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More than a belated Gutenberg Age: Daily Newspapers in India

An Overview of the Print Media Development since the 1980s, Key Issues and Current Perspectives

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Abstract: While TV may still be the dominant medium in India today, and the internet and mobile phone industry are currently growing at a tremendous speed, 'old' media such as the press don't seem to be losing ground as yet. In times of a recurrent debate about the crisis of print media in Europe and the US, the Indian newspaper market still keeps growing and has attracted the interest of multinational corporations. One reason for this is that India is presently one of the largest markets for English-language newspapers and magazines in the world. Notwithstanding the continued growth of the English-language press, it is above all daily newspapers in the major Indian languages which form the motor of this unprecedented press boom. The article shows that in the wake of economic liberalization and the enforcement of the consumption-oriented market economy, the newspaper market in India can be said to be changing from a linguistically 'split public', which was characterized by many asymmetries for decades, to an integrated multilingual 'consumer sphere'. It can thus be argued that in this new consumer sphere, the old existing and imaginary boundaries between 'English-language', 'Indian-language' or 'regional newspapers' are becoming increasingly fuzzy, whereas the new geographies of the 'regional' are now very important for the expansion and consolidation of daily newspapers. In order to de-westernize the current debate about the 'newspaper crisis', it would thus be important to look at different historical as well as contemporary trajectories of newspaper developments in the framework of changing media configurations in the so-called global South, which may differ significantly from the European or North American context.

Keywords: India, newspaper boom, media globalization, problems in categorization, cultural imperialism, De-Westernization

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Introduction

Along with the process of economic liberalization, the consumption and market oriented economy found its way into India from the 1980s onwards. Big Indian newspaper companies, such as the Times of India Group from Mumbai, the Hindustan Times Group from New Delhi, the Eenadu Group from Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh or the Jagran Group from Kanpur in North India, among many others, not only benefited from this process, but they can be viewed as a major driving force of India's 'economic miracle' in the 1990s and 2000s. It is noteworthy that most of these publishing houses soon turned into ever-expanding multimedia companies and thus had a huge influence on the increased horizontal as well as vertical integration and convergence of different media sectors in India.

While TV may still be the dominant medium in India today, and the internet and mobile phone industry are currently growing at a tremendous speed, it is interesting to observe that 'old' media such as the press don't seem to be losing ground as yet. In times of a recurrent debate about the crisis of print media in Europe and the US, or an oft-heard assessment that print has no future, the Indian newspaper market still keeps growing and has attracted the interest of multinational corporations. One reason for this is that India is also presently one of the largest markets for English-language newspapers and magazines in the world. According to the latest edition of the World Press Trends Report (WAN-IFRA 2013), the multi-edition English-language daily newspaper *Times of India* would appear to have a much larger circulation than any other English newspaper in the world.² Some key figures on newspapers in India are shown in table 1.

Tab. 1: Newspaper Circulation Figures

- Total number of newspaper registered as on 31st March 2010- 2011: 82,222
- Number of new newspaper registered in 2011: 4853
- Total number of circulations: 32,92,04,841
- Largest number of newspapers registered in any Indian language (Hindi): 32,793
- Second largest of newspaper registered (English): 11,478
- State with largest number of newspapers (Uttar Pradesh): 13,065
- State with second largest number of newspapers (Delhi):10,606

(Source: Registrar of Newspapers for India)³

² *Times of India* is listed at position 4 in the "Top 50 paid-for dailies" ranking, whereas the daily newspapers *The Sun* and the *Wall Street Journal* are at position 11 and 12. The Japanese dailies *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Asahi Shimbun* and *Mainichi Shimbun* occupy the first three positions in this ranking. It is also remarkable that 18 daily newspapers out of the "Top 50" are Indian newspapers: 4 English-language dailies, 6 Hindi dailies, 2 Malayalam dailies, 2 Telugu dailies, 2 Tamil dailies, 1 Marathi and 1 Bengali daily newspaper. Furthermore, 12 newspapers are Chinese and 11 Japanese dailies, 3 newspapers are from South Korea and only 3 of them are US dailies, 2 are from the UK and 1 from Germany. The vast majority of newspapers is thus currently circulated and read in Asia (WAN-IFRA 2013, Annex 2: 35).

³ Retrieved from <http://thehoot.org/web/NEWSPAPERS/5845-1-1-37-true.html> (last checked on June 26th, 2012).

Notwithstanding the continued growth of the English-language press, it is above all daily newspapers in the major Indian languages which form the motor of this unprecedented press boom. Especially the potential of the Hindi press and of other regional-language newspapers had been underestimated for decades and the same holds true with regard to advertising in regional languages. Other very successful newspapers are published in the four South Indian languages Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil and in Marathi.

Besides the sweeping breakthrough of advertising in regional languages, the two decisive factors for this tremendous and steady growth in circulation and readership figures over the last thirty years clearly lie in the regionalization and localization of newspaper offices and of newspaper content, which also practically did not exist until the beginning of the 1980s. It was only when market research began to expand all over the country in the late 1970s that the Indian-language press was able to acknowledge and realize its huge growth potential. Especially the results of the second National Readership Survey (NRS) in 1978 can be regarded as a real breakthrough in this context (Jeffrey 2000: 65f.). Over the next eight years since the implementation of the first NRS, newspaper readership in India had grown by 65 per cent in cities. This increase in readership alone demonstrates that the print media sector had already at that time achieved a considerable success in the history of the Indian market economy. At the same time, this development also led to speculations about the potential readership in less urbanized or rural regions (ibid.).

Today, 25 years after this decisive turning point for the Indian-language press, there is an interesting ongoing debate about the question if “regional is really the new national” (Gupta 2013) and some observers argue that newspapers will have to focus much more on the small towns and rural regions and try to build and engage local reader communities in order to avoid an ‘onslaught’ of digital media as it is being observed in Europe and the US. Rather optimistically, Robin Jeffrey, author of the seminal monograph “India’s Newspaper Revolution” (2000) said recently that “print in India has 10 to 15 years to go before it hits the sorts of downturn that is changing the print landscapes in the US and elsewhere”.⁴ He also pointed out that the re-use of old newspaper for so many purposes - from “lining walls to the packaging of bhel puri⁵” is such an integral part of daily life in India that newspapers are unlikely to shrink as they did in the West (ibid.). However, in view of the ongoing debate about the crisis of print media in Europe and the US, many observers are wondering if there is really so much “headroom for growth” (Gupta 2013) for print media in India or in South Asia in general. Especially when the results of the fourth round of the Indian Readership Survey 2012 (IRS 2012 Q 4) findings were published, it became clear that while some English- and Indian-

4 „Indian print media will flourish for next 15 years“, NY Daily News, Apr 1, 2012. Retrieved from: <http://india.nydailynews.com/business/c1a6a4b714235b273343c066660b4b31/indian-print-media-will-flourish-for-next-15-years> (last checked: Sep 10, 2013)

5 Bhel puri is a very popular Indian snack.

language newspapers still manage to grow, some of the big dailies were for the first time in many years losing readers (see Tab. 2).

