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Families always bear the brunt of research and book writing, and mine will doubtless be relieved that it is finally over.

Sevanti Ninan
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1

Overview: Reinventing the Public Sphere

'When you launch a Newspaper you have to purchase the readership.'

The decade and a half from 1991 to 2006 in India belonged to television and the Internet. This was the period when satellite television took birth and took off. Shrewd media moguls like Rupert Murdoch and Sumner Redstone hastened to get a toehold in an emerging economy that promised to become a burgeoning media market with its fair share of domestic enterpreneurs. The policy of economic liberalisation launched in 1991 was delivering, by the mid-1990s, a growing volume of international advertising. In 1995 commercial Internet came to India, and took hold rapidly enough to enable a dot-com boom by the late 1990s. Both cable and satellite TV, and the Internet, captured the attention of a growing urban middle class eager for more media choice. All this changed media habits, transformed connectivity and created a new public discourse as television news channels, Websites and blogs blossomed.

Over the same period, a less visible media juggernaut was rolling across a less visible part of the country. When literacy expanded in India's Hindi heartland in the last decade of the 20th century, Hindi newspapers followed, picking up readers in places where there had been none. The changes wrought by this newspaper revolution are the subject of this book. Journalism flowered in unexpected and unorthodox ways, and media marketing unfurled across villages from Bihar to Rajasthan. Newspapers brought increased awareness, a growing consumerism, and civic participation in their wake, and no

one was left untouched. Readers, civil society, politicians, panchayats all experienced a media saturation that was as rapid as it was new.

It brought the world outside to readers' doorsteps in the mornings, and put them all on the news map by expanding the local news universe. Local gentry, local corruption and the parlous state of the local infrastructure found space in the big newspapers circulating in the Hindi heartland even as they added local pages to woo the new readership. Many small towns in the states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Uttaranchal, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Haryana already had newspapers which mirrored the local public sphere in India's districts. They carried national and statewide news, as well as reports from the region where they were published. Some, like *Nai Duniya* in Indore, strove to bring a holistic news universe to their readers, and did it so well that they acquired a national reputation. Others, like the weekly single-sheet *Ka* ('k' in the Devanagari script), published from Ballia in eastern Uttar Pradesh for over three decades, reflected local events.

The localisation that the Hindi-speaking belt saw from the decade of the 1990s, was what Prabash Joshi, founder-editor of *Jansatta*, described as outsider-localisation.[1] Established newspapers in the region such as *Dainik Jagran*, *Dainik Bhaskar* and *Hindustan* went into new territories in neighbouring states and began a multi-edition expansion that would localise their coverage to an unprecedented degree. The objective was to expand overall readership numbers to offer advertisers, both national and local. The stand-alone newspapers in the states which they entered, were squeezed. They could not invest as much in production or distribution as the competition. They could not compete effectively for advertising without pan-Indian numbers to offer. Some died, others put up a fight, still others became a pale shadow of their former selves. That has been one of the abiding ironies of the local newspaper revolution.

A Decade of Change

The decade of the 1990s saw the convergence of many changes in the country and in the Hindi belt which transformed the print media landscape. Literacy, which had been low in the region, grew rapidly, as reflected in the dramatic increase recorded by the 2001 Census.

Rajasthan recorded a decadal increase in literacy of 22.45 percentage points against an all-India increase of 13.17 percentage points. Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh between them accounted for almost a fifth of the total decadal decline in illiteracy in India in 1991–2001, while accounting for less than a tenth of the population.

Rising farm incomes and a growing service sector in the rural areas pointed to the emergence of a rural middle class whose purchasing power had made newspapers affordable. It was targeted by marketers who underwrote the expansion of newspapers in these parts. The market in small town and rural India was expanding.

The rise of television and its penetration into the rural hinterland created a hunger for news. Across the Hindi belt, newspaper proprietors, circulation agents and hawkers alike assert that TV proved to be good for the newspaper business because it fuelled a curiosity that made the viewer turn to the next day's newspaper.

The advent of the modem, which made the Internet possible, also made possible the transmission of entire newspaper pages composed at different district centres. Expanding telecommunications, including the spread of broad-band telecom, made multi-edition newspapers more viable and affordable.

