Media satyagraha in the broadcast age: underground literature and populist

politics during the Indian internal emergency of 1975-77

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the role of media in a major instance of populist mobilisation in post-Independence India: resistance to the internal emergency of 1975-77. It engages with sender-message-receiver models of communication by looking at how news of an event in Bangladesh, the assassination of President Shaikh Mujibur Rahman (1920-1975), was disseminated via radio broadcasts and written about in the prison writings of two political leaders arrested in connection with the emergency in India - Jayaprakash Narayan (1902-1979), leader of the anti-Congress movement for Total Revolution, and L.K. Advani (1927-), Jana Sangh and later Bharatiya Janata Party politician.

News of Mujib's murder was initially censored in India, occurring as it did at the inopportune moment of Indian Independence day, when Indira Gandhi was due to make her first public address since the proclamation of emergency. But attempts to withhold news of the killing were rendered futile by unimpeded foreign radio broadcasts. In describing how prison writers refuse official accounts of this event, I outline a particular type of media satyagraha (truth force or nonviolent resistance): knowledge created through the

spatiotemporal disordering induced by technical mediation rather than the linear model of

state censorship, and made possible by the very media formats criticized by Gandhi for

having "macadamized" the human mind.

The Indian internal emergency of 1975-77 occurred during a particularly febrile period in South Asian history, a decade that commenced with the Bangladesh War of 1971 and was characterized by authoritarian regimes, mass movements, coups and assassinations. One way to reconcile the combination of authoritarianism and greater participation in the political process, social movements centered on charismatic individuals, is a particular type of populism encouraged by new forms of mass media. This is how David Page and William Crawley, for example, understand it when they describe the heyday of populism in South Asia as coinciding with a boom in radio ownership, which enabled political leaders to integrate new classes into politics by allowing them to speak to them directly (2001, 52). By dealing with an event in Bangladesh, the assassination of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920-1975), through its reception in neighboring India, I advance a different understanding of the movement of power and information within and across national boundaries. Towards this end I engage with Stuart Hall's writings on broadcast media (1972, 1973 and 1980), which both allows for a more varied audience response and highlights key assumptions behind sender-receiver models of communication.

Hall dismisses the ideal of perfectly transparent, unilateral communication as something that "can only exist in the (extremely rare) limiting case of the perfectly censored medium" (1973, 13). But he is also critical of the "residual pluralism" which underlies the concept of "selective perception" (1980, 135). The process of "encoding" is said to construct the limits within which "decodings" operate, and he enumerates three hypothetical

positions for decodings of televisual discourse: the dominant-hegemonic position; a negotiated version, which mixes adaptive and oppositional elements; and an oppositional code in which a viewer understands both the literal and connotative inflection of a discourse, but decodes it in a contrary way (ibid, 137-138).

A politically significant moment is said to be reached when events start to be subjected to oppositional reading, but this, too, exists within the parameters established by encoding: "If there were no limits, audiences could simply read whatever they liked into any message" (ibid, 135). In his essay "External influences on broadcasting", Hall specifies these limits as being defined by the state:

> The broadcasting institutions exercise a wide measure of editorial autonomy in their programmes: but ultimately they operate within the mode of reality of the state, and their programme content is, in the last instance, governed by the dominant ideological perspective and is oriented within its hegemony.
> (1972, 1)

As Hobart points out, in its reference to the structured totality of the discursive formation, Hall's account of articulation amounts to "a social or political act of linking cultural elements and social forces into hierarchical structures" (1999, 21), with, it would seem, the state at its pinnacle. As well as being a contentious description of hegemonic articulation,[1] Hall also overlooks broadcast media's capacity to reach audiences who are subject to different ideological perspectives. Despite his skepticism about transparency this model closely resembles the mathematical theory of communication systems developed by Claude Shannon at Bell Telephone Laboratories, in which messages move from source to *intended* destination through a channel that is "merely the medium used to transmit the signal from transmitter to receiver" (1998, 33-34).

In this paper I will adopt and adapt the transmitter-receiver model to consider an event occurring in one context through its reception in another, hoping to remain attentive to the media in which it was transmitted all the while. Specifically, through reception of

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[1] This is quite different from Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of hegemonic articulation as made possible by the necessarily *incomplete* nature of the social (2014, 108).

Mujib's assassination in the prison writings of two political leaders arrested in connection with the emergency in India, who learnt of the event through foreign broadcast media - Jayaprakash Narayan (1902-1979), leader of the anti-Congress movement for Total Revolution, and L.K. Advani (1927-), Jana Sangh and later Bharatiya Janata Party politician.