Tab. 2: Top 10 Daily Newspapers in 2012 (IRS Q 3 and Q 4) (average issue readership, all figures in ‘000)⁶

Publication	Language	2012 Q 3	2012 Q 4
Dainik Jagran	Hindi	16474	16370
Dainik Bhaskar	Hindi	14491	14416
Hindustan	Hindi	12242	12246
Malayala Manorama	Malayalam	9752	9760
Amar Ujala	Hindi	8536	8434
The Times of India	English	7653	7615
Daily Thanthi	Tamil	7417	7334
Lokmat	Marathi	7409	7313
Rajasthan Patrika	Hindi	6818	6837
Mathrubhumi	Malayalam	6415	6334

The following article is divided into four sections. In the first section, I will give a brief overview of the transformation of the press sector after India’s independence in 1947 into a private business sector which was, however, not independent from indirect censorship and other influences by successive Indian governments. Subsequently, I will explain some of the factors which were responsible for the unexpected and phenomenal growth of daily newspapers in the 1980s and 1990s - two decades which were simultaneously marked by the rapid growth of television and the transition from state TV monopoly (*Doordarshan*) to the burgeoning of private pan-Indian and regional satellite and cable TV. In the third section, I will discuss the problem of a binary linguistic categorization of a ‘national’, English language vs. a ‘regional’, Indian-language press and the interrelated (non-) perception of the multilingual press market in India which, as I would like to argue, has largely influenced the academic ‘production’ of information and knowledge about this medium until the mid-2000s. Even though it can hardly be denied that, due to the colonial and postcolonial power asymmetries, the print sector has been ‘divided by language’⁷ for many decades, it seems that especially the post-liberalization dynamics of a strong newspaper expansion into smaller urban and rural areas have blurred and continue to blur some of the old imaginary and existing boundaries between these linguistically defined categories. So the question arises, what new concepts and categories could be used to analyze and better contextualize the development of newspapers in the context of a rapidly globalizing and changing media system in India?

Another aspect which is important in order to understand India’s integration into the global media market is the question of foreign direct investments in media,

⁶ All IRS 2012 data are retrieved from the Media Research Users Council (MRUC): <http://www.mruc.net/> (last checked Sep 11, 2013).

⁷ Title of a documentary film by Vandana Pednekar Magal: „Divided by Language: India’s Newspapers“ (2007).

which, until today, remains a very sensitive issue. From the perspective of print media and the decade-long reputation as the decisive medium of the anti-colonial freedom struggle, the fourth section will shed some light on the controversy about foreign entries into the newspaper market in the 1990s and early 2000s. Finally, I argue in the concluding paragraph that it is time to de-westernize the current debate about the 'global newspaper crisis' or at least, to broaden the lens and represent a truly global picture of recent newspaper developments and the current global situation. Newspaper markets in Asia are very strong today, the conditions which enabled them to grow and emerge were very different from the European or Northern American context, so they may perhaps also follow a different trajectory in the next one or two decades, as many experts hope.

Transformation of the press sector after India's independence 1947

Structural framework and the role of the government

After Independence⁸, the Press Commission, which was founded in 1952, suggested the establishment of two institutions, the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) and the Press Council. Founded on the basis of functions and obligations as they had been detailed in the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867, the newly founded Registrar of Newspapers for India was to monitor the development of the print media sector and to collect statistical material. As an autonomous body, the Press Council was to monitor all developments that could potentially harm the freedom of the press. Furthermore, the Press Council was expected to promote the incorporation of self-regulating mechanisms into the structures of the press sector. Hence, the independent state in principle supported the private character of newspaper companies and, consequently, the market-based operation of the Indian newspaper sector, as Nair describes in the following quote:

"The trends in ownership and organization of newspapers, which were beginning to be apparent in the late colonial period, became fully visible by the beginning of the 1950s. The report of the First Press Commission (FPS), took note of these trends. Importantly, the profit motive replaced the idealistic and missionary spirit of the former days. The individually owned or family concerns got converted into joint stock companies and the number of papers under the control of each individual concern increased, leading to concentration of ownership. [...] The process of transformation of press from a craft to a commercial venture was thus complete" (Nair 2003: 4183).

8 Until Independence, newspaper publishing in India could be broadly subsumed under the three following categories: (1) the establishment press (or Anglo-Indian newspapers, e.g. *The Statesman*, *The Pioneer* or *The Times of India*); (2) the national or nationalist press (English newspapers owned by Indians, e.g. *The National Herald*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu* or *The Indian Express*) and (3) the anti-colonial Indian-language press (e.g. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Kesari*, *Sandesh*, *Bombay Samachar*, *Mathrubhumi* or *Aaj*). See Nair 2003, Raghavan 1994 and Ståhlberg 2002. Sonwalkar estimates that the total number of newspapers and magazines within the second and third category, i.e. anti-colonial press in India, amounted up to 4,000, in English as well as in many Indian languages (Sonwalkar 2002: 823).

However, it would be wrong to conclude that the postcolonial state was going to refrain from influencing and exerting control over newspapers in India. Outwardly, the image of an independent Indian press free from any form of censorship was upheld, true to Jawaharlal Nehru's often quoted motto "I would rather have a completely free press with all the dangers in the wrong use of the freedom than a suppressed or regulated press" (quoted in: Joglekar 1999: 8). But in practice the state used inconspicuous means of interference, such as issuing printing licenses and, more importantly, placing government advertisements. As long as nearly no private advertising existed, governing parties enjoyed a monopoly and made ample use of their privilege - a practice which had been put in place in the 1920s under British rule and which the postcolonial government adopted ceaselessly (Jeffrey 2000: 12).

Postcolonial continuity: Government bias against Indian-language newspapers

Until the gradual replacement of government advertising by corporate advertising in the course of the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1980s and early 1990s, successive Indian governments used their advertising monopoly to influence the press for their interests. "The use of advertising to punish, reward and thereby seek to influence newspapers became part of the repertoire of political parties in government" (Jeffrey 2000: 60). Hence, during the first decades following Independence the press and the state became interdependent. The danger resulting from too much interference by the state or from pre-emptive self-censorship by the press was often pointed out. Many observers were also critical of the fact that the English-language press received by far the largest amount of government advertising budgets, while non-English (Indian- or regional-language) newspapers were clearly disadvantaged. As Jeffrey argues, the unequal treatment was partly based on the central government's assumption that the non-English-language press was 'less national' and 'less modern' and exhibited more 'communalist tendencies' than the English-language press - an attitude remarkably similar to the stance the British colonial administration had taken vis-à-vis the so-called "vernacular"⁹ press (Jeffrey 2003: 6-10, see also Naregal 2001: 1-17). It is precisely this binary categorization of a 'national (= English-language)' vs. 'regional or vernacular (= Indian-language)' press which, until very recently, not only dominated the general perception, but also formed the basis for the analytical categories that were applied in many academic publications. I will elaborate on this problem in the third section below.