Hindi newspapers, harbingers of nationalism at the turn of the 20th century, had become harbingers of more material change by the turn of the 21st. They were now bursting with colour supplements and marketing coupons even as they brought politics, sports and news-you-can-use to rural and urban homes in village and small-town India. They brought a Hindi heartland, lagging in literacy till barely a decade earlier, onto the readership map and then rapidly to the top of the readership charts.

Newspaper circulation climbed, one of the few places in the world to still see this happen. The National Readership Survey (NRS) of 2005[2] put India's total readership at 200 million. This was up from 131 million in NRS 1999 and 155 million in NRS 2002.[3] Of this, 98 million, or almost 50 per cent, was from rural India. NRS 1999 had put rural readership at 29 per cent.[4] Two hundred million readers for dailies and magazines meant that the print media was now available to one out of five people in the country. As a result of the increased literacy, improved communications and rising rural incomes, as well as aggressive marketing strategies adopted by publishers, newspaper penetration in the Hindi belt increased. In Uttar Pradesh

for instance, in 1997 there were 22 readers per copy, which came down in the divided state to 16 readers per copy in UP and 8.4 per copy in Uttaranchal. By 2006 however a rival readership survey had begun to suggest that the growth had begun to peak. The Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2006 showed that urban press reach had dropped by roughly one percentage point between 2004 and 2006 but rural reach had remained unchanged.

The older stalwarts of the Indian regional media, such as the *Malayala Manorama* in Kerala, *Eenadu* in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and *Anandabazar Patrika* in West Bengal slipped in the 'Top 10' readership listings. *The Times of India*, claiming to be the world's largest circulated broadsheet in the English language, ranked at No. 11 in NRS 2006. Hindi newspapers occupied three of the top five positions in the all-India readership figures put out by the National Readership Survey in mid-2006, and five of the top ten. Just three years back, NRS 2003 had shown the southern stalwarts *Daily Thanthi*, *Eenadu* and *Manorama* occupying third, fourth and fifth positions in the top five. And in NRS 1999 only one Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Jagran* had figured in the top five in terms of readership (Table 1.1). The IRS of early 2006, meanwhile, was showing Hindi newspapers as occupying four out of five top positions in newspaper readership in the country.

TABLE 1.1 Top five dailies—rural and urban readership

NRS 1999	*NRS 2003*	*NRS 2006*
Daily Thanthi	*Dainik Bhaskar*	*Dainik Jagran*
Dainik Jagran	*Dainik Jagran*	*Dainik Bhaskar*
Malayala Manorama	*Daily Thanthi*	*Eenadu*
Eenadu	*Eenadu*	*Lokmat*
Mathrubhumi	*Manorama*	*Amar Ujala*

The Audit Bureau of Circulation figures which were released in September 2006 showed that the Hindi language had the highest number of newspapers (15) in the country with circulations of over 100,000. The second highest were English language newspapers which had 11 publications with circulation figures higher than 100,000. If editions of the bigger newspapers were to be taken separately the figure would be higher in both categories.

The backdrop to the Hindi newspaper revolution was a social and political churning which saw the consolidation of the conservative, middle and upper-class Hindu vote through the political ascendance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which espoused *Hindutva*, as well as the simultaneous emergence of backward classes and Dalits as independent political forces, particularly in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The caste-based political mobilisation that followed the adoption of the Mandal Commission's report in 1990, created a new political scenario in the states of this region and saw the media being called to account by a new crop of backward-caste and Dalit politicians.

The latter political elite was sometimes at odds with the journalistic tribe, mostly drawn throughout this region from the upper castes. Lalu Prasad Yadav in Bihar would tell his backward-caste voters not to believe what the upper-caste newspapers were saying which, according to journalists themselves, contributed to the emasculation of the mainstream media in Bihar. Mayawati railed against the *manuwadi* (casteist) journalists in Uttar Pradesh. At the same time these politicians were sons and daughters of the soil who could communicate more effectively with and through the Hindi language press than with the more city-centric, English language publications.

