so stressed out in their jobs in BPOs113 (Business Process Outsourcing) and stuff that when they want to watch TV, they want to relax and have some fun. (03/07/2006)

Rajnish Ahuja's claim of "communicating with the people in the manner they want" is backed up by a presumption of what he thinks they want, that is, "to relax and have some fun." Rajnish presumes this using the self as an example as along with most journalists, comes from the same social and economic group which television companies target as their primary audience. He therefore claims that he "understands" what the

---

113 The most common examples of BPOs are call centres of which there has been a flood in most major cities of India.

audience wants. This identification with the audience must be seen in the light of the recruiting policy of journalists at *MCCS* and here I reiterate a point made earlier by the Vice President Human Resources Sanju Saha:

> Of late we realise that even within our top target audiences or target consumers, there is a certain niche. There are a lot of English speaking people who watch news; hence what is relevant to them requires a little change in the sort of profiling of our editorial people. We need journalists who are able to understand lifestyle, who are able to understand big city issues, big city stories, and stories which are of interest to a different mass. I will have a very hard look at the profiling of people, in terms of background, classification; define them as per the TAM classification.[114] I will have to do that. For example, if I am looking at SEC A[115], I will be looking at someone with a good academic background, has English speaking capability, has gone to respectable college, has had a fair bit of influence of party circles and then see how they perform. (14/06/2006)

The recruitment policy of *MCCS* is no different from what most international news networks would pursue. As Ginneken writes "Most journalists are middle-class in social background, social position and social aspirations." (1998: 71). The particularities of the profession require a certain skill level which in India, as also in most other countries, are equated with the middle and more affluent classes. The journalists are middle class; the target audience is middle and upper class. This gives rise to the situation of the journalist equating his or her "tastes", likings and dislikes with that of the audience. Ahuja is not the only one who claims audience wants rest and relaxation. As we have seen, his Deputy, Utpal imagines his family and himself when he thinks of what the audience would want to see.

---

[114] The *TAM* classification of audiences is done keeping the socio-economic criteria or SEC in mind. The richest audiences fall in the SEC A category, the middle classes in the SEC B and B + category and so on. *MCCS* by seeking to recruit the rich, aim to target the rich audience.
[115] Socio-economic criteria A (SEC-A) is an audience classification for the most affluent amongst the audience or of the highest income bracket. See appendix 1

I think of what I would like to see, what my family wants to see. I forget
that I am a journalist. I think of what I would want to see as an ordinary
viewer or I think of what my wife wants to see. One has to remember
that the woman of the house has the most control over the television set.
So if we can think from the angle of a woman, it will be the best to garner
more TRP ratings. (06/06/2006)

Other journalists also claimed the personal as the basis for
understanding audience needs and tastes. What the journalist wants
therefore becomes what the audience wants and this becomes equated
with good news sense: predicting what the audience wants to see.

I will tell you from personal experience. My mother, when she watches
television, she watches news and all that but she would like to know
about it in bare headlines. She would not want details. Given a choice
between news and these kinds of programmes, I am sure she will go for
Saans Bahu aur Saazish (SBS). You have to understand that women are
also very important. If you want them in your fold, then you have to give
programmes, which are exclusively for them. You have news throughout
the day. Why can't you give half an hour, which is totally dedicated to
them. It is an appointment viewing. Sales show that right from 2pm till
3pm people switch on Star News. The women have their lunch at 2pm
and then from 2.30pm they have SBS. And if you have a 3pm breaking
news then they sit through that too. (Bivha Kaul Bhatt, Producer, Star
News, 01/06/2006)

I myself am an audience. Before I became a journalist, I used to watch
television so I know what people want to see. I never wanted to see
something that is too heavy. That's what I try to do here. I try and keep it
very light. If it is too heavy with information, it will not take a minute for
the people to reach for the remote. (Oly, Producer, International Desk,
Star Ananda, 07/03/2006)

I understand what the viewer would like to watch by asking the question
'would my mom, the retired people in my house, would the kids who
watch television, want to watch this story.' Thus you have the answer. If
you have got a very clear view about your viewership throughout the
day, which part of the day who is your target audience, then the business
because very easy. For example, from six to eight in the morning, news
watchers are mainly working people. So political, economics, more of

201

hard stories, those would cater to them. At the end of the day, they want a wrap up. So between nine and ten at night, news should be very fast and informative and wrap up the day's event. (Soumik Saha, Senior Producer, Output, Star Ananda, 20/12/2006)

In his extensive writings on cultural capital, Pierre Bourdieu states how social elites reproduce themselves and consolidate their positions. Middle class children acquire middle class *habitus*; for instance, a habitual way of thinking, feeling and acting which makes it easier for them to deal with school and other cultural institutions adapted to middle class norms (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973). In India, the middle class consumer revolution started in the early 80's. The decade saw a 47.5 percent rise in consumption expenditure (Dubey 1992, 150). This process received a further boost following the opening up of the economy in the 1990s. This confident middle class, animated by the vision of setting India on a newly liberated path of progress and economic prominence on the world stage, "assumed for themselves the role of the makers of the nation in new ways. In the emerging middle class political vision, the nation is a community of citizens who are enfranchised by freedom of choice, consumption and material gratification and a lifestyle of enjoyment and pleasure" (Chakravorty and Gooptu 2000: 91).

As with any articulation of nationhood, in this case a primarily middle class one, media becomes a key place for such re-imaginings. In India, middle class television journalists re-produce their likes, desires and wants for an imagined target that is also essentially middle class. In this forced homogenisation of desires, reality has remarkable ways of biting back. I relate here a story which puts into focus the dichotomy between a journalist's imagining and telling of a story and how reality can contradict such imaginings and storytelling.

A brief background

About 70 kilometres south-west of Kolkata, Nandigram is a rural area which erupted into violence that shocked the state of West Bengal and India in mid 2007. On the orders of the Left Government in West

Bengal, the state police were attempting to expropriate 10,000 acres of land for a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to be developed by the Indonesia based Salim Group. The local villagers clashed with the police and, in a conflict that still continues, several villagers and policemen were killed. The plans for the SEZ have now been put on hold.

SEZ's were planned with much fanfare in 2006 when I was in India. In the next chapter where I analyse content of both the news channels, *Star Ananda* gives extensive coverage to the inauguration of the Nandigram SEZ and the coming of the Salim Group President to Nandigram in June 2006. Given star billing by *Star Ananda*, he is followed on his daily visits and meetings with the government and villagers of Nandigram. A *Star Ananda* reporter, reporting live from the village during a visit by the Salim Group President stated that the villagers were happily giving up their lands for the sake of "development" which they understood was "necessary".

A year later, nothing could have been further from the truth. The villagers refused to give up their lands; the government had to backtrack on their plans; and reality refused to bow before a middle class dream of development, articulated by the *Star Ananda* reporter to his middle class audience..

Conclusion

This chapter attempts to understand the concept of audience discursively, as it is imagined in the newsrooms under study, and how this affects news content. The imagination of the audience, this chapter argues, is a result of certain managerial and journalistic practices within *MCCS* which is linked to the larger media economy in India. I have shown how, given increasing competition amongst channels and a political economy which makes television companies heavily reliant on advertisements, TRP or television ratings have assumed enormous significance and journalists at *Star News* and *Star Ananda* equate success and failure of news stories and programmes with the rise and fall of television ratings. The chapter therefore, adds to the empirical material on newsroom practices and along with the previous two

chapters provide details of journalistic routines in newsrooms and how they influence news content. These empirical details, in the concluding chapter, will help us to critique and analyse the 'orthodoxies' of earlier newsroom ethnographies. Given the paucity of news ethnographies from the South, it provides details of newsroom practices from areas where news ecologies are both changing and understudied.

Ratings in India are a monopoly of *TAM* Media Research. Their data gathering methodology shows an obvious bias towards a rich clientele with poor states in India being excluded from their surveys. *MCCS* targets a middle class and affluent audience and their journalist hiring policy tilts towards the same section. Journalists, in turn, imagine themselves, their families as the audience and produce for the same. In this way, a middle class India produces content for the same middle class; articulating certain desires, likes and dislikes. This chapter builds on the previous two, to show the construction of nationhood in Indian television newsrooms and is part of the answer to the primary research question of this thesis; how is the notion of India articulated in the television newsrooms of the country.

The next chapter looks at the particulars of the content produced by the two channels. It is a culmination of the three chapters which precede it and argues that corporate aims, journalistic practices and the understanding of the audience combine to produce a particular kind of news content in Indian television.

Chapter 7

Cricket, Cinema and Crime: Structures of news content in Indian Television

This chapter, through an analysis of news structures in *Star News* and *Star Ananda*, investigates how television news channels in India constructs an imaginary community of viewers who are elite, privileged and belong to the middle and upper middle classes of the television viewing audience. In doing so, it further investigates the central research question of this thesis: how is nationhood constructed in Indian television newsrooms? It argues through an examination of news content structures that television journalists construct news for an imagined community of middle class viewers, thus producing a middle class notion of the nation.

A number of studies have examined the role of the media in the symbolic construction of a common identity. Morley and Brundson, through an analysis of a current affairs programme have shown how the nation is evoked (1999). Billig has argued that the national press continuously flag the nation (1995). Dayan and Katz have demonstrated how media events help in bringing the nation together (1992) while Scannell has stressed the role of public service broadcasting in shaping national identity (1989).

As I examine the structures of news content, I argue that news is determined by what its producers believe the audience wants to see. The imagining of the audience is partly dependent on where the audience is understood to be located in terms of both physical geography and language. Though both the channels call themselves "national", *Star News* focuses on the Hindi Speaking Market (HSM) while *Star Ananda's* primary focus is on the Bengali speaking community, especially in West Bengal (see chapter 4). Given these regional identities at the core of the constructed audience, my initial hypothesis was that there must be a plurality in the imagining of the nation in television newsrooms. The politics of a pan-Indian identity, promoted by the state sponsored *Doordarshan* and *All India Radio*, had

a strong north Indian centre (see chapter 2). I presumed that the power lines inscribed by New Delhi that had created this strong centre with its numerous peripheries must now have fragmented under the strain of multiple channels airing content in the various regional languages of India. An academic obsession with a post-national imaginary had made me prematurely celebrate the demise of a pan-Indian, *Doordarshan* spun, understanding of nationhood in India. Reality, however, refused to be coaxed into such theoretical fancies. As I examined the content of both channels, I was surprised at the similarity of their news structures, especially during primetime viewing. While there were certain differences in stories, with *Star Ananda* including stories from stringers in the various districts of West Bengal, especially in the afternoons; the evening bulletins submerge such differences and the main news stories are strikingly homogeneous in their subject matter.[116] The target audience is defined not so much by language, but by their Socio Economic Criteria (SEC) (see chapter 6 and appendix 1), a market based survey technique devised by television rating companies. The second reason for homogeneity in news structures, as the empirical evidence in the chapter 5 show, is that journalists in both the newsrooms imagine themselves as the audience and produce what they think they and their families would like to see. Journalists across news channels come from the same middle class backgrounds as the target audience. With similar aspirations, needs, wants, likes and dislikes and producing news for people they believe to have similar tastes, the content reflects a lack of diversity.

Creating Waves: Journalistic Practice of producing news

Michael Schudson in *Sociology of News* (2003: 1) narrates the story of two young and ambitious journalists in New York who at the end of the

---

116 As the Input Editor of *Star Ananda*, Yuvraj Bhattacharya told me, the channel was targeting the smaller towns of West Bengal and thus, to be inclusive, they were airing stories from the districts. The point to note is that these stories were aired primarily in the afternoons when news viewership, according to the ratings, dipped significantly.

nineteenth century, trying to make a name for themselves in the profession and competing with each other, created a "crime wave" in the city. Crime reporter Lincoln Steffens did a story on a particularly intriguing crime which other reporters did not know about. The city editor of a rival newspaper berated his crime reporter, Jacob Riis for failing to report on the same. Riis, a friend of Steffens, did his own snooping around and wrote another story which the latter did not know about. The race was thus on and other crime reporters from other newspapers joined in to find out more sensational crime stories. New York City was suddenly in the grip of a crime wave generated by the mass media.

Writing on journalistic practices in Indian newspapers in the 1990s, I had noted that reporters write for each other (Batabyal, 2005). Through the experiential, I had constructed how journalists in New Delhi competed with each other, taking pride in getting more detail on similar stories while always attempting to file stories which were exclusive to their newspaper. The imagined audience was the community of journalists. In the 2000s, a combination of market factors, detailed in the previous chapters has dramatically altered the notion of the audience in the television newsrooms in India. The concept of the *core audience* has been created to target a particular segment amongst the 70 million television households, the middle class elites with disposable incomes who can afford to purchase the advertised products on news channels. Journalists competing with each other to get the best stories have been replaced by television channels following each others' stories, replicating patterns which have seen rating success. This has resulted in a similar pattern of stories across television news channels, privileging stories on cricket, crime and cinema.

Cricket Crime and Cinema

The "Bollywoodisation" of television news

As noted in chapter 4, the corporate division, particularly the marketing section of *MCCS* arranges tie-ups with new Bollywood ventures. This means exclusive rights to footage of the film, interviews with the actors, directors and producers of the film, besides promoting the film on the channel. This arrangement suits both film producers who get unlimited airtime on news channels to publicise their films while news channels package film promotions as news stories. Thussu notes "The tone of reporting is unabashedly promotional, the stories about private lives and public engagements of film stars: how they celebrate religious festivals, their holidays, their dress and eating habits, their likes and dislikes, are repeatedly given air time – across the board and on an almost daily basis (2007: 105)." This particular chapter, analysing news structures of both the news channels for three days, show how Bollywood and film gossip are entrenched into mainstream news and how such an inclusion is justified by journalists and media managers through the logic of garnering maximum TRPs.