Both *A Prisoner's Scrap-Book* (Advani 1978) and *Prison Diary* (Narayan 1977b) were written and published in the 1970s and presented as a response to events as they unfold. Advani and Narayan describe day-by-day transformations in their understanding of what happened as they learn about it from a range of sources. Their accounts are relatively free of retrospective justification for actions at the time in light of subsequent events that are a feature of later publications. For example, books by Narayan's doctor (Chhuttani 1995) and jailor (Devashayam 2006) and even B.N. Tandon's *PMO Diary* (2003), which claims to be a diary kept during this period by a member of the Prime Minister's secretariat but was published decades later.

By embedding their reception of this event in mundane details of prison life they deploy what Daniel Elam, writing about Bhagat Singh's jail notebooks, has described as "the common and the revolutionary present", which "refuses the status quo of future realization" (2016, 594); in this instance, official versions of Mujib's murder emanating from various state media. But their choice of language and selection of material also indicates that they are writing for specific audiences in both the present and the future, and with reference to past examples of the prison literature genre.

Narayan's *Prison Diary* covers the period from 21 July to 4 November 1975, and is mostly written in English. But it includes sections in Hindi when calling for total revolution (7 August 1975, pp.9-10 and 7 October, pp.87-88), celebrating Republic Day (15 Aug 1975, pp.15-16) and the 106th birthday of Gandhi (2 October 1975, p.82), and discussing the Bhagavat Gita and its commentaries (16 August 1975, p.17; 15 October, p.92). Narayan's analytical notes on the people's movement are in English, as are his open letters to Indira

Gandhi. Hindi seems to be the language chosen for expressions of political idealism, patriotism and religious faith – for addressing 'the people'. English is used for analysis and addressing the state.

Advani's book covers a longer period of imprisonment, includes entries for 26 June 1975 – 12 March 1976, and is written exclusively in English. The first part, titled "A view from behind bars", resembles the diary format in being a chronological reflection on events as they unfold, but at various points Advani distinguishes between the text we are reading and the diary he kept during this period by referring to occasions when he wrote in the latter (1978, 15). Sections from this diary do appear in the *Scrapbook*, but it is not a verbatim reproduction of it. The book has been compiled at a later date. Content may have been added, removed and edited. Parts two to four consist of political pamphlets, letters and notes sent from jail; part five, a synopsis of legal proceedings against Advani, and enumeration of the likely course of events over the next six months as seemed likely to him on 31 October 1975. The *Scrapbook* is a deliberately assembled collection of public and "semi-public" texts (Elam 2016, 602), and also quite self-conscious about its location in time.

In his preface to the *Scrapbook*, Moraji Desai, the then prime minister, describes its title as an example of "Shri Advani's modesty", and says he is sure the book "will prove to be an important addition to the Library of our second liberation" (Advani 1978: vi). Writing in a post-Independence context both Advani and Narayan were aware of this literature,[2] and in their prison writings the current moment is often compared with earlier periods in Indian history. Advani observes that these analogies were a common feature of journalism during the emergency. Precluded from criticising the government directly, journalists took to "historical narratives and references which have a moral for the present" (Advani 1978, 51). Prison writers who were not submitting their material for censorship in private writing, at least, were responding to different imperatives when making comparisons. Through analogy

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[2] Cf. Narayan's own *Inside Lahore Fort* (1959), his record of detention by the Punjab Government in 1944.

and contrast they attempt to discern rather than conceal the outlines of their current experience, and also to assert its world-historical significance. As I will go on to elaborate in my reading of Narayan's text, in this way they also draw upon what Elizabeth Grosz has described as the "the virtual relevance of the past in refiguring the prevailing forces of the present" (2004, 252).

The virtual and the past were available to them because of the storage capacities of the media through which the news they received was transmitted. Advani and Narayan refuse censored accounts of Mujib's murder by drawing upon information derived from other times and places, thereby arriving at their 'own' truth, in a process reminiscent of Gandhian satyagrahi media practices described by Isabel Hofmeyr (2013). Satyagraha, a non-territorial form of sovereignty located in the individual,[3] famously inhered in practices of spinning and fasting, and also experiments in slow reading. That is, reading "done at the pace of the human body" and by the reader "on his or her own behalf" (Hofmeyr 2013, 4).

But during the emergency satyagraha was made possible by the very media formats criticized by Gandhi for having "macadamized" the human mind (ibid). Advani and Narayan establish their coordinates and assess the wider political situation through technically mediated acts of reading and listening, and by representing this experience in their writing.[4] Even when alone (in solitary confinement) they are not reading/writing solely on their "own behalf". At the same time something of the Gandhian ideal of an "anti-commodity, copyright-free, slow-motion" newspaper (Hofmeyr 2013, 4) persists in emergency-era underground literature, in which "primary orality" (Ong 1982) aligns with electronic media, the "surrogate sensuality of handwriting" (Kittler 1999, 13) with the printing press.