As their commercial interests grew, Hindi newspapers ceased to be adversarial and learned to coexist with a backward-caste or Dalit chief minister in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, much as they did with those from the Bharatiya Janata Party who went in and out of power in Madhya Pradesh. By 2006, the upper-caste chairman of the *Dainik Jagran* group, Mahendra Mohan Gupta, was gratified to accept a Rajya Sabha nomination from the ruling Samajwadi (Socialist) Party in Uttar Pradesh, headed by the backward-caste Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav. *Jagran* had from its inception been associated with the right-wing, pro-*Hindutva* ideology. The chairman's older brother Narendra Mohan in his time had been a Rajya Sabha MP nominated by the BJP. Apart from belonging to an opposing political ideology, Mulayam Singh Yadav was an old foe for the *Jagran* group—in 1994 he had incited his followers to attack this and another newspaper, *Amar Ujala*, in an incident known as *Halla Bol* (literally, attack). But the need to consolidate and hold on to its leadership in the market had made the group pragmatic. It was at that point not

only Uttar Pradesh's leading newspaper in terms of circulation and readership, but also the paper with the highest circulation and readership in the country.

In addition to the political transition of Uttar Pradesh from a Congress-ruled state to a state ruled alternately by political formations of Backwards and Dalits, a different kind of political transformation was also taking place. In most of this region the entry of print at the rural level had been preceded by the passing of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution in 1992. This enabled revival of panchayats, the third tier of local self-government in the rural areas, and the reservation of 33 per cent of seats in these bodies for women. The revitalisation of panchayati raj (the new tier of local self-government) began in Madhya Pradesh in 1994. When close to half a million people's representatives are chosen in a single state, it spells a considerable degree of grassroots political participation, creating awareness and a hunger for news. Moreover, the state financed the supply of a newspaper to every panchayat office, which was often the first copy of a newspaper to reach that area. As they grew into their roles, *sarpanch*es began to subscribe to newspapers at home, to keep themselves abreast of state, national and local news. Together with rising literacy and a growth in purchasing power both urban and rural, panchayats helped to create a basis for growth in newspaper circulation.

From all this flowed a discourse which was more broad-based than ever before. The press was moving from being an elite to a mass medium. And the Indian newspaper was evolving from being a politics-driven product for the serious-minded reader into one that was fashioning itself for the upwardly mobile, as well as for the reader who had barely begun to read, and was looking for news of his immediate universe. In these parts of the heartland, print was a post-television phenomenon. Television connected to cable and satellite via small local entrepreneurs had already brought consumer aspirations into rural and semi-urban homes, and print had to cater to these. It met aspirational demands with supplements on careers, property, lifestyle, society and education (Figure 1.1). In mid-2006, *Hindustan* was already giving one career supplement a week in Uttar Pradesh, and was getting ready to introduce a second one.

FIGURE 1.1 *Hindustan*'s lifestyle supplement, *Metro Remix*, captures the transformation that came over Hindi newspapers in post-liberalisation India

At the turn of the century, then, both television and newspaper audiences in India were evolving into cheerful amalgams of modernity and tradition. Language and English newspapers alike sprouted cut-outs of Indian and Western celebrities, often half clad, on the mast head. Saucy pictures adorned colour supplements, satchets of consumer products began to arrive with the daily newspaper. But Indians wanted to hold on to tradition even as they embraced globalisation. The print equivalent was the feedback the editorial department of *Hindustan* in Delhi was getting from its marketing division. In 2006 the paper launched a daily column aimed at young Indians telling them what that day's religious observance was, for any religion, and how it should be observed.[5] With urbanisation and the break-up of joint families, a paper that catered to this need for guidance on year-round rituals would be able to endear itself to its readers.

Consequences of Expansion and Localisation

The expansion and localisation of the Hindi press began to accelerate from the early 1990s. In addition to the converging of the trends already described, this had to do with a new generation taking charge in the families that owned newspapers. As in *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times,* where a new generation at the helm was identified with radical changes in newspaper marketing, the coming of the sons of Ramesh Agarwal into the management of the *Dainik Bhaskar* preceded an aggressive expansion drive from the mid-1990s. At *Rajasthan Patrika* a third generation cut its teeth at a time when the *Bhaskar* was storming the *Patrika*'s bastion. Apart from helping him craft a comeback strategy, Gulab Kothari's young sons took the conservative newspaper into new media businesses such as cable, Internet and FM Radio—all of which involved a strong marketing orientation. At *Dainik Jagran*, the second and third generation together plotted the paper's expansion and localisation strategy. The exception was *Hindustan*. It languished even as its third generation proprietor focused on the English *Hindustan Times*, until the management by its own admission woke up to its potential only in the year 2000.