⁹ Vernacular literally means "local language" or "dialect", the term "vernacular press" was established by the British colonial administration in order to denote all non-English publications in India. Some authors consciously avoid the term as it has a negative connotation, and they prefer to use "Indian-" or "regional language" press.

The inequality between English- and Indian-language newspapers was further aggravated by the fact that the huge potential of Indian- and regional-language advertising had been underrated for decades. Only when market research became more prominent in the 1970s and 1980s was this misperception corrected. When the second National Readership Survey (NRS) was conducted in 1978, approximately 48 million people were regularly reading a newspaper or magazine. The biggest growth rates were registered in so-called Class III cities with populations between 20,000 and 50,000 people. This increase in readership alone demonstrates that the print media sector had achieved a considerable success in the history of the Indian market economy. At the same time, this development also led to speculations about the potential readership in less urbanized or rural regions (Jeffrey 2000: 15).¹⁰

Only five per cent of the total number of newspapers distributed throughout India at the beginning of the 1970s reached the rural regions of the country, indicating how large the urban-rural divide must have been until then. By the mid-1980s, the English- and Indian-language press reached 37.2 percent of the urban and 7.1 percent of the rural population. From the 1990s onwards, however, the urban-rural divide began to diminish. According to the 1998 Indian Readership Survey (IRS), 58 percent of the grown-up population (persons older than 15 years) in urban settings and 25 percent of the rural grown-up population were regular readers of daily newspapers and the diminution of this gap continued in the 2000s (Jeffrey 2000: 3 and Schneider 2005: 98). Currently, the readership of online editions of Indian newspapers is of special interest to marketing companies. Besides the relatively high number of readers abroad, these online offerings are frequently used by readers in smaller towns in India.

The rise of market research in India and its surprising findings not only led to an expansion of regional markets and the inclusion of completely new segments but also caused an unprecedented boom in the advertising sector. Between 1981 and 1996, the budget of the biggest advertising agencies increased from 320 to 4,200 Caror Rupees, i.e., 13 times, according to Jeffrey (1 caror = 10 million) (Jeffrey 2000: 60). The English-language press was not the only one to benefit from this increase; the Indian-language press did too. From the mid-1980s onwards, approximately half of the total amount invested into advertising went into the Indian-language sector. The increases in advertising expenditure in the 1980s and 1990s were so large that their volume alone would have provided rising revenue to Indian-language publications able to attract the attention of advertisers. But “print” was now accepted to mean print in Indian languages as well as English. During the 1980s, the Indian-language press captured a larger proportion of print advertising expenditure than ever before.

¹⁰ According to Kumar, a total of 15,814 newspapers and magazines in more than 75 languages were published or distributed in India in 1978 (Kumar 1987: 12).

In spite of the expansion of TV: India's 'Newspaper Revolution' in the 1980s and 1990s

During the same period, the entertainment media emerged as another major competitor for these rising advertising expenditures. At the beginning of the 1980s, the state-owned TV channel *Doordarshan* had already begun to show commercials (see Mankekar 1999). Another major rival appeared in 1991 in the guise of satellite and cable television. As a consequence, the share of advertising expenditure for print media sank from approximately 75 percent in 1985 to approximately 60 percent in 1997 (Jeffrey 2000: 62). Initially, this had no palpable ramifications for the print media sector, seeing that, "driven by the 'liberalization' of the Indian economy and the arrival of multi-national corporations, advertising expanded at 'frenetic pace'" (ibid.). For individual newspapers or magazines within this sector, however, the rise of entertainment media intensified competition. The same was true of the 'shooting stars' among the Hindi and regional-language press as well as the English-language press. Against the background of a steadily growing new middle class in India, the latter could no longer claim exclusive access to the audience with the highest purchasing power (Chandrasekhar 2002). The result was increased commercialization, if not commodification, of news and news-making and the use of fairly aggressive marketing strategies in order to woo more advertisers.

Although advertisers, not readers, bring in the money, large advertising budgets are tied to consumption-oriented audiences. Hence, many newspapers in India made ample use of numbers and statistics based on the latest market research surveys in their marketing campaigns. It is also interesting to note how strongly the advertising strategies of successful newspapers such as *Mathrubhumi* (Malayalam), *Hitavada* (English), *Sanmarg Hindi Daily* and *Dainik Jagran* (Hindi) resembled each other: In most cases, 'convincing' numbers from the latest Readership Surveys (either NRS or IRS) were quoted, along with explicit reference to the purchasing power of the respective reading audience. I would like to illustrate this specific advertising tactic by quoting from three campaigns run by newspaper companies which ran ten years ago, between January and July 2003, but a very similar pattern can be found in many campaigns today.

Advertisement from the Mathrubhumi campaign (published in: Outlook 2003, Jan-July):

Kalyan silks, what I started as a small showroom in Thrissur has now transformed itself into a well-known brand in Kerala. Mathrubhumi, with its staggering readership of 75.48 lakhs (source NRS 2002; 1 lakh is 100,000 in the Indian calculation system) has ensured me good reach among all categories of people. And its credibility as a newspaper has added punch to my advertising. This is what I call a double impact.

Advertisement from the Hitavada campaign (published in: Outlook 2003, Jan-July):

The Hitavada- English Readers. Educated Readers. Affluent Readers. 303,000 Readers. Can your media plan afford not to reach them? IRS 2002 certifies what you already knew - the highest read English daily of Central India.

Advertisement from the Dainik Jagran campaign for the regional editions in Bihar and Punjab (published in: Outlook 2003, Jan-July):

The rising popularity graph of Dainik Jagran in Bihar ensures a rising sales graph for your client [...]. For the simple reason that over 70% of its readership are in the SEC AB segment. Surprised? Good, for there's even more. Its readers possess the best purchasing power. [...] So go ahead, make your client happy. Now that you know how.

Now there's a solid media option to reach out to readers in Punjab. [...] What's more interesting is the fact that this readership has come from readers who matter. Which means now you have a winner for clients wanting to advertise in Punjab.

Considering the fact that India's most successful and widely read daily newspaper, *Dainik Jagran* (Hindi), especially in the 1990s cultivated the image of a down-to-earth, non-elitist newspaper it is remarkable that the paper would nevertheless make use of the same advertising tactics by referring to "readers who matter" in the following decade. The close interplay of market research and newspapers as well as the strong direction of advertising tactics towards potential advertisers can partly be explained by the increased occurrence of so-called price wars.