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[3] R.S. McGregor's *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* defines satyagraha as "insistence on, or zeal for, truth: organised, non-violent protest having a political aim; non-violent resistance; civil disobedience". https://dsalsrv04.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/mcgregor_query.py?qs=%E0%A4%B8%E0%A4%A4%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%AF&searchhws=yes (accessed 02/08/2018). For satyagraha as a political concept, as an extra-statal space for the political, see Faisal Devji and Shruti Kapila's special edition on "The Bhagavad Gita and Modern Thought", *Modern Intellectual History* 7 (2) (2010).

[4] For an account of the circuitous networks and admixtures of human and non-human agency involved in technical mediation, see Bruno Latour, "On Technical Mediation – Philosophy, Sociology, Genealogy", *Common Knowledge* 3(2), 29-64 (1994).

These convolutions suggest the impossibility of a pure response of acceptance/refusal, or even fixed position, within a given communication circuit located in a discrete historical epoch. (The electronic age, say, as opposed to the preceding Gutenberg Galaxy, manuscript and oral culture epochs, as per Marshall McLuhan's periodization.) The paper begins with a brief description of conditions of reception for the assassination of Mujib in India, then goes on to analyze the way Advani and Narayan deal with this event through a form of media satyagraha, in which knowledge is created through the spatiotemporal disordering induced by technical mediation rather than the linear model of state censorship.

"Chaos in the air"

News of the assassination of Mujib was initially withheld in India, occurring as it did at the inopportune moment of Indian Independence day, when Indira Gandhi was due to make her first public address since the proclamation of emergency. Full details of the massacre (the killing of most members of Mujib's immediate family) were also censored. But attempts to withhold news of it within India were rendered futile by unimpeded foreign radio broadcasts. Some of these broadcasts were in regional languages and Urdu, and therefore capable of reaching mass audiences.

The important role played by international radio seems to have been overlooked in literature on the emergency. Even Weiner's (1978) valuable first-hand account of the 1977 election does not mention it, choosing to focus instead on more visible manifestations of dissent: large public meetings, graffiti and handbills. He argues that in a country with low literacy rates and a radio and television network that is controlled by the government and only reaches a fraction of the population, election campaigns mainly take the form of public meetings (ibid, 21). Page and Crawley, in their book on broadcasting in South Asia, describe the 1977 election result as occurring despite "censorship of the press and the tightest

possible regulation of All India Radio and Doordarshan", the two state-controlled

broadcasters (2001, 53). Both analyses ignore the importance of international media and the

way various formats intersect, particularly in a context of low literacy rates but high levels of

multilingualism.

The political potential of radio was even greater following the arrival of 'the

transistor revolution' that occurred in the 1960s, when radios became ubiquitous even in

remote and rural areas. The Indian government had attempted to control foreign radio by

subjecting the work of its local correspondents to pre-censorship, and, when this did not

work, by expelling foreign journalists. Mark Tully, who was the BBC correspondent for India

at the time, described having to submit broadcasts for monitoring to the censors at All India

Radio, who would interpret "virtually anything that was not effusive praise as criticism".[5]

Following complaints about the erratic nature of this censorship, journalists were presented

with a list of rules. When the BBC and other foreign broadcasters refused to comply with

these, they were duly expelled. Despite these expulsions foreign radio stations continued to

broadcast into India for the duration of the emergency, gathering news from local sources

by telephone and telex.

Getting foreign broadcasters stationed abroad to comply with Indian regulations and

submit their material for censorship might not have been possible but it would have been

technically feasible to jam their broadcasts. During the colonial period this appears to have

been attempted with Congress Radio in Bombay. An article by one of the broadcasters

describes "the mischief played by the A.I.R (Anti India Radio)", which would jam their

broadcasts.[6] However limitations in the technology available prevented it becoming a

general policy of the central government, with an engineer in the colonial administration

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[5] Interview with Mark Tully, New Delhi, 13 September 2014.
[6] "Congress Radio Calling", copy of an undated and unattributed article relating to the 1942 movement, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Miscellaneous Items, Accession No. 99

warning that British communications being "strung out all over the world", they stood to lose more than they would gain by creating "chaos in the air" (Gupta 2001, 470).