Cricket fever and news television

Mehta in his recent work on television news in India writes how cricket and its coverage is "embedded within modern Indian politics, culture and identity (2008: 196)." He further comments that the "Indian television news industry has consciously ridden on the shoulders of cricket to such an extent that by 2006, cricket oriented programming was estimated to account for the greatest expenditure in news gathering across most news channels (ibid: 197)." In chapter 5, I have noted how the head of the assignment team, Rajnish Ahuja, instead of political reporters, feels the need for several more cricket correspondents who can cover every aspect of the game, including the private lives of the cricket stars. Cricket programmes get prime time slots and every news channel competes with each other to provide maximum air time for the sport. The days of my news analysis coincided with the football World Cup held in Germany. Despite this major international sporting event, there was no reduction in cricket

coverage. *Star Ananda* sent a reporter to Germany to cover the tournament as Kolkata and the Bengali audience is perceived to be more interested in football than the target audience of *Star News,* the Hindi speaking belt of India. It highlights that the event or occasion does not create the news; it is the perceived audience interest in the event.

Creating a crime wave in India

The same logic of a perceived audience interest in crime stories have contributed to every news channel devoting special programmes to its coverage. "The move towards crime shows can be explained by one factor: they fared well on the yardsticks of TRPs (Mehta, 2008: 190)" It was *Star News* who created a genre of crime story based programming which made every other news channel follow suit. The crime show *Sansani,* produced by *Balaji Films*[117] for *Star News* was anchored by an actor, Shrivardhan Trivedi, "who was deliberately styled to look tough. We did not want a generic anchor. He was a theatre person, had a good voice and we moulded him to make a statement,'says the producer [of the programme] (ibid)". The success of the show spawned several other such programmes across other news channels. Jeetendra Srivastava, the bureau chief of *Star News* and also the crime reporter, hosted one such programme, *Red Alert.* This programme, too, was produced by *Balaji Films.* It was produced in New Delhi and Jeetendra flew once a week from Mumbai to the capital to record the show. He told me that he, as a journalist, had no editorial contribution to the show. He also said that the spate of crime shows in television channels and the need to keep on producing more stories had resulted in reporting stories which would, even a few years earlier, not even be published in the inside pages of local newspapers. The need for crime stories by television channels mean that such instances are now blown out of all proportions creating the crime wave in Indian television.

---

[117] An independent content production company based in New Delhi.

Organising the Chapter: Analysing a day of news

The analysis will proceed by examining the content of both channels simultaneously, each day at a time: from the first early morning bulletins to the last late night broadcasts. I will analyse the structures of the news content at different hours of the day for both the channels, making it easier for patterns to emerge. This will help an understanding of the audience/content relationship and how the news producers decide on news content, keeping in mind their imagined audience. It is important to note here that this chapter does not take a conventional content analysis approach. There is no textual analysis, nor analysis of the exact time and length of stories or of the advertisements between bulletins. What it attempts to emphasise is the predominance of certain kind of stories to the exclusion of others. News structures, I argue is a result of production processes. Therefore, as I look at the stories at different times of the day, I will lay out in as much detail as possible the practices within the newsroom during those time frames, to explicate the context under which a certain news bulletin is constructed. I will also analyse interviews with journalists and see how far their thoughts on their practices reflect in the content.

Timeframe

Three complete days of broadcasting in both the channels are analysed in this chapter. I felt that three days of content were necessary to analyse to establish the pattern of news content. The days for which I chose the content were decided at random. The recording of both channels was done simultaneously in *Star News*, Mumbai, when I was conducting my research there. The days recorded depended on when the person concerned at *Star News* could free the recording equipment. Two video recorders had to be set up to record both the channels, which was done in real time. Given that there were live broadcast for 19 hours a day, I have 112 hours of viewing material: three days from each channel. The recording took place from the 14th to the 16th June, 2006. I have divided each day into various time bands; the early

morning bulletins from 5am to 7.30am; the morning bulletins until 10am; the mid-morning bulletins until 12pm; the afternoon bulletins until 5pm; evening bulletins until 8pm; and primetime and final bulletins until 11pm.

The headlines that dominated

Four main headlines dominated the mid June news calendar of 2006: the football World Cup in Germany; a cricket series in the West Indies; a Bollywood event in Dubai; and the arrest, on charges of taking cocaine, of Rahul Mahajan, son of a prominent politician who had been recently murdered by his own brother.

The football world cup and cricket in West Indies: Cricket is a national obsession in India. The Board of Cricket Control (BCCI) is the richest autonomous body in the country; the money they generate from television and advertising rights amount to millions of dollars. A large chunk of television news is dedicated to cricket. The India versus West Indies cricket series was on in the Caribbean Islands during the days of analysis and both channels devoted several hours of footage to the event.

The coverage of the Football World Cup in Germany in both the channels is a good pointer towards how the imagination of the audience by the corporate and the editorial within newsroom affects news structures. *Star Ananda* is the poorer cousin within *MCCS*. *Star News* operates in Mumbai, the financial heartland of India, and Hindi language television earns much more in business revenues than Bengali news channels. Yet, it was the reporter from *Star Ananda* who was assigned to cover the football World Cup in Germany. This is because of a specific understanding of the audience within *MCCS*. In West Bengal, football frenzy is perceived to be greater than anywhere else in India. Kolkata has the top three football clubs: East Bengal, Mohun Bagan and Mohammedan Sporting and the rivalry between the three clubs is

regular fare for the sports pages of the city's newspapers.[118] In Mumbai, football frenzy is perceived to be lesser and this showed in the way the event is covered in both the channels.

The IIFA Awards: The biggest Bollywood event, its annual awards ceremony, was being held in Dubai. Both channels sent their reporters to cover the event. Despite Bollywood being a Hindi language industry, it is given comparable airtime in *Star Ananda* with regular special shows and programmes.

The Rahul Mahajan case: Pramod Mahajan was one of the most prominent young politicians in India. General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the main Opposition Party in Parliament, he had been seen by many as potential future prime minister. In June 2006, his brother, Praveen Mahajan, walked into his Mumbai flat in the morning and shot him. His condition remained critical for several days, before he succumbed to his injuries. The coverage in the media was exhaustive and rumours and family scandals abounded. A month after the incident, Pramod's son Rahul Mahajan had to be hospitalised for consuming heroin. He was later arrested for alleged possession and consumption of contraband drugs. The story and incidents surrounding it became fodder for a media hungry for celebrity scandals. This story, which rivalled a Bollywood plot, was thus a prime focus of both the news channels. My analysis starts as Rahul Mahajan's bail application was placed before the court.

It is pertinent to note that despite the days being chosen at random, and even at this early stage of analysis, a certain news structure already starts to emerge: that of crime in the Rahul Mahajan story, cinema in the IIFA awards and cricket with the series hosted in West Indies.

---

[118] In 2002, when the previous Football World Cup was being held, I was stationed as a correspondent in Kolkata with *NDTV*. The channel spent considerable airtime looking at Kolkata audiences for preview stories on the football frenzy, quite a bit of which was manufactured when people see the camera and perform for it.

The Salim Group's coming to West Bengal: Another story that dominated *Star Ananda* during this period, and six months later became a national issue, started innocuously enough on the first morning of our analysis. Explained here in some detail and with the hindsight of what happened six months later in West Bengal, the story reaffirms the claim of the previous chapters that journalists are both articulators of news as well as its audience.

The story starts on the morning of June 14th 2006 with the state government planning to acquire land for the Indonesia based Salim group for a petro-chemical hub in Haldia, a district outside Kolkata. As the news structure of the next three days shows, this arrival of prospective investment to Kolkata became the most followed story on the channel. It captured the headlines with live reportage of the arrival of a high ranking Salim group official. The news coverage included where he went, the government officials he met, the land he looked at for investment and his interactions with local villagers.

The Salim Group came to Kolkata, invited by the West Bengal Government. The group promised huge investments and the state government agreed to hand over thousands of hectares of agricultural land for the petro-chemical hub. *Star Ananda* coverage deified the Salim Group representative in West Bengal and photos of him being garlanded by local villagers whose land was about to be taken away flooded the television screens. A reporter on ground where the land acquisition was proposed said that there were no protests from farmers who were happily giving their land away, realising it was for their own prosperity and progress. Six months later, in January 2007, rural West Bengal erupted against the land acquisitions. Clashes between the police and villagers claimed scores of lives. Government estimates are in hundreds while villagers claim that the police massacred thousands of peasants. The government was forced to cancel the land acquisitions and what was portrayed as a rosy deal went awry. While I will examine this story further a bit later in this chapter, there are some important points that need reiterating. I have suggested in previous chapters that the reporters in Kolkata embrace

the corporate culture of *MCCS* whereas in *Star News,* cynicism is more pronounced. This, I have argued, is largely due to the fact that a *Star News* reporter in Mumbai is financially far more secure as s/he has more job opportunities than their Bengali counterpart. The present state government in West Bengal has been trying to attract corporate and foreign investment and middle class journalists, long since seeking more job opportunities in the state, are more likely to identify with the government's policy. As *MCCS* focuses on the same middle class and affluent audience as their target group, a perfect matchmaking takes places. Six months later however, given a peasant uprising, ground realities refused to match their news articulations.

Early morning news production practices at *Star Ananda* and *Star News*
5am to 7.30am

Both *Star News* and *Star Ananda* started broadcasting live half an hour earlier than other national news channels, going to air at 5am. *Star Ananda* started with *Prothom Khobor* (First News) and *Star News* with *Paheli Khabar* (First News). The news structures of *Star News* and *Star Ananda* displayed a range of stories in the morning bulletins that gradually vanished as the news producers sought to enforce a news agenda for the day. The morning bulletins also aired several stories filed by news agencies, especially international stories. The reasons for this must be understood in the light of the practices of the night editors and producers who prepared the morning bulletins the night before. The logistics of production also play a role in this and I use my observer participant experience to tease these processes out, having spent several nights in both newsrooms observing how morning bulletins are made.

At 12pm, the final live bulletin in both the channels was aired. This was the final bulletin that will then be broadcast repeatedly through the night until 5am unless there is a major newsbreak which calls for live telecast to resume. This five-hour lull gives the night producers time to start preparing for the early morning news and the

rest of the day. Manpower is depleted; a single person attends to the assignment desk in *Star Ananda* and not more than two editors are available for editing stories. In Mumbai, owing to a larger scale of operations, the number of journalists working, though frugal, is more than in Kolkata. For both the channels, a night reporter is present and will attend to any newsbreaks. It is the duty of the journalist on the assignment desk to coordinate with the editors to get stories ready for the morning bulletin. As I noted in the chapter on editorial processes, the person on duty at the assignment desk in the evening, hands over a list of possible stories that can be aired for the morning to the journalist who takes over for the night. The person on duty at night will continue to build on the list for the morning bulletins. (see chapter 5)

Since news flows are slow at night, night producers work with stories which are on hold; that is, stories which have been filed by reporters but not thought as urgent or important enough and therefore put in the leftover bin to be used later. These stories are edited and readied for the morning bulletins. Quite a few of these stories are treated as 'fillers', to be used if there is nothing else or to add some variety to the bulletin. Newsroom politics will also play a role in this. If producers do not like stories but are forced to take them, because a reporter is likely to complain or create a fuss, those stories can be 'buried' in the night or early morning bulletins. Yuvraj Bhattacharya, Assignment Head of *Star Ananda* told me that he used this method regularly if reporters did not file stories the way he wanted them to. It was his way of forcing reporters to conform. Also 'burying' stories in the night bulletin takes away the edge of the reporter's complaint that his or her story has not been aired. Besides this, at times certain stories are put on hold as they become relevant only on the following morning or even later. Such stories are generally based on events which are scheduled to take place in the future, and the morning bulletin is a good way to start a preview of these events which will be followed up during the day. [119]

---

[119] An obvious example of this would be a scheduled political rally or a sporting event.

June 14th, 2006 (Day 1): 5 am to 7.30 am

Star Ananda

The *Star Ananda* news format includes a section called *Shironaam* (*Headlines*) that are played before and after most advertisement breaks. This short section spells out the main stories of the news bulletin. Most bulletins will have between four to six headline stories.

On 14th June 2006, the first day of our analysis of news structures, there were four headline stories at 5am: stories from the Football World Cup, the cricket test in West Indies, the IIFA awards and a petrol price hike announced by the Central Government. The bulletin's World Cup coverage concentrated on various stories: capoeira dancing of Brazilian fans in Germany, the result of the previous day's games and a story on English footballer Wayne Rooney. The last story was about local Kolkata fans holding a prayer ceremony for Rooney's recovery. Each day, there was a World Cup related story filed from Kolkata on supporters of different teams from the city. This, the sports desk reporter Ratna informed me, was to create an identification with the event in Germany amongst news viewers in Kolkata. The petrol price hike story in *Star Ananda* was treated as a political development, unlike in *Star News*, and concentrated on the dynamics between the central government which had raised the taxes and West Bengal's leftist government. The latter was an ally of the government at the centre.

Besides the headlines, there were eight other stories, including the story on the Salim group of Indonesia, the background to which I have explained above. This story was yet to become a headline. Of the other seven stories broadcast between 5am and 7am, four can be grouped in the category on crime. One of them, on Bollywood's biggest star, Amitabh Bachchan, and his income tax problems, also overlaps into the cinema section. I will discuss this story in detail a little later. In another case, where the jewellery of Bengal's most famous cricketer and former India team captain, Sourav Ganguly, was stolen by a domestic help, a crime story, encroaches into the category of cricket.

The third crime story, which was also picked up by *Star News*, was the story of the cook of an underworld don who had just been released from jail. This too will be discussed later. Another story in the cinema category was the remaking of two classic Bollywood films from the 70s. A story on the dip in the stock market can be grouped into the business category. The last story was about a group of pilgrims who had been stranded on their pilgrimage because of heavy snowfall in the Himalayas. As there were several Bengalis who formed part of the pilgrimage entourage, *Star Ananda* kept a focus on this story.

Star News

The morning bulletins from 5am to 7am are called *Paheli Khabar* (First News). The production conditions were similar to *Star Ananda* though with a few more personnel in Mumbai owing to the larger scale of operations.