In the wake of 'price wars': Extremely low newspaper prices

At the beginning of the 1990s, this aggressive marketing technique was first introduced by the *Times of India* but soon found many imitators among the Indian-language or regional press. The basic idea of a price war is to undermine the dominant position of a newspaper in a specific locality by systematically reducing the price for a single copy of one's own paper and thereby forcing the rival to do the same. Subsequently, prices for newspapers fell to such a low level in India that sales alone could not cover the costs of production and distribution; as a consequence, wooing of advertisers increased significantly. In a recently published article, R. Jagadeeswara Rao describes the unchanged 'price war' tactics of *Times of India* in the south Indian city of Visakhapatnam. A longer quote from this article may serve as a very good illustration of the stiff competition daily newspapers are faced with in Indian cities today:

"Times of India for less than Re. 1 a day'. This, rather alluring advertisement on huge billboards that one cannot miss in the busy centers of Visakhapatnam city, signals an imminent 'price war' of sorts in print media. [...] Visakhapatnam with a population of about 20 lakh, is the second most important city after Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. It is also called "City of Destiny", 'Port City' (it handles the second largest quantity of cargo, after Kandla (Gujarat) port in the country) and 'Happening City'.

The leading English daily in the city is The Hindu. The other important English dailies are the Deccan Chronicle and the New India Express. The latest entrant into the city which is yet to make its present felt, is the one year old, Hyderabad-based English daily 'Hans India', owned by the proprietors of Kapil Chit Funds.

[...] Now the cover price of the 20-plus pages The Hindu is Rs.3. The Sunday edition is priced at Rs.5. The cover price of both Deccan Chronicle (sixteen page broad sheet and 16 page tabloid) and Hans India is Rs.3. The New Indian Express is offered at a price of Rs.2.50 a copy.

[...] Leading Telugu dailies like Eenadu, Saakshi and Andhra Jyothi, are all priced at Rs.3 a

copy, and hence the reader had to only select the language of the daily and there was nothing to lose or gain for subscribing to a particular daily newspaper. It is against this background that the TOI, with strong brand image and latest technology, is entering the market in the city. The result is anybody's guess." (Rao 2012)

The emergence of a multilingual “consumer sphere”

Apart from the dynamic interplay of advertising, regionalization and localization, the continuously rising growth rates in newspaper readership since the end of the 1970s can be explained by several other factors. A major political factor was the end of the Emergency in 1977. The darkest period of Indian democracy, as it is often referred to, was characterized by sharp censorship measures, the manipulation of media content, and a massive curtailment of the freedom of the press. When the Emergency ended, an enormous demand for information about the events during this phase had accumulated in Indian society, as Jeffrey argues:

[...] inside the bottle into which Mrs Gandhi had jammed a cork in 1975, immense curiosity built up. Once she was defeated in the 1977 elections, tens of millions of people searched eagerly for news of what had happened around them in the previous nineteen months [...]. In three years - between the depths of the “emergency” in 1976 and 1979, the years before Mrs Gandhi returned to power - newspaper circulations rose 40 per cent for daily newspapers and 34 per cent for periodicals. [...] People wanted to read about themselves (Jeffrey 2000: 38; see also Rajagopal 2001: 177).

Moreover, by the end of the 1970s, migration contributed to an increase in information by Indian society. Millions of people either had relatives or friends in the United States, Europe or in some other industrialized country. Informal communication channels carried new images and ideas of a more comfortable, better life to India (see Bhatia/Ram 2012: 77-98). These images very much resembled those projected by advertising agencies in consumption-oriented market economies (see Appadurai 1996: 4). Consequently, the demand for information that characterized the immediate post-Emergency period was accompanied by a sharp increase in the demand for consumer goods. And this in turn prompted the Indian government to initiate the first careful step towards the opening and the deregulation of the Indian economy (Jeffrey 2000: 39).

Similarly, the Indian government began to show its willingness to improve press technologies and the media infrastructure. New printing machines were imported and the development of new photo composition programs facilitated the use of the various scripts used in India for printing (ibid.). These technological innovations allowed the Indian-language press in all parts of the country to catch up and expand at a tremendous pace. Another very important factor in this process was the regional differentiation and localization of newspaper contents and editorial offices. The regional-language press in particular benefited from market research, which enabled decision-makers to assess the real potential for their newspapers in less urbanized and in rural areas. The oft-cited pioneer of this profound

transformation of the Indian newspaper was the Telugu press, especially the daily newspaper *Eenadu*, which was founded in 1974 by Ramoji Rao, one of India's most successful and renowned media entrepreneurs who was listed several times among the *India Today* list of "India's Top 50 powerful people". Until today, *Eenadu* is by far the most widely read newspaper in Andhra Pradesh and one of the most successful Indian-language newspapers.

Jeffrey brilliantly describes the fundamental paradox in the relationship between consumption-oriented market economies and print media: Newspapers are essential for spreading the liberal idea. Without the existence of media the circulation of diverse opinions, not to mention the idea of a freedom of thought is simply impossible. At the same time, the "limousines" carrying liberalism are maintained, polished and set in motion by explicit economic interests. Jeffrey argues that even if newspapers expand mainly because companies consider more and more parts of the population potential "consumers" not only of news but also of the products advertised in the newspapers, this development should not be judged as a negative development (Jeffrey 2000: 88). Prior to the 1990s, there was hardly any reporting on local news in India, due to the lack of logistics and personnel plus the high costs of local news reporting compared to national and international news (*ibid.*). Local news coverage could thus only set in once market research surveys had confirmed that it was possible to earn money in this field. As Ninan describes in her detailed analysis of the process of localization of Hindi newspapers, the flipside of this strong focus on local news and contexts is that it may affect the connection or rather connectedness to other localities or regional contexts even within the same federal state, so that it may also influence the imagination of the polity in unexpected ways, or, as Ninan puts it, "begin to weaken the 'deep comradeship' that used to bind different corners of the same state" (Ninan 2007: 297).

In the following section, I would like to discuss in more detail why the binary categorization of the press in India into an "English language" and an "Indian language press" (or "vernacular press", as it is often called) has posed a major problem for the analysis and interpretation of media developments in India since the 1980s.

A foundational problem in India-related newspaper research: The binary linguistic categorization of the press

Notwithstanding the increased commercialization and commodification of the press in India during the last three decades, the English-language press still benefits from the high reputation which some of its most eminent representatives had gained in the context of the struggle for independence. It looks back on a long history of more than 150 years in India and by and large still enjoys such a good reputation that many would consider it as the true 'national' press of India. In part,

this certainly also has to do with the fact that English-language newspapers are more accessible outside India and thus came to be perceived as the sole representative of 'serious' and 'high-quality' newspaper journalism in India, whereas newspapers in other Indian languages were very often and for a very long time not archived (for instance in newspaper libraries in Germany) or monitored in press offices at all.