This book explores the supposition that media expansion and localisation in the Hindi language—located at a juncture when the economic, political and social landscape of the Hindi heartland was changing—created its own set of social transformations. In addition to more traditional notions of public space in small town and village India where both public issues and private scandal were discussed, you now had a newsprint-enabled and advertising-supported civic square where local gentry, local governance and local crime competed for attention. Competition led to the creation of more than one such paper *choupal*[6] where crime was covered as never before and local politicians were delighted at the coverage they got, though sometimes there was a monetary price to be paid for it.

The local supplements and pages created a new genre of news which encompassed a much wider ambit of society than before, and a new tribe of news gatherer drawn from the community, but representative of only some sections of a stratified society (Figure 1.2). Inasmuch as they were open to all kinds of news being delivered to

FIGURE 1.2 Mastheads of local pull-outs catering to districts in Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh

them by those who wished to feature in the next morning's newspaper, media access was democratised. Religious news found ample and prominent space, and cheating in school exams became a seasonal news staple. Local news documented street-level civic problems and panchayat politics more copiously than ever before. Even though it seldom confronted authority, it created a demand for local level accountability.

Advertising and incentive-driven marketing began to make decentralised expansion possible, and more copies began to be subscribed to in large roadside villages. The commercial instinct which leads Maruti or Godrej to seek consumers in the Indian countryside makes possible a newspaper produced for the rural mass, underwritten by these companies' advertising. It also made viable the offering of newspaper subscriptions at a low price, sweetened with gifts and commercial discounts.

In February 2005 Mahesh Shrivastava, newly-appointed editor of the yet to be launched *Raj Express*, sat in an office overlooking a real estate development outside Bhopal city and declared succinctly, 'When you launch a newspaper you have to purchase the readership.' The owners of that estate were getting into the newspaper business, and their wooing of hawkers was the talk of the media in the city. Deepak Shourie, the chief executive who had launched *Outlook* magazine in 1995 with expensive gifts for subscribers, could have told him that 10 years before. But the culture came shortly after that to the fast-growing world of Hindi newspapers. A combination of price incentives, gifts and subscribers' schemes that involved publishing daily coupons over a couple of months, are put in place almost routinely now, when a new newspaper enters a market. Both readers and hawkers are enticed. A single plastic chair giveaway could achieve a 30 per cent circulation jump over a rival, albeit for a short period of three months—a lesson both for young marketers and young journalists.

But without such incentives the price-conscious Indian reader, particularly in rural India, would not have sampled newspapers in the numbers he did and print would not have expanded as rapidly as it did.

A media sphere catalysed by market dynamics was reflecting these dynamics in other ways as well. In January 2005, the panchayat

elections which took place across Madhya Pradesh saw the advent of paid political advertising placed by aspirants. On the pages of local district supplements of the *Dainik Bhaskar* could be found not just small paid advertisments but also sponsored reporting which a pragmatic publisher was introducing into grassroots politics in this state. These were advertorials called Impact Features, introduced by *India Today* and used by politicians such as Chief Ministers Narendra Modi of Gujarat and Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh.

The resident editor of the *Bhaskar* in Bhopal argued that there was nothing wrong: the distinction in display was there for all to see.[7] (It looked like a page of text but was used in the advertising columns.) A politician however counter-argued that village readers were not yet sophisticated enough to tell the difference. He was also asserting that you got distinctly less enthusiastic coverage from this publishing group if you did not take their advertising packages.[8] So in addition to a purchased readership, there was evidence of purchased coverage.

Local Editions and Democracy

But the flip side to this was that both in January 2005 in Madhya Pradesh, and in August the same year in Uttar Pradesh, news from thousands of villages carried in highly commercialised newspapers played an unprecedented role in creating interest in the panchayat elections. Their editions going down to the village level carried news every day of the preparations in the run-up to the elections, even as their pages were full of advertisements from panchayat candidates informing voters of their symbols. Thousands of election results were carried every day, from village constituencies where the margin of victory was sometimes a single vote. Elections are always big news in India. Now village-level elections were being exhaustively covered for the first time, because the same main paper was going to both urban and rural audiences.