Two wagons had caught fire in the Mumbai dockyard on the previous night. No one was hurt, but shots of raging fire make good pictures for television, and as the chapter on editorial processes show, journalists look for striking visuals for a news story. The story was therefore accorded prominence. The morning bulletin started with this incident followed by World Cup Football reports and stories on cricket. Next was the story of a person employed as a cook in Dubai by Dawood Ibrahim, an accused in the Mumbai blasts of 1993 and one of the most high profile criminals in India. The cook, who had been arrested by the police on his return to India, had just been released. This story was also carried in the morning bulletin in Kolkata, though not as a headline. The final headline was that of alleged land grabbing by India's most famous female pop singer and Bollywood icon, Lata Mangeshkar.

There were three other stories besides the headlines that were included in the morning bulletin. The first was that of a famous Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt who had been implicated in the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts. The story relates to the central government, the prosecutor, diluting their own case against the actor. Another story, which was to unfold over the next three days, was of the income tax

department of the central government sending notices to Bollywood's biggest star Amitabh Bachchan. This same story also appeared in *Star Ananda*'s morning section on the same day. The story has a background that involves the first family of Indian politics, the Gandhis, and all the ingredients of a typical Bollywood melodrama. The film star Amitabh Bachchan was a schoolmate and close friend of Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister who was assassinated by LTTE guerrillas. Rajiv Gandhi was the grandson of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the son of Indira Gandhi, the country's only female Prime Minister, who was killed by her own bodyguards. When Rajiv became Prime Minister, Bachchan entered the political fray at the behest of his friend and was elected as a Member of Parliament before things turned murky and he was implicated in the Bofors scandal which allegedly involved monetary kickbacks from a Swedish arms firm to Indian politicians to secure arms deals. Though Bachchan was exonerated, and not a shred of evidence found against Rajiv, the political dream had turned sour and Amitabh left politics. After Rajiv's death, the relationship between their two families deteriorated and Amitabh joined hands with the political opponents of the Gandhi family. There were deep insinuations that his continuing 'harassment' by the income tax was at the behest of the Gandhi family. Amar Singh, a prominent politician belonging to a rival political faction of the Congress to which the Gandhi family belongs, is a media declared friend of the Bachchan family. He and his wife were shortly served with an income tax notice which will become another prominent news story in our analysis, further fuelling speculations of 'harassment'. The third story is of the petrol price hike. Unlike in the West Bengal coverage which deals with the political parties and alliances of the Central Government with the Left parties resisting the hike, this story focuses on the dilemmas of the middle classes who will be economically affected.

Analysis

If we look at the headlines and the other news stories, besides the hike in petrol prices, the stranded pilgrims, and a story on the stock market,

all stories aired on *Star Ananda* can be grouped into either the sports or crime category. I have grouped the wagon fire story under crime simply because the crime reporter was usually assigned such stories and s/he would have to do the follow up if necessary. In this case, the story fizzled out soon after the morning bulletins. To understand some of the processes behind how news stories are selected, let me divide the crime stories in two divisions; ones that have been aired by both the channels and the ones that are exclusive to *Star News*.

The stories about the cook and the income tax notices to Mr Bachchan are televised by both channels. Filed by reporters in Mumbai, they have been translated in Bengali for *Star Ananda*. The fascination with Bollywood, despite being geographically distant from West Bengal, is greeted with as much enthusiasm in Kolkata as in Mumbai or Delhi. Amitabh's iconic status, the clash with the Gandhi's and the hint of scandal makes the story 'saleable'. Similarly, Dawood Ibrahim has achieved iconic status and is easily identifiable. After the Mumbai blasts of 1993 and then in 2000 when the US government declared him an international terrorist, stories relating to him abounded in the media, though this was far more true of Mumbai than Kolkata as I shall demonstrate a little later in this chapter.

By the above yardsticks, the story of Lata Mangeshkar's alleged acquisition of land, and Sanjay Dutt's case should have got prominent air time on *Star Ananda*. Lata is revered in Bengal as she is in Mumbai, but the story did not feature in the morning and only came up later in the mid morning bulletins, a non-primetime slot. Not only is Sanjay Dutt a known film star but the case involving him relates to terrorism, Mumbai blasts and national security: all easily identifiable tropes of television news in India. This story finds no mention at all. So why were these stories not carried?

Several reasons may be attributed. First of all, *Star Ananda* had more stories in the morning than *Star News* on that particular day. *Star Ananda* had ten stories compared to seven stories being followed by *Star News*. *Star Ananda* coverage of the World Cup was also infinitely more detailed than that of *Star News*, with prominence given to local

stories about Kolkata crowds watching the tournament. No such stories were broadcast from Mumbai. The petrol hike story was also more politically nuanced in *Star Ananda* and therefore longer. The story on the Salim Group investment in Kolkata was also followed with lengthy reports leaving less time for other stories.

But despite an obvious shortage of time, both the story of Lata Mangeshkar and Sanjay Dutt could have made the news bulletin at the cost of two other Bollywood or crime stories. If audience interest was the sole reason for choosing a story, as the journalists interviewed seem to articulate, then these two stories were as valid a news story as the rest. The fact that they did not make the news cycle highlights the unpredictability of news bulletins which can depend on the producer; what he or she thinks should be included in a particular cycler; or even what story is readily available in the news basket from which the producer makes his or her choices. It could well be that the two stories which were not seen on *Star Ananda* were simply not sent to Kolkata; the server that links both the cities could have been down and therefore the story not uploaded in time for it to make it to the morning bulletin. This unpredictability will always make cast iron theories of news production suspect. Patterns can be discerned but allowances need to be made for the sheer unpredictability of various situations.

June 15th, 2006 (Day 2): 5 am to 7.30 pm

Star Ananda

For *Star Ananda*, on the second morning of our analysis, there were fewer stories than on the previous day, but the World Cup report was longer with detailed coverage of the previous night's England game and joyous celebrations of the Kolkata spectators on England's win. Six headline stories were included, with the Football World Cup being the first. The second headline was the continuing cricket series. The third headline was the granting of bail to Rahul Mahajan. The next was a major story that had happened in Mumbai the previous day. An unidentified shooter entered the offices premises of one of Bollywood's most famous directors, Mahesh Bhatt, fired two rounds in the air and left. The story was a follow up on investigations and reactions. The penultimate headline was the IIFA awards in Dubai, and the last referred to the continuing story of the Salim group's state investment propositions. Besides the headlines, one more story came up from one of the districts of West Bengal, filed by a stringer. The story details the killing of a local political leader by Maoists. This story featured twice more in the day's bulletin.

Star News

As with *Star Ananda* on the same morning, there were also six headline stories in *Star News*. The Football World Cup and the ongoing cricket series made headlines. The Bollywood festival at Dubai was next. The next two headline stories followed Rahul Mahajan getting bail from court for possession of cocaine and the alleged killer of his father, his uncle Praveen Mahajan, giving statements to the press hinting that a former Prime Minister was controlling the Mahajan family. The final story concerned income tax notices being sent to Amitabh Bachchan's friend and prominent politician, Amar Singh, and his family. Besides the headlines, as in the Bengali channel, there was just one more story for

221

the morning bulletin. Rats were destroying precious harvest in the north east of India and the army was helping to curb the menace by burning the bamboo trees that was helping the rats prosper. This story was dropped after the morning bulletins.

Analysis

In both channels the concentration on sports, Bollywood and political scandals and crime is obvious in the morning headlines. However, the two stories which do not make the headlines: in *Star Ananda* the news of a local politician being shot dead, and in *Star News,* the story of the rat-infested crops, are indicative of a particular practice in both the channels.

Earlier in the chapter, I quoted Yuvraj Bhattacharya, the Head of the Assignment Team, on how he kills stories which do not conform to his requirements or those he feels do not target the core audience. The story of the politician being shot dead is from the districts of West Bengal and is imagined not to be of particular interest to the metropolitan audience of Kolkata. Yet *Star Ananda* does want to penetrate the rural markets of West Bengal, as indicated by Bhattacharya in his interview with me quoted in the chapter on editorial practices. By airing the story Bhattacharya didn't give his reporter any cause for complaint, but by not giving it much prominence through primetime slots, he has kept his focus on the core audience in Kolkata.

The *Star News* story needs some explanation and context. The north-east of India consists of seven states and lies in a remote corner of the country. Audience measurement boxes, as I have explained in the chapter on the subject, are not placed in this region and therefore the audience here does not form the core target group of *MCCS*. To cover the seven states, just one reporter is deputed – a fact that is indicative of the region's significance in the national imaginary. The question arises: why did this story appear at all and why is a reporter stationed there if the area is not considered important? Land disputes with China

222

and continuing insurgency movements post Indian independence make the north-east a violent yet integral part of how the Indian nation is imagined, much of which is territorial. It might not be important to the notion of the nation, yet there is a need to claim it as one's own, and therefore the posting of the lone, solitary reporter. Not important, but necessary to flag the territory.

As mentioned above, certain stories that are not perceived to be of interest to the core audience is "killed" in the early morning or late night bulletins. The stories, once aired, stifles a reporter's complaint of being ignored - but they are not allowed into primetime news bulletins. Also, the lack of news flow is another reason why stories which do not make it past the morning bulletins, appears in these slots. Though I am not doing a textual analysis, it is still important to reiterate the differences in the way that cricket and football are covered in the two channels. In *Star News*, despite the World Cup, football continued to receive less prominent coverage than cricket, underlining that the target audience is seen to identify more with cricket in Mumbai and the Hindi Speaking Market (HSM). *Star Ananda*, while continuing to pay attention to cricket and its coverage, gives more importance to the World Cup and has special programmes around the event. As I stated earlier, it is a reporter from *Star Ananda* who cover the event for both channels.

June 16th, 2006 (Day 3): 5 am to 7.30 am

Star Ananda

On day three, the morning bulletin ran with the headline story of the proposed petro-chemical hub in West Bengal with reporters filing reports from villages where land was to be acquired for the project. Whilst on the first day, June 14th, the story had failed to make even the morning headlines; the story was now major headline news. The Indonesian based Salim Group was now proposing large amounts of money for investment. The second story, on similar lines but with an

Indian company, was about the Tata group acquiring land in the district of Singur in West Bengal for an automobile factory.[120] The Rahul Mahajan story grabbed the next headline slot with the story shifting to his homecoming and family reactions after he got bail. The third headlines were reports on the matches in the World Cup; and the final story was on the IIFA celebrations.

Three international stories also featured on this morning. One, filed from Berlin by the World Cup correspondent from *Star Ananda,* was on the city's history; the second was about a blast in Sri Lanka; and the third was on floods in China. International stories are not generally given much prominence in either news channel. The sudden appearance of the two stories on China and Sri Lanka, therefore needs more attention and I take them up in the analysis section just below.

Star News

This day wore a different look compared to the morning bulletins of *Star News* on the previous two days. The number of stories was astonishingly high. Besides the headlines, which followed similar patterns to the first two days, two other sections were included: *khabre desh bhar* (news from around the country) *and khabre duniya ki* (news from around the world). Special note needs to be taken of the latter. Though on the same day *Star Ananda,* too used three international stories, the blast in Sri Lanka was the only story used by both channels.

Analysis

I have shown, in the chapter on editorial practices, through interviews with the editors of the foreign desk in both channels, the lack of importance accorded to international stories. The foreign desk editor at *Star Ananda* was a trainee journalist (Oly), which shows the importance accorded. I refer again to an interview with Manish Kumar, the foreign

---

120   In a similar turn in events, the Tatas at the time of writing, withdrew from West Bengal. given peasant protests and uprisings against land. acquisitions.

desk producer at *Star News*. He said:

> Since I have joined here, I have been moulded or motivated by my seniors to selects stories, especially international stories, with an eye on good visuals, even if there is absolutely no news peg to the story. Initially I tried to get good stories, which were headlines in the BBC, into the rundown. But I soon realised that these stories will not be carried. No point wasting energy and time on things that are unproductive. So I do what is expected of me now. (06/06/2006)

Observing the foreign desk's news practices in both channels, it became clear that while the editor would prepare several agency stories for the bulletin producer's consideration, many would not be aired. At times, when there was a dearth of stories for morning bulletins, these international news stories were used. The morning bulletin, as I have said before, was slightly more diverse than the prime time bulletins which only focused on one or two particular issues.

The international stories selected by the two news channels are interesting and help us in identifying how the journalist imagines their audience and hence the self. The first story in the international section in *Star Ananda* was on the charity work of Bill Gates. Since the software boom, Gates has become an easily identifiable name and, given the success of the Indian middle class professionals in the software industry, many dream of emulating his achievements. The second was a bomb attack in Sri Lanka. India and Sri Lanka are neighbours. In the current political scenario of "global terrorism," given India's acrimonious relationship with Sri Lanka and the role of the Indian army in trying to contain the LTTE in the mid 1980s, a blast in Sri Lanka is a concern to India. Most journalists and their audiences would be familiar with the story. The third story was of Shashi Tharoor, an Indian who was canvassing for the post of UN Secretary General. This story was again about desire and articulation; the global Indian aspiring for a prestigious international position of power and influence.

In *Star News*, the second story on this day's morning bulletin was about the Queen of England celebrating her birthday. India and

England's shared history makes this story easily identifiable. The next was the bomb attack in Sri Lanka which was also carried in *Star Ananda*. The third story was about a prisoner freed in Baghdad. Given the dimensions of the "War on Terror", media coverage to it and the world's attention, it is an easily identifiable international news story. The final story was on the IIFA awards in Dubai which had been included as an international story for this bulletin.

As I move from the early morning bulletins to the later news cycles, a few points need stressing. The obsession with cricket, crime and cinema is already visible even in these early stages of analysis. Also, as I have shown, there is some diversity in the morning bulletins which lessens as the day progresses and news agendas are established. International stories not used from the previous day are a part of this diversity. I have argued that even these stories generally have to fall into the pattern of that which the news producers imagine their audiences can identify with.