Until the 1990s, and as a consequence of this one-sided focus on English-language newspapers, Hindi newspapers, for example, which were growing at a tremendous pace since the 1980s were hardly ever included in the monitoring and systematic qualitative analysis of Indian newspapers. Adding to this was the continual distrust vis-à-vis the so-called 'vernacular' press which originated in the colonial situation and in the efforts of the British authorities to control all the printed material that was hard to access for them because of the language, and that could be potentially 'seditious'. However, the independent state seemed to be equally leery of the Indian-language press (see Naregal, 1999: 1-13), and this official mistrust was reinforced when the ruling Congress Party under Rajiv Gandhi tried to reestablish a central institution for the monitoring of the Indian-language press in the mid-1980s, i.e. 'India speaks', which was "an attempt to digest and report on Indian-language newspapers around the country which had the aroma of a British institution, the Vernacular (or Native) Newspaper Reports, begun in the late 1860s to try to keep tabs on what was going on in the bazaar (Jeffrey 2003: 7)".

As mentioned above, the unequal treatment was partly based on the central government's assumption that the non-English-language press was "less national" and "less modern" and exhibited more "communalist tendencies" than the English-language press. And indeed, this general perception seemed to find a renewed justification with regard to the obvious manifold connections between the emergent Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) and the Hindi press in the 1990s (see Farmer 1996, Nandy 1997, Rajagopal 2001 and Rawat 2003) as well as in the context of the anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat in 2002, when sections of the Gujarati press were accused of inciting the violence (see HRW 2002: 34f.). Against this background, the binary categorization of a "national" (= English-language) vs. a "regional" (= Indian-language) press was once again reinforced significantly. Simultaneously, the idea that Indian regional languages carry along a distinct and inherent system of values that can be clearly distinguished from the values and inherent attitudes that are transported by the English language was also reaffirmed by many observers in the 1990s and early 2000s. Two longer quotes, the first one from an academic publication (1999) and the second one from a literary magazine (2003), shall serve to illustrate this aspect most clearly:

The researchers found that some of the most ethnic-centred stories came from the regional-language newspapers. These newspapers were serving the ethnic interests of their readers. [...] This became more pronounced in the ethnic-language or vernacular media. It was also prominent among media catering to local or regional audiences rather than those serving national audiences. In countries such as India, the English-language press was able to

transcend narrow communal and ethnic loyalties because of the cosmopolitan composition of the readers of the English-language press, but this press reaches only a miniscule proportion of the population in these countries (Goonasekera/Youchi 1999: 9).

[...] deep within the sumless folds of the language beats the hidden heart of the nation. The language carries its own values, the comforting familiarity of its age-old prejudices. Second, the message is contained within the language constituency, and English has no regional base. The only 'national' language, English opens up the message to a pan-Indian, maybe even an international audience. It has its uses, it has its dangers. [...] In short, though there are several exceptions in both categories, by the very nature of their language and audience, the English language media is generally smarter and more secular than other media (Dev Sen 2003: 19).

In such an essentialized and static understanding of language and supposedly homogenous linguistic communities, political attitudes and sentiments are seen as given a priori, stemming from the signs and symbols that are associated with a given language, while the complex situation and context of news(paper) production and distribution, the subject position of journalists or the diverse expectations and interpretations by audiences, and other important factors are more or less faded out. Regarding the first quote, besides the deeply problematic equation of "regional" and "ethnic", the most striking aspect is the assumption that the English-language and the regional-language press are seen as representatives of two diametrically opposed and monolithic interest groups - and accordingly, of two distinct public spheres and audiences. "National" interests are generally ascribed to English-language newspapers, and this nationalism seems to be per se rational, liberal and legitimate, while "regionalism" as a synonym for "narrow communal and ethnic loyalties" is categorically attributed to Indian-language newspapers.

Against the background of very violent conflicts in the last two decades, many researchers and journalists seized on this reemerging idea of an Indian public sphere that was primarily split along the linguistic dividing lines (see Rajagopal 2001 and 2009: 207-227). Without dismissing the important empirical findings and interpretations with regard to the Gujarati and the Hindi press, and without ignoring the vociferous attempts to actually (re-)produce this "split public" on every level, it can be argued that a conceptualization of Indian society as "split" in two monolithic blocks, an "ethnic" vs. a "cosmopolitan" block willingly or unwillingly reproduces earlier hierarchical conceptualizations which were first established by the colonial administration. It is thus debatable whether this deeply Eurocentric categorization can provide a suitable analytical framework for the extremely diverse and fragmented category 'press in India', which today includes publications in more than 100 languages and regional dialects and which is situated in very different contexts that make it problematic to compare, for instance, Assamese or Urdu newspapers with the Hindi press - despite the fact that they are all "Indian-language". While it may be correct to use the term "regional press" for the Assamese press, Urdu, for example, in India has no clearly fixed regional base. There are Urdu speaking communities all over India, but the most

successful Urdu newspapers today can be found in the southern federal state of Andhra Pradesh, especially in the capital Hyderabad. Even more problematic is the categorization of the Hindi press as “regional”, because its outreach nowadays extends far beyond the Hindi-speaking states and Hindi newspapers were able to win over readers from the English-language as well as from other segments in the last two decades, especially in southern metropolises such as Mumbai or Bengaluru/Bangalore.

Similarly, the English-language press also managed to enter into segments that either had been dominated earlier by Indian-language newspapers or that did not even exist before. Another trend which became more noticeable in the 1990s and 2000s further blurs these categorical boundaries, i.e. that there is a clearly definable group of readers who regularly read both, English-language as well as Indian-language newspapers. Also, in regions where newspapers compete with each other within the same language segment, English-language and Indian-language newspapers are all increasingly forced to ‘discover’ new markets that may differ considerably from their usual average reader profile (see Schneider 2005: 137). But most importantly, Dev Sen’s assessment that the “English language media is generally smarter and more secular than other media” is rather problematic. A qualitative analysis of the coverage of the Shah Bano case and subsequent debate on the introduction of a Uniform Civil Code vs. the preservation of religion-based personal law (1985-87), one of the most controversial and ongoing debates in postcolonial India, for instance, clearly showed that the bias against the Muslim minority was also strong in some of the English-language newspapers (Schneider 2005). If secularism in India is understood to mean that all religious communities are treated equally and that an equal distance is maintained to all of them, then certain English-language newspapers in India have violated this principle in the past three decades as much as other newspapers in the Indian or regional languages did (see also Rajagopal 2001 and Rawat 2003).