Later, during the Cold War period, the USSR adopted a policy of jamming foreign radio broadcasts, but this remained an ineffective technology despite the fact that the Soviets spent the equivalent of billions of US dollars on it (Schmemann 1988). Jamming was most effective in densely populated urban areas, and even there easily circumvented by listeners who would take their shortwave radio sets out of city limits to pick up broadcasts in areas where jamming was less intense. Hence it was particularly ill suited to a large country with a predominantly rural population and several international borders such as India.

One effect of this was to encourage a form of circulation in which print, radio and the word of mouth were imbricated. Most strikingly, in the format of the underground news sheet: handwritten, typed or cyclostyled documents containing on-the-fly translations and transcriptions of foreign newspapers and radio broadcasts, distributed by hand or post, and bearing the slogan "Read, reproduce and circulate".[7] The logics and logistics at work in this underground form of circulation were made explicit in an alternative Independence Day address sent out on the same day that Mujib was murdered. In a public letter addressed to "comrades", located "somewhere underground" and dated 15 August 1975, the union leader George Fernandes lays out his instructions for the conduct of media satyagraha (Anon 1978, 13-14). These include appeals to boycott "All Indira Radio", as AIR came to be described during the emergency-period, and listen to "BBC, VOA, even the Pakistani and Peking Radio" instead; to duplicate, copy and translate underground news bulletins, and to encourage others to do these things (ibid, 14). The logic of circulation is concentrated in the formula "three raised to the power of eighteen", whereby if three people tell a story to only three others "in eighteen operations the whole country will have heard the story" (ibid). He ends with the injunction: "Learn the power of the spoken word" (ibid).

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[7] Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Jayaprakash Narayan Papers, IIIrd Instalment, Subject file no. 315

In its dialogism, Fernandes's "spoken word" would seem to closely resemble what Bakhtin designates as "the living word", the smallest linguistic unit of his theory of heteroglossia, or "social diversity of speech types" (2006, 263). The living word participates in what Bakhtin describes as "the social life of discourse…discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages" (ibid: 259). But in the closed spaces of emergency-era India the power of the spoken word seems to have been underlined by the attempt to silence it, and to have acquired greater potency through being dispersed, translated and mixed with other media; notably print and broadcast media, both of which are technically mediated rather than 'social' in the sense of involving face-to-face interaction.

Dissemination of underground literature often seemed to be encouraged by the flat-footed operations of state censorship, which in a period of low literacy levels was disproportionately concerned with print. Indira Gandhi even claimed that opposition to her rule came from the newspapers alone:

> While explaining the reasons for the imposition of Emergency, Smt. Gandhi had said that it was the newspapers which were inciting the people and creating a terrible situation. According to her, the agitation was only in the newspapers and once the newspapers were placed under censorship there was no agitation.
> (GI 1978, Vol I, 33)

According to this view it is readers who possess a critical intellect and are therefore capable of threatening state projects, whereas in a September 1975 address to Directors of AIR, V.C. Shukla, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, described radio as "the most potent medium that the Government has at its command" (GI 1977, Appendix 7, 15). In contrast to the way in which Indira Gandhi worries about the unruliness of print, broadcast media is viewed as an instrument over which the state is imagined to have control. The Indian government famously offered transistor radios as an inducement for men to undergo sterilization during the emergency, an initiative which also configured listeners as passive ('silent') recipients of state programmes and messages. State censorship seemed to be informed by a standard theory of communication, which privileges the spoken over the

written word because of its immediacy, and a hierarchy that places speakers and writers over readers and listeners.

Writers during the emergency benefited from inconsistencies in implementation of state censorship, compounded by the interface between the spoken and written word in a multilingual context. (This, for example, is how George Fernades's alternative Independence Day message came to be widely disseminated through the written and spoken word in various languages.) Moreover, in an age of broadcast media dissent did not have to remain local. Reaction was rendered ineffective on a national scale by international radio working in conjunction with modern telecommunications and the simple cyclostyle technology of the local underground press. By these means it also elided Bakthin's distinction between the living word and technical means by combining the properties of both.[8]

"Back to the barbaric feudal days"

Narayan was kept in solitary confinement and his jail diaries often lament the fact. Every day there is something in the papers that upsets him, he writes, usually Indira Gandhi's "half-truths and lies", and he wishes that there was someone with him to whom he could talk and vent his feelings (1977b, 14). This would be worth "many tablets and sedatives and tranquillisers" (ibid). Solitary confinement initially seems to induce a state of solipsistic introspection in Narayan. The very first entry in his *Prison Diary*, dated July 21 1975, establishes the tone of self-recrimination and regret that pervades the book: "My world lies in a shambles all round me…I must bear the full, the whole, responsibility" (ibid, 1). Later he describes how "every nail driven deeper into the coffin of Indian democracy is like a nail driven into my heart" (ibid, 4), which is not an empty simile given the state of his health. His