7.30am to 10am

Star Ananda* and *Star News

The news bulletins for this next time period changed little for either channel as not much fresh news feed would come in from reporters. Some of the key stories or themes would, however, have been identified as having the prospect of being the big news stories of the day. The journalist for the morning shift on the assignment desk would come in at 7am and the handover from the night person would start. S/he would have started giving the final touches to the morning list of stories for the editorial meeting.

These hours were crucial within newsroom functions as it was the time when the news agenda for the day starts being set. The morning editorial meeting with Delhi took place in Mumbai around 9am when the decision was made as to what the big stories would be and how they would be projected. In *Star Ananda*, there was no regular

formal meeting but the head of the assignment desk, the output desk and the bureau chief had morning conversations on the phone to set the news agenda.

Here we must remember, and as I mentioned in the chapter on corporate strategies, that the media market treats news as an essentially male genre; the 25 + male being the prime target. But as Sonal, the Deputy Head of the Sales Team, told me, "*Star News* and *Ananda* [are] also trying to actively work towards the 15 + category, that is the school-going children." Therefore, we can safely assume that these news bulletins were targeted not only at office-goers but school going children too.

June 14ᵗʰ, 2006 (Day 1): 7.30am to 10am

Star Ananda:

Ball Pagol (*Mad for the ball*), the first of the several scheduled sports programmes, was screened at 7.30. A half hour programme, it focuses on the Football World Cup and matches from the previous evening with predictions of how the next few matches will fare. It is hosted by the sports correspondent of Ananda Bazar Patrika, the Bengali daily and the parent company of *Star Ananda*. Another 15 minutes of a scheduled World Cup programme would be aired at 8.45am. *Berliner Lorai* (*The fight in Berlin*) was hosted by a regular anchor along with a former Bengali footballer who has played some international football in the 1960s. Besides these programmes, the other stories followed the same pattern as the early morning bulletins

Star News

Between 7.30am and 8am, the headlines focused on the World Cup and three international stories: riots in Bangladesh, a train crash in Tokyo and a story on the Al Qaeeda. There was also a story on the stock exchange's performance. Between 8am and 10am, three stories were

focussed on. Cricket headed the list, followed by World Cup and singer Lata Mangeshkar's alleged land embezzlement story. At 8.30am, a scheduled programme on cricket *Wah Cricket* was telecast.

Analysis

The limited diversity which we saw in the headlines and stories from the first early mornings became visibly reduced as channel producers started focussing on what they identified as key areas of interest for their notionally defined audience: at this point office-going males and school-going students. Yuvraj Bhattacharya, assignment head of *Star Ananda* told me "Our audience is in a rush to leave. We give them a quick pill of all the important things they need to know before they leave." These important things that the journalists identified as the headlines were: updates on cricket, the World Cup and the story on the Salim Group, sports and imagined prosperity were the main focus. The rest of the bulletins and the story categories reflected the same concerns. There were interviews with cricket umpires and coaches regarding their teams' performance in the Caribbean; interviews of football fans from Berlin; a story on Brazilian fans' *capoeira* dancing in Germany; and a story on former Indian cricket captain Sourav Ganguly, dropped from the national team and now playing club cricket. In the World Cup stories, effort was made to show that the Bengali reporter was present in Germany, comfortable with reporting from international arenas. Bengalis, who are keen on football, were made to feel part of an international event. At the same time, there were stories relating to the World Cup from Bengal, whether it was prayers being offered for Rooney or the supporters of the Brazilian football team in Kolkata.

It is important to note that though the overall structures of crime, cinema and cricket remained in *Star Ananda,* there was always an attempt to connect with the Bengali television viewers who are the core target audience. An example: Sourav Ganguly, the former Indian cricket captain, was axed from the national team following a much hyped media covered quarrel with Australian national coach, Greg

Chappell. *Star Ananda* led a media campaign against this axing. Even the façade of objectivity was dropped and Yuvraj told me later that the channel felt that Ganguly was a symbol of the talented Bengali hard done by "India" and this was an editorial position consciously chosen by the channel. *Star News* remained either neutral towards Ganguly's exclusion or favoured it.

Bhattacharya told me that Abhik Sarkar, the owner of the *ABP* Group which has majority shares in the channel, rang him to say that maybe the channel had been over-ostentatious in their support for Sourav Ganguly. Yuvraj said that he told Mr Sarkar that if the channel abandoned their position, the public outrage would be detrimental for *Star Ananda*'s image. The editorial policy on this matter continued unchanged. On this particular day, Sourav Ganguly was playing inconsequential club cricket in Kolkata. A reporter was placed there throughout the day and live broadcasts coupled with studio discussions with former cricketers on Sourav's batting ensured that a sporting event which would never be normally covered was given sudden prominence. Given the way channels follow each other, other Bengali news channels followed the story and it was made into a media event. The two other stories on *Star Ananda* fall into the cinema category and had been shown in the bulletins before: updates from the IIFA awards ceremony in Dubai and the remaking of two classic Bollywood films. Sports, Cinema and Business, the paradigms of interests were already being defined in Kolkata's morning bulletins.

Star News showed the same trait of keeping in mind a particular audience while deciding on the news cycle. Mumbai is a crowded city. Commuting from the suburbs to the centre where the offices are situated is a nightmare. Office-goers leave for work as early as possible. The bulletin between 7.30am and 8am is interesting as this would be the time the targeted office-going audience and school children might have a quick look at the morning news while having their breakfasts. The story on the sensex is important to understand in this context. Mumbai is the financial capital of India and the stock exchange, its symbolic centre. A story on the sensex targets audiences to whom the

share market movement is important: the middle and upper class of Mumbai. The next story on the stock market came on the 11am bulletin when the office-going executive might switch on his/her television set in the office to find out how the share market is doing. Two of the international stories again focused on what can be easily identified with. A bomb blast in Bangladesh was of interest, bearing in mind the security situation in India, and Al Qaeeda is linked to the same understanding of security and terrorism. The train crash in Tokyo provided striking visuals; something which the producers of both the channels told me was a priority for international stories making it to the bulletin.

Football, cricket, crime and cinema are the focus of both the channels.

June 15th, 2006 (Day 2): 7.30am to 10am
Star Ananda

There was no change to the headlines from the early morning bulletins. *Ball Pagol*, as usual, came on schedule at 7.30am. World Cup football, cricket, the Rahul Mahajan story, the shooting at Mahesh Bhatt's office the previous day, the IIFA awards in Dubai and the story on the Salim Group continued as headlines.

Star News

A scheduled cricket programme *Wah Cricket* went on air at 8.30am. The Football World Cup and IIFA awards were the main headlines, along with Rahul Bajaj, an industrialist seeking nomination for the Upper House (Rajya Sabha). But every other story was dwarfed by the breaking news that Amar Singh, leader of the Samajwadi Party, had been served income tax notices. By 10am, reporters were filing updates and a press conference was held later in the day. I have already

explained the context of the story, Amar Singh's friendship with movie star Amitabh Bachchan and their rivalry against India's first family, the Gandhi household.

Analysis

In *Star Ananda,* there was not much change from the morning bulletins. This might have been for several reasons: because producers were still deciding on what to focus on for the day; there were no fresh updates on stories and bulletins were repeated with little change; perhaps a producer was busy with other matters and did not feel like adding more stories; or even the repeats were due to a lack of personnel. The story categories are hardly surprising and follow the earlier patterns.

It is clear that *Star News* had found the story on Amar Singh as one of its main focus for the day. The story is a developing one and the channel hoped to keep the audience interest on it. It fulfilled at least two of the basic structures of news at *MCCS* that I have highlighted. The hint of income tax evasion would ensure that the crime reporter is kept on the job all day while Amar Singh's proximity to Bollywood stars, especially the Bachchans, ensures glamour and a hint of scandal.

June 16th, 2006 (Day 3): 7.30am to 10am

Star Ananda

On the third day too, there were no changes in the headlines and stories from the early morning to these later bulletins.. The patterns of stories remained similar, with the Salim Group story leading the headline followed by the story on the Tatas acquiring land for a car factory that we have already discussed. World Cup, IIFA awards, the Rahul Mahajan saga continued.

Star News

231

Vishwa Yudh (*World War*), a programme based on the World Cup, was broadcast at 7.30. This is not the norm, though sports programmes do sometimes get played a few more times than planned and the same programme is relayed again at 9.30am. *Wah Cricket* came on at 8.30am, as usual. Famous Bollywood singer Udit Narayan and the case of his two marriages made headlines and continued as one of the major stories of the day as it developed. The income tax notices to Amar Singh continued as a headline story into the second day. But the breaking news of the moment and the biggest story on the day's news agenda was the suicide of a woman army officer in Kashmir. A story on mutual funds and another on home prices coming down were put in the business section. Another story, not yet headlines but which would demand live broadcast and updates later in the day was an unemployment *mela* (carnival) organised in Lucknow, capital of India's biggest state Uttar Pradesh, by the state's Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav. The story was about the Chief Minister offering Rs 500 (approximately 6 GBP) to unemployed adults of the state. It was aimed at a Hindi speaking audience, Uttar Pradesh being the Hindi heartland of North India and India's most populous state. To further emphasise how stories are tailor made for "audiences", this story found no mention in *Star Ananda* which caters to the Bengali speaking audience.

Analysis

In the earlier three chapters, I established that journalists overwhelmingly understand news as what the audience wants. Given the corporate focus on maximising profits and an editorial obsession with ratings, news in the two channels were bound to cater to audience tastes. Middle class journalists construct the audience as an imagination of the self. Kolkata has lagged far behind Mumbai in terms of capital investment and financial health and it is the middle class journalist's aspiration for increased opportunities that lead to the extensive coverage given to the Salim Group. The fact that on ground farmers were unhappy about giving up their land was completely

ignored.

Sports, both cricket and football are high TRP garners. What is fascinating about the news coverage of both cricket and football on *Star Ananda* however are not the sports themselves but how the audience is invited to identify with them. Sourav Ganguly is one of India's most high profile cricketer and a Bengali. His involvement in an innocuous club level game therefore acquires significance and is promoted throughout the day. In *Star News,* this sporting event finds no mention. The football World Cup reports too, try to situate the audience in a context through reports of fans in Kolkata. Besides these, the fascination with crime and Bollywood is evident. The biggest scandal of recent times has been the Mahajan saga which unfolded like a soap opera on both channels with Rahul's tearful return home and reunification with family, completed with a trip to the temple. Scandals and deaths, income tax notices, celebrity gossip and sports continued to set the news agenda on the third day in *Star News* which, as news producers like to say was a "newsy day".

10am to 12 noon: Midday Production Practices at *Star Ananda* and *Star News*

If newsroom processes are taken into account, this is a busy time. However, if we go by the market evaluation of audiences, then this is the off peak period, where news viewing is believed to be low. Television advertising spots cost the least mid-morning and, in the afternoon the television audience is believed to be mostly housewives (not perceived as viewers of news channels). Unless a major incident takes place, news channels do not fare at the top of the audience's choice, audience viewing patterns and surveys claim. (see chapter 4)

Within the newsroom, however, things are hectic. Morning meetings would have finished by now and the various producers and heads of departments briefed on stories being followed. Accordingly, reporters would be assigned to their stories. The assignment desk would also be in touch with the reporters in the different states who

would be going out for the day's story. Unless there was a story which was breaking or being followed from earlier, the content of the regular news bulletin would not change much from the early morning bulletins. News programmes were generally added to the news cycle to lend variety.

10am to 12 noon: June 14th 2006 (Day 1)
Star Ananda

Stories from the football World Cup, the Salim Group story and IIFA continued as headlines. To this was added the rail wagons catching fire in the Mumbai dockyard. It was treated as a voice over[121] and was definitely being used because of the spectacular shots of fire. A story from Mumbai on the making of Bollywood film *Krrish* also made the headlines. Besides the headlines, several stories made it to the bulletins in these two hours. The remaking of Bollywood films and the story of pilgrims suffering on the Amarnath Yatra which was filed by a *Star News* reporter was translated for these bulletins. The *Star News* reporter, keeping the Kolkata audience in mind, interviewed some pilgrims from the city who are stranded. Rahul Mahajan's bail application found place along with the singer Lata Mangeshkar's alleged land grabbing story. Both these stories were shown in both the channels though the latter story did not make it to the headlines in Kolkata as it did in Mumbai. The story of Dawood Ibrahim's cook continued. There were some international stories too: Maoists freed by the Nepal Government, a storm in Florida and a report on the fragile political situation in Bangladesh. There was also a separate section called *Kolkata sharadin* (*All day in Kolkata*) which listed the various cultural events happening in the city that day.

121A voiceover means that a full story with details and interviews is not filed. Instead, pictures are shown along with an explanatory commentary.

The headlines were similar to the morning; the main issues until now remained Rahul Mahajan's bail, cricket and the World Cup. The share market was then looked at in detail. Two other stories - the making of the film *Krrish* and Nigerian students being asked to leave Mumbai for being involved in drug trafficking - were broadcast in these bulletins besides the scheduled crime programme *Sansani* (*Sensational*) and *Saans Bahu aur Saazish* (SBS).

Analysis

I have already described in the chapter which looks at corporate practices how, during the makings of films, news channels tie up with film producers for rights to exclusive footage and interviews. Whichever film a particular news group ties up with gets promoted on that channel. *MCCS* had a tie up with Rakesh Roshan, the producer of *Krrish*, and the film was promoted by both the channels.

Few new stories were added to earlier bulletins, though in *Star Ananda* there were three international stories. Nepal and Bangladesh are neighbours across the border of West Bengal. The political situation in Bangladesh is a major source of concern for the media in the state as are the Maoists activists of Nepal. The floods in Florida again made for arresting visuals. For *Star News,* there is less variety. The only new story added was about the Nigerian students in Mumbai suspected of drug trafficking. This again falls under the category of crime. Two of the most successful programmes in *Star News* were repeated from the previous day in these two hours. At 10.30am, the crime programme, *Sansani* (*Sensational*), was broadcast. The other programme was *Saans, Bahu aur Saazish* and was aired at 11.30am. This particular episode is a repeat of the previous day's show. The afternoon broadcast at 2pm will show a new episode but already women were being targeted as the primary audiences until the men come back from office. Also, for the office-going male, the share market news features prominently on all

three days during this time period.