Robin Jeffrey's case study of Kerala had led him to theorise that there were three stages of print in a society in which the media is growing and maturing. He defined these stages as 'rare', 'elite' and 'mass' medium and concluded that the impact of print lessened when

it became a mass medium spewing trivia (Jeffrey 2004). It also became, according to him, more likely to appease the establishment, and therefore less likely to

> generate public action as it had done in its ideology-driven days as an *elite* medium .... In short, in the elite mode, print may serve evolving nationalisms; but in the mass mode it serves the interests of the state ideologies within whose boundaries vulnerable proprietors have their money invested.

While this last point is certainly borne out to some extent by the example of *Dainik Jagran* already quoted, there is some evidence that even the trivia-laden local pages that arrived in the Hindi heartland's villages created civic and political awareness in first-time rural newspaper consumers. They talked about financial allocations made for the village, they focused on the state of civic amenities, and highlighted lapses in governance. Social workers felt this new flow of information had succeeded in altering the tenor of popular participation in panchayat meetings. 'Awareness has increased and the village level dynamics has changed. This is reflected in the interaction in the Gram Sabha too, especially in the kind of questions that people have begun to ask'.[9]

What's more, with sometimes as many as four local pages to fill for an area where not that much was happening, the coverage could be exhaustive. At a round table in Udaipur those who worked with village communities felt that small news items, locally generated, served as a useful early warning system for drought, or crop failure, or impending economic distress.[10]

Some of the changes triggered by newspapers were not anticipated. As localisation grew, administrative and political repercussions surfaced. The mapping for segmentation of newspaper editions had to do with the presumed area of reader interest—a Betul (Madhya Pradesh) reader, for instance, would want news of adjoining regions as well—and the combining of contiguous areas which could make an edition viable, and make printing and delivery convenient. But the basis of demarcation of political constituencies has to do with population, and the creation of administrative blocks for the purposes of governance and law and order had to do, historically, with revenue collection. Because these mappings often varied, an administrator

seeking news from areas under his jurisdiction found that this had to be gleaned from more than one local edition. A politician seeking news from his entire constituency (of up to a million voters), had the same problem. And when you had to take an advertisement in a local pull-out section before the local part-time reporter could be persuaded to cover your election campaign, it became an expensive problem.

A more significant consequence of multi-edition newspapers was that this was producing a newspaper which both united and divided communities. The localising big dailies created a national–local product that blurred an existing regional identity which people living in India's states, voting in state-level elections, had acquired. The first part of the newspaper brought the national universe into rural and semi-urban homes, the second part brought the immediately local universe that the reader would recognise. As a result, news of even neighbouring districts disappeared from local editions. With the pressure of advertising on pages, coverage of the state as a whole, shrank. The intermediate picture, the amalgamation of many local universes, got squeezed out.

Over time newspaper localisation, driven by reader interests, had its political fallout though it was scarcely noticeable. Many a politician and activist became better known in his backyard, thanks to the increased coverage, but his fame died a local death. Local news for the most part remained local, rarely making it to the edition which was published from the state capital. Politicians fretted that achieving state-level recognition was becoming more difficult. They were concerned that there would soon be no statewide debate on issues, only local exposure. Members of state legislatures worried that questions raised in the assembly by them were now used only in local editions of the area to which the question pertained. Social workers and activists complained that regional was being replaced by local; and while the news coming out of the districts was more voluminous than before, its impact on backwardness was minimal. Since local news rarely found its way to other editions, their efforts to mobilise support on issues across a state often came to naught. By 2005 the worries were echoing in some editorial boardrooms, and debates began on how to contain the negative social fallout of excessive localisation.

Evolving a Public Sphere

This book argues that localisation of coverage by the print media expanded the existing public sphere at the district level, and then reinvented it unconsciously through its segmentation of editions. This had consequences for the political class and for civil society. It reshaped the individual citizen's sense of belonging, it added a new dimension to his identity. At the same time in nurturing the local it made newspapers relevant to a much wider readership. And when these new readers began to subscribe to newspapers it widened their horizons by bringing the national and international universe into their homes, through the main section of the newspaper. Even as it gave them a new local consciousness, it widened their information horizon. Its commercialisation of the election process, its democratisation of access to its pages, and the resulting inclusiveness of the news universe, its revival of dialect and its self-conscious reassertion of tradition in order to win over the mass reader, were all processes within this reinvention. It may seem fanciful to attribute changes in social dynamics to the impact of the print media. But that is precisely what writings on the notion of a public sphere have tried to establish for the influence of print media in other parts of the world.