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[8] A code, according to Bakhtin, is merely "a technical means of transmitting information", and without any "cognitive, creative significance", whereas "live speech" is "created in the process of transmission" (1986, 147). Context enters the speech that frames it in a "chemical union" rather than a "mathematical bond" (2006, 340). It therefore cannot be studied in isolation from its "contextualized (dialogizing) framing" (ibid). On this basis Bakhtin distinguishes between semiotics, the transmission of ready-made codes, and live speech.

visceral response to politics oddly recalls a period when the emperor's physical person was the locus of the state. From the controversy over purchase of his dialysis machine (Narayan 1977a, 97-98), through to postmortem examinations to determine whether he had been medically injured in jail by not being given appropriate treatment, his imprisonment during the emergency and death soon after were to become a part of "socio-political-medical history" (Chhuttani 1995, viii). Narayan himself draws these parallels in his empathetic response to the account of Aurangzeb's death in Ishwari Prasad's *History of Muslim Rule,* which he describes reading on the eve of Mujib's murder. In the entry for 14 August 1975, he draws parallel between his own situation and Prasad's account of Aurangzeb's lonely final days: "What the Emperor felt, a humble person like me could be allowed to feel" (1977b, 15).

But the example of Aurangzeb, under whose rule the Mughal Empire reached its greatest extent before falling apart, also encourages more impersonal reflection on antecedents to the emergency. He observes that there has never been a successful attempt to govern India from a single center and heavily centralized states have not lasted long. The borders of various empires have expanded and shrunk with the passing of time and all of them have eventually disintegrated. This was case even when there was "no concept of democracy based on adult franchise, or of civil liberties and rights of every common citizen" (ibid, 16). Thinking about Indira Gandhi's actions in stark historical perspective, without reference to specific rulers and periods, allows Narayan to abstract out the dynamics that he perceives to be at play. From this he draws the hopeful lesson that the emergency period will also be short-lived.

In less general terms this response fits within Narayan's longstanding interest in questions of nationalism and federalism. His attitude changed over the decades from hostility to states reorganisation in 1956 to participation in peace missions in Nagaland and Kashmir, which led him to advocate for smaller and more autonomous states. But he remained concerned with reconciling the right to self-determination and the need for overall

unity. With reference to events in Bangladesh this is evident in his entry for 18 August 1975, which expresses relief that Bangladesh will retain the name of the "People's Republic", that there will not be "any constitutional links forged with Pakistan - confederation, association or anything else like that," and "Bangladesh is not going to become anyone's satellite" (1977b: 19-20). Despite his empathy with Aurangzeb there is evidence here of unease at the prospect of a latter day example of 'Muslim rule', another Islamic state on India's borders.

Narayan's reference to satellites expresses similar concerns in the idiom of geopolitics. At the international level his support for national self-determination is part of his support for non-alignment, which leads him to view both the USSR and US with suspicion. This attitude is manifest in an elaborate conspiracy theory about the emergency being a Soviet take-over plot. In the entry for 22 July 1975 he predicts a time will come when "having squeezed the juice out of Mrs Gandhi, the Russians through the CPI [Communist Party of India] and their Trojan horses within the Congress will dump her on the garbage heap of history and install in her place their own man" (ibid: 3-4). He also writes of the role of the Americans in spreading disinformation. False rumours that Bangladesh will be renamed the Islamic Republic are revealed to originate from a US news agency, leading him to wonder why the Americans are "always up to this kind of mischief" (ibid: 20).

Narayan's awareness of a range of competing perspectives during the Cold War era informs his analysis of the international coverage of the event, which he receives prior to the Indian press commentary. Because of the wide range of media from distant countries that he refers to, some in languages he could not read or even understand, I am assuming that he came across their contents through news digests on international radio, but this is not specified. He mentions coverage in Russia, France, Yugoslavia and the US specifically, and makes vaguer references to the European and Western press in general (ibid, 20). Russia and the Russian press are said to be predictably silent or noncommittal, whereas the communist press in Europe sees the hand of the CIA in the event, *L'Humanité* being the most explicit in

making this claim. Non-communist European papers are apparently divided, some viewing the assassination as a US-backed rightist coup, others discerning the support of China. Only Yugoslavia "regrets the eclipse of the policy of non-alignment for which Mujib stood" (ibid).