When the secular nation-state came under fire in the second half of the 1980s, there was also short period when the prevailing hierarchy between the English-language and the Indian-language press came under criticism (see Hasan 1989 and 1999). In this critical discourse, it was above all the ‘elitist’ position of the English press as well as their status as a ‘national’ press which was contested. At that time, the English-language press was accused of conveying an idea of the state as a monolithic organization, whereas smaller, regional and local newspapers were found to portray and describe the multi-layered and de-central texture of the Indian state (see Gupta/Aggarwal 1996 and Farmer 1996: 109f.). Basically, however, this could be said to be a mere inversion of the binary hierarchy. Despite the reinterpretation of both categories, the inherent problem and analytical fuzziness of a dichotomous construction of the ‘national vs. regional’ was not acknowledged nor addressed. A general revaluation of ‘the regional’ in this context, for example, completely ignores the fact that there may be a number of Indian-language newspapers (apart from the Hindi press) whose self-perception and

understanding is firmly grounded on the idea that they are part of the “national press” in India, even if their reach may be defined or limited by the linguistic region. For example, *The Mathrubhumi* from Kerala very confidently uses the self-designation “The national daily in Malayalam” (Jeffrey 2000: 217). So why should the idea of belonging simultaneously to a national as well as a regional community be considered as mutually exclusive?

Equally problematic is the persistent idea that regional means automatically ‘less urban’ or that Indian-language newspapers are mostly read in smaller cities and rural areas, whereas English is the preferred newspaper language of metropolitan audiences. It may be true that English-language newspapers are facing more difficulties when they look for new markets in less urbanized places, than many Indian-language newspapers do at the moment. To assume that Indian-language newspapers do not have a strong presence in the bigger cities and metropolises of the country, however, would be absolutely wrong. But as urban markets have become more and more saturated in India in the last few years, both, English- as well as Indian-language publishing houses are determined, to “go local and deeper into our heartland via print”, as D.D. Purkayastha, MD and CEO of the Ananda Bazar Patrika Group recently put it in an interview (Hasan 2013a). The Times of India Group (Bennett, Coleman and Company Ltd), for instance, is set to launch a Gujarati edition of *The Times of India* in the western Indian state in September 2013, and it is not their only experiment with regional or Indian-language editions or new newspapers:

The last few years has seen Bennett, Coleman and Company Ltd (BCCL) eyeing the regional market extensively. The group launched Bengali paper *Ei Samay* last year in West Bengal, besides more editions of Maharashtra Times in cities such as Nashik, Aurangabad and Nagpur.

TOI’s Gujarati edition will face stiff competition from market leader Gujarat Samachar and Divya Bhaskar, along with Sandesh, Gujarat Mitra and Darpan. It is learnt that the existing newspapers in the Gujarat market are gearing up for the new entrant with a slew of promotions to attract the Gujarati readers (Hasan 2013c).

Similarly, the English-language newspaper *The Hindu* is going to launch a Tamil edition in September 2013 (Balasubramanian 2013).

These examples illustrate that especially under the conditions of a highly competitive media market with strong tendencies towards an increasing horizontal and vertical, cross-media integration, it should no longer be assumed that the publication language *a priori* defines the orientation of a newspaper. Nor can it be assumed that reading groups represent homogenous “ethnic communities”, as Goonasekera and Youchi argue. As Rawat suggests, precisely because newspapers want to survive and grow, it is not completely inconceivable that even a Hindi newspaper which was formerly a staunch supporter and even a mouthpiece of rising Hindu nationalism, could adopt a less ‘culturalist’ tenor and readjust its profile (Rawat 2003: 1-21). By expanding beyond the language region of the so-

called Hindi belt, Hindi newspapers may be said to have more in common with the English-language press than with many other Indian-language newspapers, so in which category would they fit nowadays, national or regional press? Or should we understand the phenomenon of the rise of Hindi newspapers as a “vernacular¹¹ modernity”, as Neyazi suggests and by which he means “the critical appropriation of Western modernity reproduced in indigenous form”?¹²

In sum, one could argue that the continued binary categorization of the Indian newspaper landscape into an English-language and a regional press, at least in part, obstructs the in-depth analysis and overdue differentiation of analytical categories that is required in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the growth dynamics of newspaper development in India - despite the rapid expansion of TV, the internet and above all at present, the mobile phone industry (see Doron/Jeffrey 2013). The commercial knowledge production, which primarily addresses the information needs of the media industry, seems to take these constant changes and continued blurring of existing or imagined boundaries into account, but the problem of categorization also needs to be reconsidered by academic publications about the print media in India. All the more when there is a clear tendency that ‘regional press’ can be, in many cases, but does not necessarily have to be defined by the publication language, but rather by the localized content and scope of a newspaper. The current situation, in which regional is understood by many as the “new national in terms of consumer spend propensity and hence, attention of marketers” (Hasan 2013b), seems to be markedly different from the times in which it made perfect sense to apply the notion of a linguistically split public to the Indian newspaper landscape and perhaps also to its audience. This is certainly not meant to deny the many old and new chasms and inequalities that do exist in India, but rather to draw the attention to the fuzziness of these categories and to the interrelation of processes of media and social change in India which should be reflected in the analytical categories too.

As can be seen in the three tables below, the Indian Readership Survey now uses the three categories of “Hindi Dailies”, “English Dailies” and the newly introduced category “Language Dailies”. However, for someone who may not be familiar with the historical and contemporary background of this categorization of the newspaper landscape in India, “language daily” might perhaps be a rather confusing term.

¹¹ Neyazi’s use of the term can be understood as a conscious re-appropriation and new interpretation of the concept.

¹² “By adopting technological innovation and being sensitive to local cultural values, Hindi newspapers have been able to provide hybrid content to their readers. Such a hybrid content is sensitive to the vernacular realm of Hindi publics while incorporating a modern outlook and values” (Neyazi 2010: 908).