10am to 12 noon: June 15ᵗʰ, 2006 (Day 2)

Star Ananda

There was little change from the earlier bulletins, though the international section, *Baire Dure,* was added at 11.50am. The first story on this section was on scientists working on the smile of *Mona Lisa* (Leonardo da Vinci's most famous painting) to figure out her body structure and height. The second was on the auctioning of Prince Margaret's jewellery in England. The third looked at spectators at the Football World Cup.

Star News

The Rajya Sabha (Upper House) elections were looked at in detail, with reporters filing fresh stories. This was a political story of how various parties were trying to propel their choice of candidates into the Upper House. Tax notices to Amar Singh's family and the sensex movements were the other headlines. Pravin Mahajan's insinuation against a former prime minister and his statements on the murder of his brother was another story included in these bulletins.

Analysis

It was usually the foreign desk producer of *Star Ananda,* Oly who updated *Baire Dure (Outside and Afar),* the international news section in the evenings. The stories used in the afternoons, therefore, were from what was not used the previous evening. The choices of the stories were interesting, again revealing something about both producers and audience. The first story was on Mona Lisa. Da Vinci's most famous painting is known to most television audiences. The second is on the auctioning of Prince Margaret's jewellery in England

and India's colonial past and Kolkata also being the Capital of British India until it shifted to Delhi makes the identifications with this story quite possible. The inclusion of the third story on spectators at the football World Cup is self-explanatory given the hype over the event in Kolkata. The scheduling of *Baire Dure* as a programme was not necessarily fixed. It was inserted quite randomly within news cycles through the day, and depended on the bulletin producer's need to ensure variety into the news cycle. The other headlines during these hours continued almost exactly from the earlier bulletins. The story on the Salim Group venture, however, was given much prominence with the studios doing live broadcast and interviews with reporters and local people from where the land acquisition was proposed to happen. Another interesting feature of the bulletin is not in an inclusion, but the dropping of a story. The firing at film director Mahesh Bhatt's office was dropped. The same story was to be dealt at in detail in *Star News* but in Kolkata the fascination with the underworld is limited when compared to Mumbai as the latter is the epicentre of India's underworld activities, linked as it is to the Bollywood film industry. However, family sagas and soap operas must be similar in both cities as the story of Rahul Mahajan visiting the temples after his release on bail continued.

In *Star News*, the *Rajya Sabha* election was then covered with updates and fresh reports. This story was being ignored in Kolkata. Rahul Bajaj, who was seeking a seat in the Upper House, comes from Mumbai and is a prominent industrialist of the city. The ignoring of the story in Kolkata and its coverage in Mumbai again reflects that news is produced keeping a focused audience in mind even though the essential structures remain the same.

10 am to 12 pm: 16th June, 2006 (Day 3)

Star Ananda

The headline addition to the earlier bulletin was an interview with the film star Amitabh Bachchan at the IIFA Awards in Dubai. The report

was filed by a *Star News* reporter and was used by *Star Ananda.* Clips of the interview, especially Bachchan talking about his tax problems, were put in the context of a news story about the recent income tax notices to the superstar and his response to it. The interview was billed as an exclusive. However, variety is added to the bulletin through several other stories. The final story of the next four bulletins in this time period was that of a West Bengali artist painting various portraits of Amitabh Bachchan, for which an exhibition had been organised. The previous stories were that of Bollywood star Salman Khan jailed for shooting endangered animals and a strike at the All India Medical Sciences Institute (AIIMS). The problems for pilgrims at the Amarnath journey and the story on rats eating crops in the north-east are also included in these bulletins.

Star News

The army officer's suicide was clearly going to be the story of the day. Fresh stories were being filed and reporters had reached the house of the parents. Interviews with the family were being shown. The other big story was the unemployment festival in Lucknow. Live broadcast had begun and a reporter was present at the spot interviewing people. A new story, that of Bollywood actor Rakhi Sawant who had accused a singer of molesting her was also broadcast. This story had dominated the television channels with Sawant, a fringe actor, attaining instant stardom. News channels had vied with each other to get her in the studio to repeat her accusations and shots of the party where the alleged incidents took place were repeatedly shown. Sensex movements and information on the share market continued. Besides the headlines, there were stories on mutual funds and their performance, the possibility of housing prices coming down and a story of the chairman of Jet Airways, a private airline, not being allowed to sit on the board of an airline company he had just acquired. The earlier package of their international stories was also broadcast for one bulletin.

Analysis

On both the channels, the focus was on crime and cinema. Stories on Bachchan, the recently jailed Salman Khan, and Rakhi Sawant highlight the fascination with, and the focus on, cinema. The suicide of an army officer was a scandal and given prominence as a breaking news event. The business and stock market got continued coverage.

12noon to 5pm: Production Practices at *Star Ananda* and *Star News*

The excitement of the morning meetings, the assigning of stories and the hustle and bustle of people coming and going die out in the newsrooms during this part of the afternoon. The agenda would be known (unless there was breaking news), developments were being followed and reporters out covering stories were being asked for updates. Editors and script writers would be busy preparing stories for the primetime bulletins and also keeping a watch on new feeds coming in from various reporters across the country. These new feeds would later be edited into stories.

Scheduled programmes were used to break the monotony. In *Star Ananda*, between 3pm and 5pm, there was however an enormous shift in the flow of stories. Stringers and reporters from the remoter districts of West Bengal filed stories that were aired in these hours. The stringers were generally local reporters who were not very well trained and used mediocre quality cameras for their work. Though the stories were edited in Kolkata, editors frequently complained about the lack of good footage [from which] to edit a story.

Despite the lack of quality footage, the stories would still be aired as *Star Ananda* attempted to move beyond the metropolis of Kolkata and target rural audiences. The market reasons were spelt out by Yuvraj Bhattacharya, assignment head of the channel: "The aim is to penetrate the markets [districts of West Bengal] like *Ananda Bazar* [the newspaper] does. Not only the A market [Kolkata] but B, C and D

239

[progressively poorer districts] markets must be targeted." Despite the attempts to penetrate the rural market, the affluent target audience remains in Kolkata. The afternoon therefore became a convenient time to "dump" stories from the districts of West Bengal.

2 pm to 5 pm: June 14th – June 16th 2006

Star Ananda

There were three scheduled programmes in these five hours, which already indicates a lack of enthusiasm for regular news bulletins in the afternoon and an attempt to get the audience by appointment. Of these, one was repeated twice, which meant that four slots were reserved for pre-packaged programmes. Two were on the football World Cup and *Hoi Maa Noi to Bou Ma*, the Bengali equivalent of the *SBS* show, was aired twice. There were no major changes to headlines, except that at 4pm, the Sourav Ganguly story on the former Indian captain playing club cricket was updated and there were live reports saying that he had scored some runs in the match. In all the three days analysed here, the headlines did not change much, though new stories on local issues made it to the headlines. On the first day, there were five local stories: some local robberies; a hospital closed in a district because of a lack of doctors; bail denied to a local politician; a story on soldiers who fired at their counterparts in Bangladesh near the West Bengal border, and a plan to manage waters of the local rivers. These were interspersed with stories of Rakhi Sawant; the Lata Mangeshkar story, and a story on elephants in Kerala.

Star News

Afternoon June 14th, 2006 (Day 1)

The firing took place at film director Mahesh Bhatt's office on the first day at 12.30pm. That turned out to be the main story for the day as all

channels actively sought to get the better of each other. The other story which was followed was the statement given by Pravin Mahajan. Mahajan allegedly killed his politician brother by shooting him and was now insinuating that a former prime minister and international terrorists were involved in the saga. Though the claims were completely unsubstantiated, the story was followed by every Hindi channel. Rahul Mahajan got bail later in the day in the narcotics case and that too made headlines at 4pm. The scheduled *SBS* was aired at 2.30 targeting the women audience.

Analysis

There is a difference in how news stories were produced in both the channels during the afternoons. *Star News* is the more established channel. The audience research and the market analysis are known and understood by the journalists. The scope for experimentation is less. The stories therefore showed little diversity. In *Star Ananda,* which was yet to complete a year, the scope for experimenting was more. Rival 24-hour Bengali channels were few and have yet to establish themselves. The audience and market research is in its initial stages. The corporate ambition to penetrate into newer markets and tap into new audiences allows for a bit more diversity in the news cycles, even if very briefly. For *Star News,* the shooting at Mahesh Bhatt's office was top on the news agenda. Cinema and crime are winning propositions, news producers told me, and a combination of both is unbeatable. While *Star Ananda* was yet to focus on a particular 'news agenda' and was promoting the Sourav Ganguly story, Mumbai focused on the Mahajan saga and the shooting. Cricket, crime and cinema, therefore, continued to be the main structures.

2 pm to 5 pm: June 15ᵗʰ, 2006 (Day 2)

Star Ananda

On the second day at 1pm one of the headlines was on a home science

course being started at the local university. All other headlines were from the morning bulletins though some of them were updated. Besides this, there were five stories filed by stringers from the districts of Bengal. They included Maoists killing a local politician, the sexual assault of a mentally challenged girl, and the removal by the state of security provided to a girl raped by the police. All three stories fall under the category of crime. Two other stories, one on the state government banning political writings on walls and another on a local university being unable to start a medical college because of a lack of funds were also aired. Another story filed by the crime reporter in Kolkata relates to a police officer getting text messages on her cell phone from an anonymous person who proclaimed his love for the officer.

Star News

On the afternoon of day 2, the Amar Singh income tax story was the main focus. A few minutes past 12pm, a press conference was held at Singh's residence. His friendship with Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan, political feuding with the Gandhi family and allegations of tax evasion gave the story the right ingredients: crime, scandal and cinema and made it the top story of the day. The Mahajan family saga continued with updates; interviews with Rahul Mahajan's sister and uncle after he had come home on bail. Cinema was covered in detail with a news programme *Khabar Filmi Hain* (*Cinema News*) at 1.30pm. This day's episode was based on the IIFA awards ceremony in Dubai. Cinema and crime continued with the Rakhi Sawant story. Mika, the man who had been accused of forcibly kissing Rakhi at his birthday party, had applied for anticipatory bail. There were two other packaged programmes besides the scheduled *SBS*. The first one was on cricket. The second was *Yeh Bharat Desh Hain Mera* (*This India is my Country*), which is a current affairs programme but does not always play at these times. This afternoon's programme was around a new cricket star, Mahendra Singh Dhoni. Another news based show, *Ek Din ki Dulhaan*

(Bride for a night), based around a girl child being rescued by the police from a forced marriage was also aired.

Analysis

Star Ananda is evidently trying to straddle two identities at the same time, that of a "national channel" as also its identity of being a "Bengali channel." The latter forces it to compete with newer channels and give airtime to stories which expand the viewership base rather than focusing only on its core audience. If, in the afternoons analysed, *Star Ananda* burst into a plethora of stories - tick-marking stories from the non metro cities and towns and torn between a Bengali identity and a "national" news agenda; *Star News* by contrast seems to have decided by mid afternoon what the major stories that the channel would focus on are. Apart from unpredictable major story breaks, by mid-afternoon, the channel decided on its primetime programming for the day. The unscheduled news programme *Ek Din ki dulhaan* is interesting as it brings into question what is the difference, if any, between programmes and news at *MCCS*. To the journalist, there is supposedly none. With this in mind, we revisit the words of Uday Shankar, the CEO of the organisation:

> The differences are getting blurred and I think that is the way it
> should be. Such categories have become completely irrelevant. They
> go back to the pre live, pre 24x7 news days. Why did we need to tell
> people that this is a news bulletin and this is a programme? Because
> news was where you told them the day's happenings. You did that in
> the days of *Doordarshan*. It was one channel and then a few others,
> which were all omnibus channels primarily viewed for entertainment
> and then there were a couple of news bulletins. There was this 8.30
> news bulletin on *Doordarshan*, which for several years' people used
> to make an appointment and watch. But before and after that people
> were watching entertainment programmes. But in the days of 24x7, it
> doesn't really matter what people are watching. People know they
> are watching a news channel. The primary identity of *Star News, Aaj
> Tak, NDTV* are that these are news channels; the viewers do not sit

down and make those subtle differentiations. In fact, I have got impatient of those differentiations. These are meaningless intellectual exercises that journalists get into in most newsrooms and are only useful for academic and research value. They do not actually mean very much in terms of creating a programme from the point of view of a journalist or offering a programme from the point of view of a viewer. It does not really mean anything to me. It doesn't really matter. Why are we talking about it? (05/07/2006)

Rajnish Ahuja, the head of the Assignment Team had stated:

I don't think there is any difference left today between programmes and news. Earlier we had programmes like The World This Week 122on Doordarshan. It was a round-up of the weekly events. But now I have the resources to put such programmes everyday. What happens now? You take the main news of the day. Look at it from all aspects, get the background and put together a half hour programme. Now I can make a World This Week every day. I have enough resources. Today in Star News everything is news cum programme. (03/07/2006)

The programme was unscheduled during this afternoon period. But given the news peg, the journalists decided that a half hour programme could be put together for the afternoon. This allowed the channel to advertise it through the morning, thus attempting to create an afternoon appointment with the viewer. Given that it was a story about child brides, the imagination was that it would appeal to the women or housewives, who were the target audience in the afternoon.

2pm to 5 pm: June 16th, 2006 (Day 3)

Star Ananda

Star Ananda featured nine local stories this afternoon, including polio awareness campaigns, protests, killings of local leaders, student strikes,

---

122 A popular weekly programme on world affairs that revolutionised the concept of prime time television viewing in India.

the state of local hospitals and robberies. Besides the scheduled programme *Hoi Ma Noi to Bouma* which clones *Star News*'s *SBS*, another half hour "news programme", was aired at 3.30pm. It focused on a local film actress, Pulokita, who had accused her in-laws of harassing her. Given its placing in the afternoon, when most men are out at work, the programme was probably assuming women as its target audience. The main headline story remained the Salim Group investment, covered from various 'angles' including the former chief minister of the state, Jyoti Basu, voicing his displeasure at the developments.