The public sphere has become, over the past decade and a half, a much explored and interpreted concept. When Jurgen Habermas, the German philosopher of the Frankfurt school, first enunciated a model of what he called the 'bourgeois public sphere', he generalised from developments in Britain, France and Germany in the late 18th and 19th centuries. He defined the early public sphere as consisting of organs of information and political debate such as newspapers and journals, as well as institutions of political discussion such as parliaments, political clubs, literary salons, public assemblies, pubs and coffee houses, meeting halls and other public spaces where sociopolitical discussion took place. According to Douglas Kellner,

> For the first time in history, individuals and groups could shape public opinion, giving direct expression to their needs and interests while influencing political practice. The bourgeois public sphere made it possible to form a realm of public opinion that opposed state power and the powerful interests that were coming to shape bourgeois society.[11]

Habermas' treatise was written in German in 1962 but began to be debated and theorised about only after it was translated into English in 1989.

Inherent in the transition from elite to mass audiences for newspapers in India, from newspapers full of politics to those geared to giving the reader entertainment and news-they-could-use, was this concept of a public sphere that Habermas evolved. The early public sphere, which he conceptualised as an instrument for nurturing or transforming democracy, became in the Indian context in the early 20th century an instrument for waging a battle for freedom from colonial rule. The early years of newspaper growth in Uttar Pradesh conform to these theoretical assumptions. 'Just as in Europe, the Indian newspapers emerged as an arena between state and civil society where public opinion could be formed' (Stahlberg 2002: 53).

In the history of *Aj* in the pre-independence era, you had the emergence of a newspaper which was founded to act as a vehicle for nationalism in a country under colonial occupation. It was devoid of commercial intent. Between 1920 and the attainment of independence in 1947, in what was then the United Provinces, it was fairly pivotal to the struggle against British occupation. A chronicler of the paper's history described it as the vehicle for reporting revolutionary acts, for stirring up the populace and making it aware of what was going on in the national movement.[12] Its first editor was a revolutionary who had trained others in firing arms, and was asked—after he emerged from a spell in jail—by the paper's founder Shiv Prasad Gupta, to create what was described as a revolutionary newspaper. He went on to consciously evolve both a medium and a vocabulary for propagating the freedom movement.

From Habermas' own articulation of the structural transformation of the public sphere that took place from the 17th and 18th centuries to the present, and from the interpretations that others have done of his thesis of the emergence of a public sphere and its subsequent disintegration, emerge a theoretical framework that

helps understand the changes that have been taking place in the Hindi heartland. Indeed, the parallels are fascinating. In his introduction to *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* Craig Calhoun (1993: 3) describes the transition:

> The early bourgeois public spheres were composed of narrow segments of the European population, mainly educated, propertied men and they conducted a discourse not only exclusive of others but prejudicial to the interests of those excluded. Yet the transformations of the public sphere that Habermas describes turn largely on its continual expansion to include more and more participants ....

The expansion on account of the transition from elite to mass press had to do with literacy and with affordability. Habermas describes the initial period when most people were still outside the public sphere created by print. In Great Britain at the start of the 18th century, he says, more than half the population lived on the margins of subsistence. 'The masses were not only largely illiterate but also so pauperised that they could not even pay for literature. They did not have at their disposal the buying power needed for even the most modest participation in the market of cultural goods' (Habermas 1989: 38). But with the emergence of the diffuse public formed in the course of the commercialisation of cultural production, he says, a new social category arose.

In England, the illiterate masses were transformed because of initiated state policy, and reforms such as Forster's Education Act of 1870 (Hill 1985: 208–9). State-promoted literacy in UK in the 19th century, as in India in the 20th, helped lay the basis for a growth in newspaper readership. Michael Schudson looking at the public sphere in America says that 19th century Americans were more educationally equipped for participation in a public sphere than their 18th century forbears because in the 19th century the intellectual resources of the population expanded. Literacy shifted from being intensive to extensive, schooling became much more accessible, and the secularisation of culture, along with the democratisation of religion, spread a wider range of ideas to more and more people (Schudson 1993: 151).