All these readings are ultimately rejected as Narayan decides that the "affair was a domestic event" (ibid). When further details of the killing emerge on 22 August 1975 (ibid, 27-28) he identifies it as an assertion of oligarchic power in accordance with a familiar pattern. The precautionary murder of all available members of Mujib's family is said to be a return to the "barbaric feudal days…when brother killed brother to seize the crown" (ibid, 27). Nevertheless, he struggles to reconcile the barbarity of this act with the military regime's continued espousal of the tenets of 'Mujidabad' (nationalism, socialism, secularism and democracy). "His (Mushtaq Ahmed) taking over supreme martial law power while still talking of democracy, I can understand. All dictators talk like this. We have our own Mrs Gandhi. But why destroy the entire Mujib family?" (ibid). He leaves open the possibility of third-party involvement and concludes "the truth will only emerge from the passage of time" (ibid). In a context of censorship and distortion of information all received accounts are refused, past, present and future elided.

Although Narayan may have been sensitive to both "the literal and connotative" levels of the accounts he receives, his response to them does more than simply engage in an "oppositional reading" along lines delimited by the process of "encoding" (Hall 1980, 137-138). By reading different hegemonic codes *against* one another, he effects the "contraction or distention of temporalities", which Rancière specifies as necessary for thinking and writing democratic history (2011, 65). With reference to the novels of Virginia Woolf, Rancière speaks of the "liberating political possibilities" of modes of individuation and the interlinking of sequences, which challenge "the formatting of reality" of state-controlled media, by "undoing the relations between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable",

thereby establishing a grid that makes it possible to think of "political dissensuality" (ibid, 65).

This 'grid' was outlined in one of the J.P. movement's most famous slogans: "*sampoorna kranti ab nara hai, bhawi itihaas hamara hai*" (Narayan 1977b, 128 – "total revolution is now the slogan, future history belongs to us"), conveying a sense of what would be the retrospective significance of this 'second Independence struggle'. In Narayan's prison writings this grid seems to be expressed in two registers. Listening to radio reports of the massacre brings up the suggestion of 'eternal recurrence' and even 'regression' – back to the "barbaric feudal days…when brother killed brother" – thus puncturing the progressive pretensions of the new regime. Reading about those days allows him to invoke the future anterior, to kick the traces of the present to reveal the pattern of the past in order to evoke a different distribution of power and demarcation of territorial boundaries.

"We, representing the entire political spectrum in the country"

Unlike Narayan, Advani was always in the company of other prisoners, and in his prison writings he describes reading media in various languages and coming from national and international sources against each other alongside this fact-checking and critical chorus. Early in his book Advani describes how censorship of the press had meant that "the Indian student of public affairs has no option but to tune in to foreign broadcasting media. I took it upon myself to keep track of reports regarding India relayed by the BBC, Voice of America, Voice of Germany and Radio Australia…Radio Moscow, Peking Radio and Radio Pakistan" (Ibid, 17). On a previous occasion, in the entry for 4 August 1975, he describes an instance when someone in the News Services Division of All India Radio had "bungled" and allowed the Punjabi and Urdu divisions to report on proposals to amend the Representation of the People Act, information that had been removed from the English bulletin (ibid, 32).

Both aspects of his reading practice come together in his account of Indira Gandhi performing the flag hoisting ceremony on Independence Day, which he was able to watch on a television set kept in the canteen of Rohtak jail. Advani describes how "we, representing practically the entire political spectrum in the country", could not comprehend an allusion in Indira Gandhi's speech to an opposition ruler who had ridiculed the tricolour as a "rag" (ibid, 38). This leads to an excursus on Dalit politics in Maharashtra by Socialist Party leader Madhu Dandavate, who explains that this remark had been made by a member of the Dalit Panthers, an organization representing the interests of the Scheduled Castes (formerly known as the 'Untouchables').

The detainees also comment upon the otherwise mellow tone of the speech and Indira Gandhi's unconvincing performance of anger. She is said to be "making a special effort to look enraged" when referring to the opposition at the beginning of her speech, but her "worked-up wrath" fails to impress (ibid). (With a television broadcast there is also the possibility to read a speaker's physical expressions against his words.) The mystery is resolved when Advani listens to the Voice of America morning news bulletin and hears about the military coup in Bangladesh and the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He shares the news with the other inmates, who react with shocked disbelief. A few days previously Dandavate had heard a radio broadcast announcing the resignation of eight Cabinet ministers and relayed the information to the other prisoners, who only realized later that this had occurred in Argentina and not India. Advani's report of a coup in Bangladesh is met with doubt by the others, and this makes him wait for confirmation of what he has heard.