Star News

Star News's main focus at this stage was on the suicide of the woman army officer. Competing for place this afternoon were several other stories. The Rakhi Sawant episode, with its mix of sex, scandal and cinema was priority along with a story of top Bollywood singer Udit Narayan who, it emerged, had two wives. The story was centred on a court case filed by the singer's first wife. Narayan had failed to turn up in court and images of his first wife crying and interviews with lawyers from both sides became part of the story. The UP chief minister's unemployment gathering at Lucknow was a developing story which was still being followed. At 12.30, *Vishwa Yudh* (*World War*), the football World Cup based programme, was telecast. The other programme besides *SBS* was *Registaan mein rounak* (*Celebrations in the Desert*), based on the IIFA award at Dubai. At around 1pm, the Indian Defence Minister announced that political parties, depending on their membership, would be given land on which to build offices. This story was followed up through the evening as the major political news. A strike at the All India Medical Institute; the slashing of car prices; and a proposed bank for Muslims, all vied for headlines in an afternoon which saw several new stories.

Analysis

Despite this afternoon having been what journalists refer to as a "newsy day", *Star News* did not break from its traditional structure. Cinema, crime and scandal continued to dominate the headlines and an unscheduled programme on Bollywood stars' celebrations in Dubai was added. In Kolkata, the women in the audience were targeted with the news programme on the Bengali cinema star accusing her in-laws of harassment. As the channels approached evening prime time bulletins, it is important to note that international stories, especially on world politics, were remarkable for their absence. Stories tended to focus on particular audience groups, especially in the afternoons where programmes targeting women were aired in both the channels.

5pm to 8pm: Production Practices at *Star Ananda* and *Star News*

The newsroom was at its busiest during the early evening. Most of the reporters would be back from their day's assignments; the senior editors giving the final touches to what were to be primetime news. The core target audience, the 25 plus male, would have been on their way back from office and the 15 plus male, the audience that *Star News* and *Star Ananda* target (see chapter 4), is back from his school or college. Most of the stories would almost be ready, the programmes packaged, and the agenda decided for the day. Within two hours, advertising rates would be the highest the channels charge and the newsrooms would want to highlight what they imagined to be the most "attractive" content.

5 pm to 8 pm: June 14th – June 16th 2006 *(Day 1)*

Star Ananda

At 6pm was the scheduled programme *Ekhon Kolkata* (*Now Kolkata*), a listing of the various cultural events for the evening. The diversity of

the afternoon bulletins was over. There were just three stories now on the bulletin. The "issues", as Yuvraj said, had been decided. The football World Cup and stories around it, Rahul Mahajan getting bail, and the firing at Mahesh Bhatt's office were the only stories that the channel focused on. At 7.30pm, there was another scheduled programme, *Khela Shuro* (*The Game has started*) focusing on football matches and cricket. At 8pm, *Kolkata Ekhon* (*Kolkata Now*) comes on again under a slightly different name and a few additions to the one at 6pm.

Star News

The main stories this evening were focused on Rahul Mahajan, the Mahesh Bhatt incident and cricket. Even the news programme *Aaj ki Baat* (*Today's Topics*) only covered these three stories. The programme was preceded by *Yeh Bhaarat Desh Hain Mera,* (*This is my India*) which on this particular evening was about the marketability of the new cricket star, Mahendra Singh Dhoni. This was followed by the scheduled cricket based programme *Wah Cricket*, a half hour show starting at 7.30pm.

Analysis

The "issues" in both the channels were the World Cup, the firing at a film director's office and the release of a high profile politician's son from jail on charges of drug abuse along with cricket. As I have argued in the introduction to this chapter, the diversity in languages and target audience that might have resulted in diverse articulations does not necessarily take place in the two channels. While there are some differences in stories filed through the day, by evening, when the core audience is being targeted, both channels air almost identical news. The imagined core audience is therefore the same: the affluent middle class.

5 pm to 8 pm: June 15th, 2006 (Day 2)

Star Ananda

In the bulletins between 6pm and 6.30pm, some of the local stories filed in the afternoon were still carried: the policewoman receiving unwelcome texts; a story on incessant rainfall in Bengal; the sexual assault of a young girl; and the lack of funds in Universities in West Bengal. At 6.30pm, the World Cup based programme, *Beliner Lorai,* came on. The headline stories after the programme were the interview with Amitabh Bachchan on his tax issues; the politician Amar Singh receiving income tax notices; the IIFA awards; the Rakhi Sawant story; and the story on Rahul Mahajan's release. The stories on cricket included detailed analysis with former cricketers coming to the studio for expert comments.

Star News

The main stories of the second day were tax notices to Amar Singh; the AIIMS doctors' strike; movement in the Mumbai stock market; and the story of the Mahajan family. Rahul Mahajan's press conference received ample coverage. Besides the headlines, film actor Rakhi Sawant's case against Mika forcibly kissing her was also included in the bulletin, with the former approaching the National Commission for Women to intervene in the case. There were three half hour programmes within these two hours. At 6.30pm, there was *Yeh Bharat Desh Hain Mera.* This evening's episode concerned old men at Varanasi, a Hindu holy town in North India gathering together to celebrate and demonstrate their skills. The programme was promoted as *Aabhi to Hum Jawaan hain (We are Yet Young).* At 7pm was *Aaj ki baat,* a news bulletin packaged as a programme and, at 7.30pm, it was back to cricket with *Wah Cricket. Aaj ki baat* focused on the Mahajan story and the Amar Singh case.

Analysis

Programmes were inserted in news bulletins to create the appointment-based viewing relationship with the audience that I discussed in the chapter on corporate practices. Thus, in the hours just before hitting the main primetime schedule for the evening, there were several news-based programmes, which even if not very different from regular news cycles, had a certain sense of repetition: the same anchors, similar styles of presentation - something which the audience could identify with and come back to watch, knowing what to expect. *Star News*'s scheduled programme *Yeh Bharat Desh Hain Mera* on the older men at Varansi and how they cope, live and work together is interesting as it breaks the stereotypical patterns of what news structures are in the two channels. As I have stated earlier, however much patterns in news structures can be discerned, aberrations and contingencies must be allowed for as the individuality of a particular reporter or programmer occasionally breaks the mould.

5 pm to 8 pm: June 16th, 2006 (Day 3)

Star Ananda

At 6.30pm, after *Ekhon Kolkata, Berliner Lorai* (*The War in Berlin*) was screened. It was repeated at 8pm, followed by *Khela Shuru* (The Game Starts) at 7.30. Besides the World Cup, one headline was about a speech of the West Bengal chief minister in which he asks state trade unions to change their ways and attitudes towards work. This was put next to a story on India's richest businessman, Mukesh Ambani meeting the Chief Minister. It was followed by the story on the Salim Group state investments. Bollywood was not to be left behind and there was more on the IIFA awards from Dubai. The Kolkata actress, Pulokita being harassed by her in-laws was the other story for the evening.

Star News

The suicide of the woman army officer, the two marriages of Bollywood

singer Udit Narayan, and the High Court asking for a case to be filed against the organisers of a fashion show where a model's clothing had come off on stage were the main stories in the news programme and the headlines. At 6pm, *Desh Videsh* (At home and abroad) showed the story of two kidney patients receiving organs from each other's spouses which was treated like a family soap opera with interviews of relatives from each side. At 6.30, in *Yeh Bharat Desh Hain Mera*, a half hour show titled *Crorepati ki kangal patni* (*The Millionaire's Pauper Wife*) described how a rich lawyer had thrown his wife out of the house and how she now lived on the streets. It was followed by *Wah Cricket* at 7.30pm.

Analysis

This evening's bulletin of *Star Ananda* substantiates the point I have made earlier in this chapter that journalists in Kolkata articulate their own desires through the news cycle. Kolkata has been shunned for several decades by the big industries because of the presence of strong workers' union. The message from the Chief Minister and his meeting with the industrialist, Ambani, were stories directed at the growing image of West Bengal as a place for new industries and investment opportunities. This is followed by the story of a multi-million dollar investment by the Salim Group from Indonesia. The desired articulation is that West Bengal is changing economically and is becoming prosperous. The focus is on the sensational in *Star News* and both the scheduled programmes are treated like television soap operas.

8pm to 11pm: Production Practices at *Star Ananda* and *Star News*

By the primetime news hour, from around 8pm, most of the day's work for the input team was completed. The output desk which looks after production quality would still be busy giving final touches to stories or programmes. The senior editors and journalists not going on air would be leaving or planning to leave. On the assignment desk, the handover

from the evening shift to the night shift would be taking place.

8pm to 11 pm: June 14th, 2006 (Day 1)

Star Ananda

The headline stories at these hours remained unchanged. The Salim Group story dominated followed by the story on Rahul Mahajan and the shooting at the film director Mahesh Bhatt's office. The IIFA awards continued in the headlines along with Sourav Ganguly's batting exploits at club level cricket. Reports from the World Cup Football and the cricket series were also included.

Star News

Primetime in *Star News* started with a scheduled programme *Khabar Filmi Hain* (*The News is Cinema*). Two stories made up this programme: the Mahesh Bhatt shooting incident and the making of a new movie, *Gangster*. At 9pm a new programme launched recently called *Satyameva Jayate* (*Truth Prevails*) began. The programme focused on three stories: a boy refused treatment at AIIMS as doctors went on strike; privatisation of some elite colleges and the hike in petrol prices. The headline stories include the Rahul Mahajan saga, the shootout at Mahesh Bhatt's office, the IIFA awards and stories on cricket. Another scheduled programme, *City 60* was at 10pm, focusing on the main events that have happened in the metro cities through the day.

Analysis

Almost every headline, though continuing through the day, was updated. For example, there was a live conversation with his sister in the Rahul Mahajan story; new guests came in for analysis of sporting events of the day: on the Mahesh Bhatt incident, the producers used graphics to try and capture how the shooting had taken place. *Star*

News entered the primetime with a film-based programme each evening. However, their new programme at 9pm, *Satyameva Jayate*, was a result of feedback that the channel needed hard news stories. The programme was advertised as a show that would air stories that affected the audience. This programme had been conceived as a counter to the criticism that *Star News* had not been airing enough hard news stories.

June 15th 2006 (Day 2)

Star Ananda

The headlines this evening were clips of the Amitabh Bachchan interview where the film star spoke about the problems he was facing with income tax authorities. The next headline was the election of the officials of a cricket board in Kolkata. Another story from the afternoon followed: the CID policewoman receiving anonymous texts. The IIFA awards in Dubai, the Salim Group investment and the World Cup were the other headlines. At 8.30pm, a scheduled World Cup Football programme, *Berliner Lorai* was aired

Star News

After the programme *Khabar Filmi Hain*, the new programme *Satyameva Jayate* came on. The first two stories in the programme looked at the Pramod Mahajan incident and the next one was on film star Salman Khan who had been accused of shooting endangered species of animals and was being taken to jail after a long court battle. The next story focused on the doctor's strike at AIIMS and the final story was on diabetes and its spread in India. At 9.30pm, another cricket based programme was aired called *Operation Vijay*[123] (*Operation Winning*). 10pm was the time for *City 60*.

---

[123] Operation Vijay was also the code name for the Indian army operation against the Pakistani army offensive, known as the Kargill war.

Analysis

Star Ananda on this evening had a story on the election of cricket board officials of the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB). Writing on the coverage of the same issue a few days later, Mehta notes:

> On 30th July, 2006, voting for the new governing body of Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) saturated news on all major networks. All channels covered the polling live through the day and at least three commissioned exit polls with professional agencies: Times Now with A.C. Nielson, *Star Ananda/ Anand Bazar Patrika* with Mode and Kolkata TV with IMG-Marg. All this for a regional sports management association with a grand total of 120 voters (2008:196)

Along with cricket, it was cinema and crime which fought for space in both channels. They followed similar stories through the day into primetime. News packaged as programmes were the staple diet of *Star News*; it is an attempt to create the audience loyalty and appointment viewing that I discussed in the chapter on editorial processes.

8 pm to 11 pm: 16th 2006 (Day 3)

Star Ananda

Headline stories focused on industrialist Anil Ambani coming to meet the chief minister of West Bengal; the chief minister's speech asking the state's government workers to change their ways and work harder; and the Salim Group story. The other headlines were similar to *Star News* and included the Rahul Mahajan case, the IIFA awards ceremony, cricket and World Cup Football.

Star News

Bollywood singer Udit Narayan's non-appearance in court in relation to

charges of polygamy; the suicide of a woman officer in the Indian army; the cricket series; and the World Cup were the main headlines. IIFA awards; forensic reports in the Rahul Mahajan case; and a crime story where a group printing bogus court papers was cheating the courts of revenue also made headlines. On *Satyameva Jayate*, the main story was about political parties being given plots of land. The other story was that medicine prices were scheduled to come down. At 9.30pm, cricket based programme *Wah Cricket* was aired.

Analysis

Star Ananda's primetime stories show a difference from those of *Star News*. The stories were focussed this evening on the articulation that the state was on a path of economic progress. The West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya who belongs to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM) exhorted government workers to change work practices and shun industrial action. One of India's richest industrialist came to visit Mr Bhattacharya and the Salim Group had already made promises of large investments. The illusion was of prosperity. I have argued above that this is a middle class articulation made by middle class journalists. Since the audience targeted is essentially middle class, a match making continuously takes place. *Star News*'s focus on primetime remains on Bollywood stars and awards, cricket and scandal.

Conclusion

In the first lines of his book, *The Sociology of News Production*, Schudson defining journalism writes

> Journalism is the business of practice of producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of general public interest and importance. It is the business of a set of institutions that publicises periodically (usually daily) information and commentary on contemporary affairs, normally presented as

254

true and sincere, to a dispersed and anonymous audience in a
discourse taken to be publicly important (2003).