Tab. 3: TOP 10 Hindi Dailies (Average issue numbers, all figures in '000)¹³

Publication	IRS 2012 Q 3	IRS 2012 Q 4
Dainik Jagran	16474	16370
Dainik Bhaskar	14491	14416
Hindustan	12242	12246
Amar Ujala	8536	8434
Rajasthan Patrika	6818	6837
Punjab Kesari	3364	3323
Prabhat Khabar	2761	2859
Navbharat Times	2639	2633
Patrika	2051	2068
Nai Dunia	1553	1358

Tab. 4: TOP 10 English Dailies (Average issue numbers, all figures in '000)

Publication	IRS 2012 Q 3	IRS 2012 Q 4
The Times of India	7653	7615
Hindustan Times	3786	3820
The Hindu	2258	2164
The Telegraph	1254	1265
Deccan Chronicle	1051	1020
DNA	962	972
Mumbai Mirror	807	819
The Economic Times	753	735
The Tribune	653	671
The New Indian Express	664	652

Tab. 5: TOP 10 Language Dailies (Average issue numbers, all figures in '000)

Publication	IRS 2012 Q 3	IRS 2012 Q 4
Malayala Manorama (Malayalam)	9752	9760
Daily Thanthi (Tamil)	7417	7334
Lokmat (Marathi)	7409	7313
Mathrubhumi (Malayalam)	6415	6334
Eenadu (Telugu)	5957	5972
Ananda Bazar Patrika (Bengali)	5788	5750
Sakshi (Telugu)	5343	5379
Gujarat Samachar (Gujarati)	5153	5114
Dinakaran (Tamil)	4912	4816
Daily Sakal (Marathi)	4403	4469

The discourse of cultural imperialism and India's new role as an expanding media power in the 1990s and 2000s

The rapid expansion of transnationally active media corporations in the 1990s led to the recurrence of the debate on cultural imperialism, in India as well as in other nation states in South and Southeast Asia. However, while the forced rhetorical dissociation from the 'West' influenced the renewed imagination and actual

¹³ All IRS 2012 data are retrieved from the Media Research Users Council (MRUC): <http://www.mruc.net/> (last checked Sep 11, 2013).

integration of an 'Asian culture and community', Indian media companies were actually quick to adapt to the new rules of media globalization and began to expand far beyond India's borders.

In the mid-1990s, when the controversy over the question whether foreign direct investments (FDI) into the Indian print media sector should be allowed or not had reached a first peak, statements like the following one were not uncommon:

The print media seeking to ride into India with hi-tech might and propagandist power to consolidate the West's cultural conquest will make Indians un-Indian and our politicians welcoming economic recolonisation (Iyer 1994: 3082).

V.R. Krishna Iyer, a former Supreme Court judge, worked hard to mobilize public opinion against the intended opening of the Indian print market. He was convinced that every Indian was bound to support the "Operation Rescue of Indian print media". Among the opponents of FDI into the Indian press sector were some of the most powerful press companies in the country, especially the Times of India Group, the Hindu Group and the Eenadu Group. Although the potential weakening of their market position was most probably the real reason for this attitude, many editorials and lead articles which were published in their newspapers depicted the question of FDI as a major threat to India's culture. Besides 'cultural imperialism', terms such as 'India's threatened sovereignty' or a 'new form of colonialism' were frequently used in this debate (see also Sonwalkar 2001a). Similar statements were made on the political level. The oppositional alliance comprised, among others, the Congress Party, the Indian Newspaper Society, the Indian Press Council and all-Indian trade union federations. Congress Party spokesman Anand Sharma announced that his party maintained its position as it had been declared in the 1950s. As early as 1954, the first Press Commission of India had emphatically warned against allowing foreign players to enter the Indian press sector. The recommendation led to the legal prohibition of foreign direct investments in 1955. In February 2002, 47 years later, it seemed that the opponents of FDI would be successful again: The pro-FDI draft bill pushed by the BJP-led government was initially voted down in a parliamentary committee in February that year, but nevertheless enforced in the same year. Subsequently, the government allowed 26 per cent foreign direct investment in the news and current affairs segment in the Indian media, and 74 per cent in the non-news, non-current affairs segment which includes technical, medical and other specialized journal, whereas business publications fall in the news and current affairs sector: "The rider is that Indian shareholding should be significantly higher than the 26 per cent FDI. Apart from that, editorial control will remain in the hands of the Indian company and three-fourths of the editorial posts will have to be occupied by Indians" (n.a. 2002).

Reasons for the opposition to Foreign Direct Investment into the press sector

At first sight, the stance of the Congress Party may have been a surprise for many observers, for the Congress of the 1990s and the early 2000s surely was no longer

a strict supporter of the idea of economic self-reliance and autonomy vis-à-vis the former colonial powers. Ever since the reforms at the beginning of the 1990s, the Congress Party had rather come to symbolize the economic liberalization of the country. It had also been the driving force behind the opening up of Indian television as an advertising market for sponsors and advertisers from abroad. In view of this, what could explain the fierce opposition against the opening of the Indian press to FDI? The answer lies partly in the historical meaning of the press and in its anchoring in collective memory as the 'national' medium per se - not only in terms of its geographical scope, but also with regard to the emergence of an Indian public sphere which was based on anti-colonialism (Schneider 2005: 66-70).

In its initial phase, the Indian press was a product of the reform movements of the nineteenth century and the struggle for national self-determination in the first half of the twentieth century. What many of the leading figures of those movements had in common was the fact that they were also the pioneers of Indian journalism. Well-known names such as Ram Mohan Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru and especially Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi were inextricably linked with the political history of the country and with the history of journalism in India. It is against this historical background that the ideal of non-corruptible journalism with a strong political focus is still the measuring stick which is applied to the postcolonial and increasingly market-oriented journalism of today. But apart from the nostalgic idealization of a 'golden age' of the Indian press, one also needs to take into account the alleged 'invasion from the sky', as the introduction of satellite television in the 1990s was often referred to. In this 'invasion' scenario, which could be observed in a number of postcolonial states in Asia during this decade, Western print media or satellite channels came to symbolize the deeply felt threat to the integrity of cultural and geographical regions as well as of nationally defined borders. What formed the basis of this scenario was thus the persistent idea of an unchallenged and dominant 'centre of power' in the West, which was supposedly trying to maintain its colonial domination over the 'periphery' according to the logic of a borderless corporate capitalism.

This "discourse of complaint and protest", as Ang calls it, was inspired by the widely received theory of Herbert Schiller, who equates cultural imperialism with media imperialism (Ang 2002: 565). As Ang (2002) and Tomlinson (2002) rightly criticize, it is rather reductionist to consider media as powerful agents who permeate all social and cultural textures and, more importantly, as the sole cause of abrupt socio-cultural changes. Tomlinson and other cultural and media theorists have repeatedly argued against the idea of a homogenized global culture as a result of media globalization. They also question the idea of an unchallenged 'centre of power' in the West vis-à-vis its countless 'peripheries'. Interestingly, however, some of the states in South and Southeast Asia argued for the promotion of a new "Asian perspective" as the foundation for their own global ambitions. According to Ang, it was this discursive shift which marked the transition of the

anti-colonial or post-colonial climate to what could be termed a “neocivilizational climate” (Ang 2002: 580; see also Morley 2006: 30-43).

In lieu of a specific national identity, the renewed Asianism stressed the importance of Asia as a transnational cultural community, one which was to present itself as united on the cultural terrain in order to promote transregional economic integration. Of course those efforts have not rendered the nation state irrelevant. On the contrary: In India, following a phase of deregulation during which the state had seemingly retreated from the media sector, attempts to re-regulate it became visible in the beginning of the 2000s, with the effect of limiting the scope of action for foreign as well as for Indian media companies.