Advani begins trying to get reception of a medium wave radio station to see if any regional language broadcast might be available. He finally gets a Marathi language news bulletin, which declares that Mujib had sent an Independence Day greeting to the Indian President. But he soon comes across Voice of America and BBC reports which give "full accounts of the gory events in Dacca that morning" (ibid, 39). He also listens to Dacca Radio,

which broadcasts the swearing in of the new Head of State (ibid, 40). All India Radio, meanwhile, takes five hours to report that a coup has taken place (ibid), and a full account of the killings does not appear until much later.

"Clog the openings and you run the risk of explosions", Advani concludes (ibid, 39), referring to events occurring in both Bangladesh and India. But all of the above suggests that repression also encouraged a search for alternative news-sources in other media and various languages, encouraged reading across this media, alliances across previously existing lines and critical reception of both official and unofficial information. Information became knowledge through slippages between the time of the killing and dissemination of news of the event, collective discussion about its significance and the solitary process of writing. Obstructions, gaps and misunderstandings in this information matrix encouraged readings in an oppositional code and the coming together of previously antagonistic groups in opposition to the emergency regime.

As with the 'first' Independence movement, this was an ambiguous and volatile process. Because of its incorporation of elements from across the political spectrum, from Naxalites to Hindu nationalist organisations, around the amorphous goal of 'total revolution' and under the charismatic leadership of Narayan, the J.P. movement has sometimes been labelled 'fascist'. (A pamphlet collected in part two of Advani's *Scrapbook*, "Anatomy of Fascism", reverses this accusation [ibid, 249-269].) Even those who participated in it have subsequently expressed the opinion that it was regressive. In an interview given in 2000, Socialist Party politician Dandavate questions the inclusion of the Jana Sangh.[9] Narayan is said to have believed that only the total mobilisation of forces opposed to the emergency could bring about its revocation. But, speaking to an interviewer in the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum and Library during a time when a BJP government was in power at the

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[9] Madhu Dandavate. (interviewee), recorded by Smt. Usha Prasad (interviewer), 12th December 2000, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Oral History Project (778)

centre, Dandavate regrets the long-term repercussions of this move. Communal forces such as the Jana Sangh are said to have gained respectability during this period, whilst the Socialists fell into decline.

Dandavate may well have been thinking about the career of former prison-mate L.K. Advani, who had risen to the position of Home Minister in the BJP government. Advani had gained political prominence a second time in the 1990s as one of the leaders of the campaign to build a temple on the site of the Babri masjid, culminating in the destruction of the mosque in 1992. Coming from a Sindhi Hindu, un-associated with the north Indian Hindu identity at play in the Ayodhya movement, the opportunism of his actions seemed blatant. The single extended religious reference in Advani's prison writings stands out because of its incongruity. The "sins of these past few months are not Indira Gandhi's alone", he writes, but the "collective guilt" of all Congressmen, regardless of whether they actively supported her or merely acquiesced: "Bhishma and Drona were as much responsible for the outrageous disrobing of Draupadi as were Duryodhana and Dushasana"(ibid, 78). This is footnoted as an allusion "to an episode in the Mahabharata" (ibid), which says something about whom he imagines his readers would be**.**

Across the *Scrapbook* as a whole Advani's references are often non-Indian (Thomas Jefferson, Cesare Pavese, Solzhenitsyn) and the ideology that comes across most strongly is a liberalism that contrasts with his later politics. Opposition to the death penalty in India is occasioned by inspection of a gallows (Advani 1978, 58). Discussion of a UN General Assembly resolution prohibiting torture, unlawful arrest and detention follows a meeting with a school teacher who has been badly beaten by police officers (ibid, 88). The resolution had been supported by the Indian representative at the UN during the emergency itself, and in the English translation of the RSS history of the period, in a heavily illustrated chapter titled "Atrocities", this is likened to "the Devil quoting the scriptures" (Sahasrabuddhe and Vajpayee 1991, 242). Advani's account is drier. Displaying a stronger sense of the

international, of history, and, arguably, with an eye on future and foreign readerships, he leaves out the detail that India had signed the resolution and focuses instead on the role played by Greece in sponsoring the motion (1978, 88). These liberal attitudes therefore seem to be no less of a performance than his actions in Ayodhya; a response to a particular context and imagined audience – a future Anglophone readership, in India and elsewhere, rather than a national electorate.