Not only should there be more participants, says Habermas, they should also be capable of participating in the political public sphere. What makes this possible in addition to literacy is affordability and a de-intellectualisation as reflected in the popularity of the penny press. Describing the advent of the American mass press he says it was based on the commercialisation of the participation in the public sphere. 'In the case of the early penny press it could already be observed how it paid for the maximisation of its sales with the depoliticisation of its content.' In the next para he adds, 'In relation to the expansion of the news-reading public, therefore, the press that submitted political issues to critical discussion in the long run lost its influence' (Habermas 1989: 169).

According to Calhoun, Habermas suggests that ultimately this inclusivity brought degeneration in the quality of discourse, but contends at the same time that both the requirements of democracy and the nature of contemporary large-scale social organisation meant that it is impossible to progress today by going back to an elitist public sphere. To this Schudson adds that the extent of participation was an essential dimension of publicness, a key criterion for evaluating a public sphere. Calhoun stresses that it has to be kept in mind that Habermas' two-sided constitution of the category of public sphere meant that it was simultaneously about the quality or form of rational–critical discourse and the quantity of or openness to popular participation.

The evolving public sphere in the Hindi speaking states at the close of the 20th century conformed to this notion of quality in the early part of the century, and quantity and popular participation by the end of the 20th century. But it occurred within the space of a single century. In the 20th century people went from mass illiteracy to growing literacy, and then the ability to read a newspaper. When they came into the readership net the public sphere here was becoming accessible, both in terms of commercial incentives to the first-time reader, as well as in terms of depoliticisation and the creation of a cultural product that people would want to consume: a colourful product in which local news, crime, magazine supplements, and religious and cultural news was displacing the emphasis on politics that newspapers in the earlier part of the 20th century had.

Contrary to Habermas' later belief that commercialisation only degrades the public sphere, commodification of news in this part of the world helped to turn more people into readers, thereby achieving his stated requirement that an effective public sphere should also have more and more participants. And while he did not attribute widespread political consciousness to the masses, in India you had a situation where even without literacy, political consciousness was increasing. This was because of the emergence of new political formations that had constituents drawn from Dalits and backward castes and served to broadbase political participation, and because of the emergence of village self-governance and the widespread popular participation that it triggered. By 2006, elected village councils or panchayats had become the bodies through which the central and state governments disbursed substantial development funds.

In the context of India's Hindi belt, the early public sphere was the site for nationalism and gathering resistance to British rule. When it was re-invented, in a manner of speaking, some 75 years later in the mid-1990s, it was consciously developed as a commercial vehicle. It did not, however, necessarily speak to its readers primarily as consumers. It spoke to them as consuming, upwardly mobile, politically and culturally aware citizens. Also, in its second avatar, the print public sphere strove to create a sense of local community among readers who were assumed to have already acquired a national and state identity.

When media theorists discuss government, citizenship, information and the public sphere, they also grapple with the question of access. 'If citizens are to participate, the level of interaction with the public sphere must be two way—both to retrieve information and to introduce and circulate it as part of the creation of technoculture' (Green 2001: 120). As later chapters of this book demonstrate, an essential feature of the way the localised print public sphere developed in the Hindi-speaking states was that it democratised access: it accepted what passed for news from all and sundry, even as it incentivised reading of local editions by offering gifts and circulation packages. In addition to the practice of accepting news handouts in very small towns and in rural areas, first *Dainik Jagran* and then *Hindustan* introduced the 'sms' (short message service on mobile telephones)

mode of interactivity with readers. You could message for information, or give news ideas from your locality that you wanted the newspaper to investigate. You could also sms to complain about something that had appeared in the newspaper—a 21st century variation of a letter to the editor.

But on both counts, this sort of democratisation of access was superficial. It served those classes that had the wherewithal to interact: the education, the confidence, the technology. Those still at the bottom of the economy (landless labour, migrants, poor Dalits and backwards, victims of hunger and indebtedness) could figure in this public sphere only if a conscientious reporter sought them out. They were not readers and not likely to feature on the circulation agent's radar. There was however one small fortnightly newspaper, *Khabar Lahariya*, which sought them out and presented a subaltern view of how people were faring in the villages of the region of Uttar Pradesh known as Bundelkhand. It was in the Bundeli dialect and was produced by a group of women, some of whom were Dalits.