In the Indian context, from the examination of the content of the two
news channels, *Star News* and *Star Ananda,* it is evident that the
"general public" Schudson is referring to is a certain elite section of the
society. In a country where more than 400 million live below the
poverty line, where unemployment, hunger and famine occur
frequently, where continuing insurgency movements threaten several
parts of the nation, coverage of cinema, crime and cricket to the extent
that it colonises almost every news bulletin of national news channels
must be seen as exclusionary. Unlike *Doordarshan,* which constructed
an all inclusive, though North India dominated notion of the nation, the
constructed nation of the private news channels is definitely exclusive.
The "general public interest", therefore, is the perceived interest of the
affluent Indians.

The next chapter, the concluding one will address the merits of
an ethnographic approach to studying newsrooms. Pulling in the
various strands of arguments and empirical data from previous
chapters together, it will seek to ask whether journalism in India and in
a broader context, the global South inherently different and if so, do we
require new categories to analyse news practices? To do so, I will use
Cottle's formulation of the "orthodoxies" of earlier newsroom
ethnographies and examine them against the research data and see
whether they are still useful tools for critiquing news practices in a
different century, in settings which are geographically non-western?

Chapter 8
Conclusion

Hegel reminded the philosophers of his time to read the papers daily. According to Derrida, the same responsibility today would oblige the philosopher "to learn how the dailies, the weeklies, the television news programmes are *made,* and by *whom."* (2001: 1). Hartley has said that news is "the sense-making practice of modernity" and, as such, "the most important textual system in the world (1996: 32). Derrida, therefore was suggesting to the philosopher, the importance of understanding *how* and *who* makes news and thereby creates a sense of who we are, how we understand ourselves, and how we make sense of 'reality'. My research was conducted in this spirit of inquiry; the attempt was to understand how news programmes are made and by whom, and therefore who gets to articulate 'India' and how.

Indian media and also the international press have held up the country as the new Asian economic tiger. The country's economic prowess is demonstrated with Indian companies taking over western industries, be it Ratan Tata's acquisition of the Jaguar in England or another steel plant which comes under the billionaire businessman, Lakshmi Mittal's, anvil. The term Bollywood no longer requires footnotes. However, it is also equally true that India is a poor country. "We [India] are a nation of nearly a billion people. In development terms we rank number 138 out of the 175 countries listed in the UNDP's Human Development Index. More than four hundred million lack even basic sanitation, and over two hundred million have no safe drinking water" (Roy, 2000: xxiv)

The media has been disparaged by scholars for not paying attention to the less privileged sections of society and constructing a world of glitz and glamour (Chakravorty and Gooptu, 2000, Deshpande, 2003, Mehta, 2008). Yet, most of these arguments do not tell us how the media constructs an elite discourse. Why does it do so? What the media practitioners feel about their work routines, ethos and ethics? In short, an ethnographic approach, which this thesis has adopted, has helped to

reveal the complex situated particularities of news practices in Indian television newsrooms; the *whys* and the *hows* of newsrooms' construction of 'reality'. The empirical data generated from this research will provide political economy theorists with ammunition to critique and analyse media practices, especially television news. In short, ethnography, as this research claims to be, can provide data from within, instead of pontificating from the outside.

The "orthodoxies" of media theory: making a case for grounded research

One of the prime drivers of this work was to conduct newsroom based ethnographic research in a part of the world where such work has not been done before. Given India's burgeoning media industry and the country's increasing global influence, such a study seemed quite necessary. Newsroom ethnographies, as discussed in the literature review, have played a significant role in formulating media theory; providing meta-theoretical formulations with grounded, empirical data. Their influence in media theory is remarkable, and yet it is their very prominence which has resulted in an unquestioned acceptance of some of the key tropes in media scholarship. Cottle has called for a "second wave" in news ethnographies which can challenge and question the "orthodoxies" of the first (2000). Chapter 2 of this thesis has detailed how I have worked with four of these "orthodoxies" as theoretical entry points to commence my research. In this concluding chapter, I revisit these "orthodoxies" to see how a "second wave" of news ethnographies can question and critique earlier ethnographic findings, allowing for a reinvigorated media theory.

Routinisation: Professional social activity, quite often, is routinised. Journalism requires a huge amount of daily output, more than most professions, and is therefore highly structured to ensure continuous production. Cottle points out that news ethnographies have shown that

257

routinisation within newsroom leads to create a prominence for "events" based reportage which hides long term process from public view. It also creates a newsroom division of labour and journalists are assigned particular beats and bureaus are located strategically. Journalists also turn to official news sources and this dependency allows official elites to become the "primary definers" of news. Routinisation also creates a "vocabulary of precedents" which creates a journalist's news sense. (2000: 22)

If we examine the empirical data of this research, especially chapter 5, it is evident that both *Star News* and *Star Ananda* are highly routinised in newsroom activities. Journalists perform specific functions within specific formats at specific times and are strictly controlled. *Star Ananda,* I have noted, operates like an assembly line production house. Yet, while agreeing that news production is indeed routinised, the "unintended consequences" (Cottle 2000: 22) of this needs contextualisation in the Indian scenario in particular and also in the changing news ecology everywhere in general.

Ethnographic work in the 1970s and 1980s have noted that the process of routinisation, puts journalists into particular beats as "newsnets" need to be monitored (Rock 1973; Tuchman 1973; Fishman 1980). This, today, can only be partially true. The television news genre has made news beats a less sacrosanct space for individual reporters than it used to be in newspapers. Limited manpower in most news channels mean that reporters are asked to work on several beats at the same time and also collaborate with each other. The demands of immediacy in television journalism also means that if a particular reporter is unavailable and a story breaks in his or her beat, other reporters would have to immediately follow up the story. If we look at the newsroom processes described in chapter 5, it is evident that at night when a sole reporter is present in the newsroom, s/he is responsible for any news breaks, that is, the reporter is in charge of every news beat. The assignment desks in both channels, I have shown, control reporters. They provide information on ground to the reporters and keep them updated. This means that journalists in assignment

desks encroach into every beat. Reporters are asked to provide phone numbers of sources and officials on their beats to the assignment desks. News beats, therefore, no longer work in the manner it did when the earlier ethnographic works, mentioned above, were undertaken.

Most news channels now have guest desks that organise which official or expert should come in to talk on particular subjects. This means that the position of "dependency" individual journalists would enter into with particular news sources is broken to a certain extent. Individual journalists might have favoured certain sources. With several journalists in the play, many more news sources come in. The establishment of news bureaus must also be looked at anew. As news is targeted towards particular audience group, news bureaus in India are created according to what the media managers feel is important for their target audience. So, *Star News,* catering to the Hindi Speaking Market (HSM) will have several more bureaus in the north Indian hindi speaking heartland than it would in the north-east of India which has a just one reporter to cover seven states.

News room routines, Ericson states, also feature in the journalists deployment of a "vocabulary of precedents" that help them to recognise, produce and justify their selection and treatment of "news stories" (1987: p348). Given the importance of the audience in the newsroom (see chapter 6), the recognition, production and justification for stories have completely changed. It is news channels that follow each other in their stories and programming, keeping an eye on the TRP ratings which results in the production of a homogenous content across news channels.

Objectivity: A second orthodoxy, Cottle claims, in part derived from *routinisation,* is journalistic *objectivity.* (Cottle, 2000) Soloski has argued that "objectivity is the most important professional norm and from it flow more specific aspects of news professionalism (1989:33)." Tuchman sees this 'strategic ritual' as a pragmatic response to the elusiveness of objectivity (1972). Also, this claim of 'objectivity' obviates, we are told, the need for explicit organisational policies as a

form of control (Larson cited in Cottle, 2000:28). Given the empirical evidence provided in the preceding chapters, a universal notion of objectivity in newsroom is obviously contentious. In the Indian context, where "[t]he tone of reporting is unabashedly promotional, the stories about private lives and public engagements of film stars: how they celebrate religious festivals, their holidays, their dress and eating habits, their likes and dislikes, are repeatedly given air time – across the board and on an almost daily basis (Thussu, 2007: 105)", the notion of objectivity seems redundant. Journalists have repeatedly told me during interviews that stories are meant for an audience to like and enjoy. Objectivity, as the bureau chief of *Star Ananda* pointed out is for "journalists to be loyal to their employers" (see chapter 5). Given this evidence from newsrooms, objectivity even as a "strategic ritual", surely needs rethinking. Being an empirical impossibility, at best it is a ritual, at worst a pretence. However, the notion hardly influences practices in Indian television newsrooms at most times. If a high TRP rating is achieved, the objective has been served.

Hierarchy of Access: The 'first wave' of ethnographies made a strong case that routinisation of news production coupled with the notion of objectivity serve to access the voices of the socially powerful, and marginalise or even silence those of the institutionally non-aligned and powerless (Hall et al,1982; Goldenberg, 1975; Gitlin, 1980). Social hierarchy is thus replicated in and through the patterns and processes of news access. In the Indian context, this is definitely the case. But again the understanding of the *socially powerful* needs contextualisation. As the empirical evidence and the chapter on news structures show, there is a new breed of elites, film stars and cricket heroes who define national news in India. As Rajnish Ahuja, head of the assignment team in *Star News* pointed out in chapter 5, political reporting is no longer that important in Indian television. The elites to whom Stuart Hall was referring to in the 1980s, the bureaucrats and the politicians, have now changed to film stars and sporting heroes. In middle class India, the less affluent indeed have no voice. Bollywood

icons now define nationhood in Indian television. This obsession with film stars and sporting icons are bringing about fundamental changes in way news is imagined and constructed and needs careful investigation if media theory is to serve any relevant purpose in this emerging news ecology.

The forgotten or the imagined audience

The fourth "orthodoxy" in media studies, Cottle claims, is that "mass audience" by definition being "unknowable", can only be "imagined". "While this literally may be the case, it ignores that the audience approached "as a discursive conceptualisation or typification inscribed by the news producers into their particular news forms rather than as an empirical object 'out there', the 'imagined audience' of the news producers is literally 'at work' within newsrooms" (Cottle, 2000: 34). Chapter 6 of this thesis is dedicated to this understanding of the audience within the newsroom and how it influences news practice. As Cottle states, the audience is literally "at work" within Indian television newsrooms. News programmes are tailor made for specific audiences; news is constructed keeping a particular audience in mind at various times of the day and evenings. Journalists are trained and encouraged through various corporate strategies to understand the likes and dislikes of the core audience and produce news keeping them in mind. Instead of the "unknowable" audience, in Indian television newsroom, the audience has been captured and reified. Journalists know their audience; it is the self and the familiar of middle class India.

Claims of this news ethnography

As a news ethnography, this thesis makes three broad claims that it wishes to inform media theory of. First, the assumed traditional divide between corporate and editorial no longer exists in Indian television newsrooms. Each performs the job of the other, encroach into each other's territories and no line is sacrosanct. Second, journalists imagine themselves as the audience and produce content they think they and their families would like. Most of these professionals come from middle class and relatively prosperous backgrounds. Across television channels in India, middle class journalists producing news for the self and the familiar, result in homogeneity in content. Connected to this is my third claim. Advertisements target the wealthier sections of society. In pursuit of advertisements, television channels too, target the same group as their primary or core audience. With journalists coming from the same economic class as the target audience, a match-making takes place. Privileged journalists articulate for a privileged audience and a hegemonic and singular narrative of an affluent nation is thereby achieved.

Towards a "second wave" in news ethnographies

The orthodoxies of news ethnographies, as the empirical evidence of this research suggests, clearly need a rethink. The categories in themselves, no doubt, are important. Routinisation of news produces certain formats. The rich and the powerful of course dominate the media. Without a notion of objectivity, news becomes increasingly a tool for the social elite. The audience is even more important than ever. In this scenario, as Cottle states, a "second wave" of news ethnographies is urgently needed (2000). Most newsroom ethnographies were conducted in the 1970s and the 1980s. Despite their influence, their numbers were few. A lack of access to newsrooms for researchers means that in recent times, even fewer ethnographic research works

262

are conducted. The news ecology has changed overwhelmingly in the last 30 years. Convergence, digital media, new media and continuous shifts in the political economy have all changed the way news is produced. While the methodology of an ethnographic approach to understand newsroom dynamics remains extremely relevant, more such work is required to provide media theory with empirical data. It is only by a steady accumulation of research data, both from the South and the North, can we start theorising on news practices in today's television newsrooms. This ethnography of two Indian television newsrooms, with its detailed empirical evidence of corporate and editorial processes, of its changing understanding of audiences and analysis of news structures, is a step towards that end.

That contemporary television newroom practices should produce such a particular, middle-class, image of India and discount all the other possible imaginings and realities raises profound questions about the adequacy of India's public sphere and opens up new trajectories for research.

Bibliography

Altheide, D.L., & Snow, R.P. *Media Worlds in the Postjournalism Era.* Hawthorne NY: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991

Anderson, B. *Imagined communities: Reflection on the origins and spread of nationalism,* London, New York: Verso, 2006 (reprint).

Ang, I. *Desperately Seeking the Audience.* New York, London: Routledge, 1991

Appadurai, A. *Modernity At Large,* New York: Routledge, 1990

Arden, J. *America's Meltdown: The lowest common denominator society,* Westport: Praeger/Greenwood, 2003

Batabyal, S. *For God's Sake, Be Objective,* Sarai Reader (472-481), Delhi: Sarai, 2005

Batabyal, S, "Dilemmas of Ethnographic Research: The Practitioner/Academic's Quandary" *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA PGN, Vol 1, No 1, (2007), journalhosting.org/meccsa-pgn/index.php/netknow/article/view/5*

Benjamin, I. *The Black Press in Britain.* Stoke-On-Trent: Trentham Books, 1995

Beville, H.M. Jr. *Audience Ratings: Radio, Television and Cable.* Hillsdale, New Jersey, Hove and London: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, 1988

Bhatt, S.C. *Satellite Invasion of India (Mass Communication and Broadcasting, Journalism, Advertising, Culture)* New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1994

Bidway, P. "Whose Truths?: Indian Media in the Global Village."
Humanscape Magazine, Dec, 1996, 6-8

Billig, M. *Banal Nationalism,* London: Sage, 1995

Boorstein, D.J. (1964). *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America.* New
York: Harper and Row.