Religious references return in Advani's next book, *The People Betrayed* (1979), which deals with disintegration of the Janata Party on the, in his view, pretext of joint membership of the RSS. He describes the RSS as the "hobgoblin" of Indian politics, a scare figure that other parties could draw upon to frighten Muslim voters (ibid, 80-81). He elaborates on this insight with reference to the war diary of Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Information and Propaganda of National Socialist Germany, said to be one of the "precious documents" recovered by the Americans from post-war Germany:

> Analysts of Nazi propaganda techniques are all agreed that one of the cardinal principles of their strategy was: there must always be an enemy for the people to identify as the cause of all their problems; all propaganda must be keyed to ensuring that hatred against the enemy does not sag. The Bolsheviks and the Jews were favourite hate-objects of Nazi propaganda (ibid, 80)

During such moments Advani demonstrates an awareness of what Laclau, in his work on fascism and ideology, has described as the importance of "an antagonistic relationship with a dominant bloc" in the process of popular-democratic interpellations, which produce the subject known as the "people" (1979, 107). These are independent of any precise class content and therefore available to "quite distinct political discourses", including fascism (ibid, 111). Hence the difficulty in identifying the politics of the J.P. Movement on a right-left spectrum, because of its use of such a wide range of popular-democratic interpellations to oppose Indira Gandhi's regime – variously appealing to liberal ideas of civil liberties, socialist ideals, revolutionary notions of non-violent struggle and religious beliefs. These ideological convolutions seem to bear out Laclau's criticism of the assumption that "the 'people' as a

historical actor will be constituted around a progressive identity (from the point of view of the Left)" (2007, 246). Rather than embracing emancipatory politics they may well move in what he describes as a 'fascist' direction. But this, too, is not an inevitable process. Even with reference to a single figure, Advani, and a single party, Janata, affiliations shift according to audience and context.

Media satyagraha

In a comparative study of censorship in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and pre-revolutionary France, Darnton comes to the conclusion that reading "is a mystery everywhere" (1995, 55), at one and the same time an individual activity and a social one, spanning agency and structure, making reader response hard to predict and a dichotomous understanding of the relationship between censorship and free speech hard to sustain. Darnton tells the story of how "the Enlightenment penetrated cracks in the system and spread through French society" (ibid, 45), cracks that had been created by the legal system itself through a series of categories that allowed books to appear on the market without official permission. By linking individual readers and writers through illicit circulation of books and particular modes of reading and writing it produced a sense of community that was provoked by but outside the direct control of state regulation.

In the GDR censorship is said to have encouraged new types of writing (official propaganda, subversive literature), which in turn encouraged new ways of reading. When confronted with censored literature readers became attuned to tone and typographical features, scanning up and down texts in search of irregularities. When dealing with official messages they read "critically, aggressively, with a combination of sophistication and alienation unimaginable in the West, even among our hardiest deconstructors" (ibid, 57-58). Groups and subjects coalesced in this way were hard to fix, a difficulty that went beyond individual reader response or linguistic indeterminacy – the necessarily incomplete task of

subjectification. Censorship articulated subjectivity and sociality, but in ways unintended by the censor and not fully determined by the reader.

The communication model here is different from both a satyagraha and sender-receiver model, founded upon the sovereignty of the individual or the state. Neither history supports a view of the state as an "apparatus that stands apart from the rest of the social world", or the complementary notion of a subject "who stands *outside* the state and refuses its demands" from "some wholly exterior social space" (Mitchell 1991, 93). According to Darnton, meanings were *made* in the interface between reader and text, rather than simply hidden and found. His non-deterministic understanding of media technology allows that typeset words, too, can induce the "passion of all reading to hallucinate meaning between lines and letters" (Kittler 1999, 10).[10] This model would seem to better accord with the dynamics of media reception during the internal emergency of 1975-77. Prison writers Advani and Narayan are transmitters *and* receivers of emergency-era messages. Rather than being a passive audience for news of a 'raw' event, they construct meanings from information they receive from a variety of media in various languages, which they interpret through a host of Cold War and postcolonial contexts.

Advani, reflecting on Indira Gandhi's audacity in "lying" in her first formal address to the nation since the emergency, writes that "this outright lie…must have given to the thinking sections of our people a measure of the deceit and untruth which marked Indira Gandhi's campaign of calumny against the opposition" (1978, 38). As a journalist and politician, someone professionally qualified to decode state messages, he implicitly includes himself in this category. By writing about his response to state propaganda and distributing this writing through the underground press, he establishes 'voice', asserts a capacity to both know and act despite his consumption of censored media and confinement in a jail.

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[10] Kittler regards this as the preserve of the book prior to the invention of type: "As long as the book was responsible for all serial data flows, words quivered with sensuality and memory…Electricity itself put an end to this. Once memories and dreams, the dead and ghosts, become technically reproducible, readers and writers no longer need the powers of hallucination." (1999, 10).

Narayan's account also demonstrates awareness that he is writing a historically significant document, not just responding to the exigencies of the moment but asking more profound questions about Indian politics. But this process is fostered by the alienability of the word rather than unilinear communication, and by technical mediation as much as live speech.

Acknowledgements

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