Conclusion

To sum up, a decade and a half beginning from the early 1990s saw the expansion and reinvention of the public sphere in the Hindi belt, making it both inclusive and more commercially driven. Newspaper penetration increased, and marketers quickly followed. Print went from being an elite to a mass medium and very ordinary people living in very small towns (known as *kasbas*) and villages became both news consumers and newsmakers as newspapers localised.

This expanded public sphere was catalysed in significant ways by the explosion of local news. It carved up the states of the Indian Union which made up the Hindi belt, into mappings imposed by the way newspapers evolved their local pages and editions. This had implications for politicians, administrators and social workers, and activists working in villages and small towns on various issues. News of even neighbouring districts disappeared from local editions. With the pressure of advertising on pages, coverage of the state as a whole, shrank. The larger picture, the amalgamation of many local universes,

got squeezed out. By 2005 the worries on this score were echoing in some editorial boardrooms. And debate began on how to contain the negative social fallout of excessive localisation.

This book locates the dynamics of 21st century Hindi journalism against the backdrop of its historical beginnings, as it evolved up to independence and thereafter. It traces the histories of some of the major newspaper-owning families, what led them to move across states in the Hindi belt, and the role played by the second and third generations in these families in expanding and diversifying the business. New modes of financing came in: the leading Hindi newspaper first divested its shareholding to a foreign partner, and then went to the stock market to raise further capital. It touches upon the influence on the media of political changes, predicated on caste, class and communal strategies. Out of all of this emerged a Hindi journalism in modern India that was pragmatic and market-oriented, and reader rather than editor-driven.

Notes

1. Prabhash Joshi, interviewed by author, Delhi, 18 May 2003.
2. http://www.indiantelevision.com/mam/headlines/y2k5/june/junemam47.htm, downloaded 29 July 2006.
3. Dionne Bunsha, 'The Rise of Print', 6 July 2002, *Frontline*.
4. Praveen Swami, 'Recording Media Trends', 25 September–8 October 1999, *Frontline*.
5. Mrinal Pande, interviewed by author, 24 June 2006.
6. The Hindi term for a traditional village meeting place.
7. Babulal Sharma, interviewed by author, Bhopal, 19 February 2005.
8. Suneelam, Samajwadi Party MLA, interviewed by author, Bhopal, 19 February 2005.
9. Amitabh Singh, Member Working Committee, Debate, interviewed by Sushmita Malaviya, Bhopal, 31 January 2004.
10. At Seva Mandir, Udaipur, 2 December 2004.
11. Douglas Kellner, *Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention*, http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/habermas.htm, accessed December 2006.
12. Dhirendranath, interviewed by author, 18 March 2005.

2

The Evolution and Growth of Hindi Journalism

'Our Hindi is no longer the Hindi of Pandits.'

Hindi journalism is young, some 50 years younger than English journalism in India which had late 18th century origins.* And while today it has the status of a national language in a huge, multi-lingual country, Hindi itself is a relatively recent construct, almost consciously developed as a vehicle for nationalist sentiment in the 19th and 20th centuries. Those who wrote in it strove to develop a political vocabulary, and a language that communicated with a wider audience than those acquainted with Persian or Urdu. These latter were the languages used for literature and discourse in the 19th century for a region which extended geographically from Rajputana in the west to Bihar in the east, from Punjab and Garhwal in the north to the Central Provinces and Berar in the south. The Mughals had ruled over this area, one legacy of which was a Persian-educated gentry. Press and publishing was in Urdu and Persian, Hindi was for the hoi polloi.

According to one chronicler of the emergence of spoken Khari Boli Hindi, the precursor of modern Hindi, it was the 'lingua franca of the bazaar over the whole of northern and central India, and the mother tongue of a relatively small area around Meerut in western Uttar Pradesh.' It was also the mother tongue of merchant castes like the Agarwals who used it for long distance trade communications. But not the language of poetry, which was more likely to be

*India's first newspaper, *Hicky's Bengal Gazette*, appeared in Calcutta on 29 January 1780.