Bourdieu, P, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" in *Knowledge,
education and cultural change,* ed, Brown, R. London: Tavistock, 1973

Bourdieu, P, *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge University Press:
Cambridge, 1977

Bourdieu, P, *The Logic of Practice.* Polity Press: Oxford, 1990

Bryman, A. *Social Research Methods,* Oxford, New York: Oxford University
Press, 2001

Butsch, R. *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Televison, 1750-
1990.* Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid: Cambridge University
Press, 2000

Castell, M. *The rise of the network society,* Oxford: Blackwell, 2000

Carter, C., Branston, G. and Allan, S. (eds) *News,Gender and Power.*
Routledge: London. 1998

Chakravorty, R and Gooptu, N, "Imagi-nation: The media, nation and politics
in contemporary India" in Hallam, E and Street, B [ed] *Cultural Encounters,*
Routledge: London, 2000

Chibnall, S. *Law and Order News - An Analysis of Crime Reporting in the
British Press.* London: Tavistock, 1977

265

Cohen, B. *The Press and Foreign Policy.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963

Coleridge, N. *Paper Tigers: the Latest, Greatest Newspaper Tycoons*, New York: Birch Lane Press, 1998

Cottle, S. *TV News, Urban Conflict and the Inner City.* Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993a

Cottle, S. "From BBC Newsroom to BBC News Centre: On Changing Technology and Journalist Practices". *Convergence: Journal of New Information and Communication Technologies* 5(3): (1999) 22-43

Cottle, S. 'New(s) Times: Towards A 'Second Wave' of News Ethnography' *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research, 25(1),* (2000): 19-41.

Cottle, S. 'Rethinking News Access' *Journalism Studies. 1(3),* (2000): 427-448

Cottle, S. 'Contingency, Blunders and Serendipity in News Research: Tales from the Field', *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research, 26(2),* (2001): 149-167

Cottle, S. "Ethnography and News Production: New(s) Developments in the Field", *Sociology Compass* 1/1, (2007): 1–16

Curran, J. and Park, M. *De-Westernising Media Studies,* London, New York: Routledge, 2000

Danahay, D. (ed) *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the self and the social,* Oxford, New York: Berg, 1997

Dayan, D. and Katz, E. *Media Events: the live broadcasting of history*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Deshpande, S. *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*, New Delhi, Penguin: 2003

DeLanda, M. *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, London, New York: Continuum, 2006

Deleuze, G. *Foucault*. London: Continum, 1988a

Deleuze, G., and Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum, 1998b

Derrida, J. *Echographies of Television*, London: Polity, 2001

Dubey, S. 'The middle class', *India Briefing*, Oldenberg, P. (ed) 137-164. Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1992

Dunwoody, S. 'Science writers at work'. In D. Berkowitz (Ed.)(1997), *Social Meanings of News* , (pp.155-167).Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications, 1978

Epstein, E. J. *News from Nowhere: Television and the News.* New York: Random House, 1973

Ericson, R.V., Baranek, P.M and Chan, J. B. L., *Visualizing Deviance: A Study of News Organization.* Milton Keynes: Open University, 1987

Fernandes, L. *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform.* University of Minnesota Press, London: Thousand Oaks, 2006

Fischer, J Michale and Abedi, Mehdi. *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues between Tradition and Postmodernity*, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990

Fishman, M. *Manufacturing the news.* Austin: University of Texas Press. 1980

Foucault, M. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences,* Tavistock: London, 1972

Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison,* New York: Vintage, 1979

Foucault, M. *The Use of Pleasure: History of Sexuality* (Vol 2), Random House: New York, 1990

Gaye, T. "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity", The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Jan., 1972): 660-679

Gandy, O. *Beyond Agenda Setting: Information Subsidies and Public Policy,* Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing, 1982

Ganguly-Scrase, R. and Scrase, J. T. *Globalisation and the Middle Classes in India: The social and cultural impact of neo-liberal reforms,* US, Canada: Routledge, 2009

Gans, H. *Deciding What's News,* New York: Pantheon, 1979

Galtung, J. and Ruge, M.H. "The Structure of Foreign News," *Journal of Peace and Research,* 2, (1965): 64-91.

Geertz, C. *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays,* New York: Basic Books, 1973

Gerbner & Gross, p.182, "Living with Television: The Violence Profile."
Journal of Communication, (Spring 1976): 182

Ghose, B. *Doordarshan Days,* Penguin: New Delhi, 2005

Ghose, S. *Modern History of Indian Press,* Cosmo: New Delhi, 2002

Glasser, T.L. and Craft, S. 'Public journalism and the search for democratic
ideals' in T. Liebes and J.Curran (eds) *Media, Ritual and Identity.* London:
Routledge. 1989

Goldenberg, E. *Making the Papers.* Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath. 1975

Golding, P & Elliott, P. *Making the News.* London: Longman. 1979

Ginneken, J V, *Understanding Global News,* London, Thousand Oaks, New
Delhi: Sage, 1998

Gitlin, T. *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and
Unmaking of the New Left.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980

Gupta, D. *Mistaken Modernity: India between Worlds.* New Delhi: Harper
Collins, 2000.

Hall, S. (ed), Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying
Practices, London: Sage, 1997

Hall, S. 'The rediscovery of ideology: Return of the repressed in media
studies'. in M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran & J. Woollacott (Eds.) *Culture,
Society, Media* (pp56-90). London: Methuen, 1982

Halloran, J.D., Elliott, P., & Murdock, G, *Demonstrations and Communication: A Case Study*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970

Harding,S. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies,* New York: Routledge, 2003

Hartley, J, *Invisible fictions: television audiences, pedocracy and pleasure.* Textual Practice, 1/2: 12-38, 1987

Hartley, J. *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture,* London, Arnold, 1996

Herman, E. and Chomsky, N. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.* London: Vintage, 1988

Hobart, M. *After culture: anthropology as radical metaphysical critique.* Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana University Press, 2000

http://www.rediff.com/money/2008/dec/12you-might-soon-have-500-tv-channels.htm

Inden, R. *Imagining India.* London: Hurts & Company, 1990

Jaffrelot, C and Veer,P. [ed] *Patterns of middle class consumption in India and China* , London: Sage, 2008

Joshi, Vijay and Little, I.M.D. *India's Economic Reforms 1991-2001.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996

Kohli, V. *The Indian Media Business,* New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications, 2006

Kumar, S. *Gandhi Meets Primetime: Globalisation and Nationalism in Indian Television,* Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006

Laclau, E., Mouffe, C. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a radical politics.* London: Verso, 1985

Lakha, S. "The State, Globalisation and Indian Middle-Class Identity" in M. Piches (ed.) *Culture and Privelege in Capitalist Asia,* London: Routledge, (1999):251-74

Lichtenberg, J. "In defence of objectivity revisted", in J. Curran and M. Gurevitch (ed), *Mass Media and Society,* Sage, 1996

MacGregor, B. *Live, Direct and Biased? Making Television News in the Satellite Age,* London: Edward Arnold, 1997

Madianou, M. *Mediating the Nation: News, audiences and the politics of identity,* London: UCL Press, 2005

Mankekar, P. *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India,* Durham: Duke University Press, 1999

Marr, A. *My Trade: A Short History of British Journalism,* London: Macmillan, 2004

Mazzarella, W. *Shovelling Smoke: Advertising and Globalisaton in Contemporary India, ,* Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2003

Meehan, E. 'Ratings and the institutional approach: a third answer to the commodity question', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication,* (1984): 216-25

Mehta, N. *India on Television,* New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2008

Moreley, D and Brundson, C. *The Nationwide Television Studies,* London: Routledge, 1999

Morrison, D. 'Journalists and the social construction of war'. *Contemporary Record.* 8(2), 305-20, 1994

Morrison, D., & Tumber, H. *Journalists at War: The Dynamics of News Reporting During the Falklands War.* London: Sage, 1988

Morson, G. and Emerson, C. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaic.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990

Murphy, D. *The Silent Watchdog: The Press in Local Politics.* London: Constable, 1976

Nainan, S. *Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India,* New Delhi: Penguin, 1995

Neuman, W.R. *The Future of the Mass Audience,* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991

Page, W and Crawley, D. *Satellites over South Asia: Broadcasting Culture and Public Interest,* New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage, 2001

Pedelty, M. *War Stories.* London: Routledge, 1995.

Rabinow, P. *Reflection on Fieldwork in Morocco,* University of California Press: California, 1977

Rajagopal, A. "The Rise of National Programming: The Case of Indian Television" *Media Culture and Society,* 15 (1993): 91-111

Rajagopal, A. *Politics after Television: Religious Nationalism and the reshaping of the Indian Public,* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001

Ram, N. (In Silvers, R and Epstein, B. [ed] *India: a Mosaic,* New York: New York Review of Books, (2000): xi-xiii

Rosenblum, M. *Mission To Civilize: The French Way,* London, New York: Anchor, 1988

Rosenblum, M. *Back Home: A Foreign Correspondent Rediscovers America,* New York: William Morrow and co, 1989

Rock, P. 'News as eternal recurrence'. In S.Cohen & J.Young (Eds.) *The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media.* London: Constable. 1981:64-70

Ross and Nightingale. *Media and Audiences, New Perspectives,* London, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003

Roy, A (In Silvers, R and Epstein, B. ed *India: a Mosaic,* New York: New York Review of Books, (2000: xv-xxxiv)

Sahay, U [ed] *Making News: Handbook of the Media in Contemporary India,* New Delhi: OUP, 2006

Sajal N. "Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Question in North-East India." Social Scientist, Vol. 19, No. 10/11 (Oct. – Nov, 1991):84-96

Scannell, P. "Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Public Life", *Media, Culture and Society,* Vol 11 (1989): 135-166

Scannell, P and Cardiff, D, *A Social History of Broadcasting, vol 1, 1992-1939: serving the nation,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991

Schlesinger, P. *Putting 'Reality' Together: BBC News.* London: Constable, 1978

Schudson, M. *Sociology of news*, New York, London: W.W. Norton, 2003

Shoemaker, P.J. *Gatekeeping.* Newbury Park: Sage, 1991

Shanti, K. *Gandhi Meets Primetime: Globalisation and Nationalism in Indian Television,* Urbana Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 2006

Sigel, L.V. *Reporters and Officials.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1973

Simpson, J. *News from No Man's Land: Reporting the World.* London: Routledge, 2002

Sissors, J.Z. and Bumba, L. *Advertising, Media Planning,* (5th edn), Lincolnwood: NTC Business Books, 1996

Smith, R.R. 'Mythic elements in telvision news'. *Journal of Communication,* 29, (1979): 75-82.

Smyhte, W. *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism. Consciousness and Canada,* New Jersey: Norwood, 1981

Smulyan, S. *Selling Radio: The Commercialisation of American Broadcasting 1920-1934.* Washington, London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994

Soloski, J. "News reporting and professionalism: some constraints on the reporting of news." *Media, Culture & Society,* 11(1989): 207-28, London, Sage Publications.

Sonwalker, P., *Violence as Non-Communication: The News Differential of Kashmir and Northeast Conflicts in the Indian National Press* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester), 2000

Sonwalkar, P. 'Murdochization' of the Indian press: from by-line to bottom-line,
Media Culture Society. (2002) 24: 821-834,

Sreberny, A., in Chan, J. and Bryce, T. [ed] *In Search of Boundaries: Communication, nation states and Cultural Identities,* Westport, CT, London: Ablex, 2002

Stahlberg, P. *Lucknow Daily: How a Hindi Newspaper Constructs Society,* Stockhom: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2002

Taussig, M. *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987

Thomas, Amos Owen. *Imagi-nations and Borderless Television: Media, Culture and Politics across Asia,* New Delhi, London, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005

Thussu, D. *News as Entertainment: The rise of global infotainment,* London: Sage, 2007

Thussu, D. "Murdhochisation of the media: An Asian perspective", (from a paper presented at the 14th Asian Media and Information Centre (AMIC) annual conference Media and Society in Asia – Transformations and Transitions, held in Beijing, China on July 18-21, 2005). Online http://www.compos.org.br/seer/index.php/e-compos/article/viewFile/105/104

Tuchman, G. 'Making news by doing work: Routinizing the unexpected'. *American Journal of Sociology,* 79(1), 110-31, 1973

Tuchman, G. 'Objectivity as strategic ritual: An examination of newsmen's notions of objectivity'. *American Journal of Sociology,* 77, 660-679, 1972

Tuchman, G. *Making News: A Study in the Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press, 1978

Tunstall, J. *The Westminster Lobby Correspondents: A Sociological Study of National Political Journalism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970

Verma, P. *The Great Indian Middle Class,* New Delhi: Penguin India, 2008

Warner, M. 'Organisational context and control of policy in the television newsroom: A particpant observation study', *British Journal of Sociology,* 22: 283-94, 1971

Weaver, D.H. and Wilhoit, G.C. *The American Journalist: A Portrait of US Newspeople and their Work,* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986

Webster, J.G., Phalen, P.F. and Lichty, L.W. *Ratings Analysis: Theory and Practice.* Hillsdale, Hove and London: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, 1991

Webster, J.G., Phalen, P.F. and Lichty, L.W. *Ratings Analysis: The theory and practice of Audience Research,* (2nd edn). Mahwah, New Jersey and London: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, 2000

White, D.M.. 'The gate keeper': A case study in the selection of news', *Journalism Quarterly, 27,* 383-390. Reprinted 1964: In Dexter, L.A. and White, D.M. (eds) *People, society, and mass communications,* New York: Free Press, (1950: 160-72)

Wilson, C. 'The paradox of African American journalists' in S.Cottle (ed) *Ethnic Minorities and the Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries.* Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000

Woodward, B. *The Plan of Attack,* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004

Zelizer, B. (1993). 'Has communication explained journalism?' *Journal of Comunication, 43*(4), 80-88.