When the new FDI policy for the Indian press sector was enforced in June 2002, the former opponents quickly began to look around for partners in Great Britain, Australia or in the United States. Again, it was the big newspaper groups in India which benefited from it. They are also the biggest players in other media sectors in India, while a number of smaller publishing houses have literally been driven out of the market over the last decades.

The expansion of Indian media corporations in the region of South Asia and beyond (especially in the so-called diaspora markets) is thus another good example which serves to illustrate the fact that the dynamics of media capitalism or media globalization are no longer exclusively generated in the ‘West’ and directed towards an (equally imaginary) ‘rest’. They have become very real in all kinds of directions. Thus, as Sonwalkar very pointedly argues, the fear of a “Murdochization” of the Indian media sector was and is not a danger that comes from the outside, for India has already generated its own “media barons” in the 1990s and 2000s:

Instances of cultural/media imperialism within the South figure less in western media studies, but there seems to be enough evidence now to suggest that they increasingly complicate regional politics. The notion of mediascapes as cultural ‘battlegrounds’ is often evoked in economic terms, but this can well extend to politics as well, as the situation in South Asia suggests. For example, elites of Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka not infrequently speak of Indian cultural imperialism. [...] The source of domination is clearly not necessarily in the North or West; it can emanate from and within the South as well. In some locales, the threat posed by the local and the regional may be perceived to be more serious (Sonwalkar 2001b: 506).

Interestingly, while the Indian government has increased FDI in areas like telecom and insurance in July 2013, “a key decision on raising foreign investment in the sensitive media sector remains pending as the Information & Broadcasting Ministry has sought advice from TRAI [Telecom Regulatory Authority India] and Press Council on the matter”. Suggestions to increase FDI in print media from 26 to 49 per cent within the news and current and to 100 per cent in the specialized magazines segment and facsimile editions of foreign newspapers are currently discussed in India and would once again introduce a new dynamics into the Indian newspaper market (n.a. 2013).

Conclusion: Time to de-westernize the debate about the ‘newspaper crisis’

In a German study entitled “Das Verschwinden der Zeitung? Internationale Trends und medienpolitische Problemfelder“ (in English: The vanishing newspaper? International trends and problems in media policy issues) which was published in 2009, the adjective “international” referred exclusively to the Northern American context plus a few western European countries, whereas not more than two sentences in the sixty-three pages long study were dedicated to the non-European and non-western regions of the so-called global South where print media have grown significantly during the last two decades. A deep Eurocentrism which still seems to characterize the perception and consequential debate about the crisis can thus be traced, first of all, in the prevailing notion that there is an “international” crisis of print media when in fact, the total global circulation numbers of printed newspapers have constantly grown until very recently. However, the authors of this study make a remarkable distinction between “classic newspapers countries”, such as Germany, Great Britain, France and the United States and what they perceive - quite unjustly, if you look at the long history of newspaper journalism in India and in other Asian countries, for instance - as “newcomers”, i.e. Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa (see Weichert/Kramp, 2009: 14f.). Equally significant in this context is the abridged explanation that the two authors offer for this extraordinary growth of printed newspapers in non-European regions in the last two or three decades:

Das Nebeneinander von Pressesterben und sprunghaften Auflagenzuwächsen beruht dabei auf einem typischen Merkmal des ‚digital divide‘, der digitalen Spaltung: Verlage in Entwicklungsländern [sic] profitieren von der späten Alphabetisierung und dem technischen Rückstand, während das Internet im Rest der Welt immer populärer wird und die Verweildauer zunimmt - auch in Deutschland (Weichert/Kramp, 2009:15).¹⁴

What the authors seem to suggest here, like many observers do, is that the absence of state-of-the art technology and the ability of an increasing number of people to read and write can be considered as the two decisive factors for the growth of print media. However, in India, as has already been mentioned, almost every medium and related technology has been growing very rapidly for some time now and the internet and mobile phone technology are by far the fastest growing communication technologies at the moment, while it is television and satellite which have the widest reach in both, urban and rural areas. It would thus be wrong to assume that we are currently witnessing a belated Gutenberg age in India and that the publishing houses would only flourish until the digital age would eventually, and once again, belatedly, arrive in India and subsequently replace or at least marginalize newspapers. Furthermore, it should not be ignored that in

¹⁴ English translation: This coexistence of a dying press and increases in circulation figures is caused by a typical characteristic of the ‘digital divide’: Publishing houses in developing countries [sic] benefit from the belated alphabetization and from the technological gap, while the internet is becoming more and more popular in the rest of the world and the dwell time is increasing - in Germany too.

India too, there's a visible tendency that more and more newspaper readers are already reading their content on the digital medium, be it the mobile phone, tablet or laptop, and this also includes some of the biggest Indian-language newspapers who have an "enviable readership base on the digital medium" (Hasan 2013b). Not least in view of the actual newspaper crisis in the US and in Europe, Indian publishers are closely observing the global development and trying to envision several best and worst case scenarios with regard to the future of printed or e-newspapers in India.¹⁵

In view of India's demographic situation, the question how young readers can be attracted to newspapers is one of the key concerns at the moment, so this would be just one among a large number of shared concerns where a more inclusive and truly global comparison of newspaper developments could bring fresh perspectives. Especially relevant with regard to the recent newspaper development in Arab-speaking countries and in Southeast and East Asia too is also the question of female newspaper readers who are now increasingly focused on by advertisers and publishing houses alike (see WAN-IFRA 2013: 14).

The second argument of a belated alphabetization also requires a closer look. The increasing numbers of women and men who can read and write in India has by now become a standard explanation for India's newspaper boom. It is definitely one of the most important reasons, but, as I hope to have shown with the short overview of the development during the last decades, it is nevertheless one among many, but not the only decisive factor for the remarkable growth of newspapers in India. Far beyond the contemporary developments and global trends, however, it can be argued that the continued engagement and attitude of a society or community towards "its" national, regional or local press also needs to be contextualized and regarded as a result of the specific development and political role of the medium in historical processes and struggles. Having said this, I would nevertheless argue that today, in the context of a dramatically changing newspaper market in India in the last couple of years, 'regional press' can no longer be defined by the publication language alone, but rather by the localized content and scope of a daily newspaper. The current situation, in which regional is understood by many market observers as the 'new national' in terms of readership and investments by marketers, thus differs significantly from earlier times when it made sense to apply the notion of a linguistically split public to the Indian newspaper landscape and perhaps also to its audience.

At least some of the commentators in the recent remake of the newspaper debate in Germany linked the crisis of newspapers with the current "intellectual crisis" in Europe (Weimer 2013), and with the general crisis of the middle classes (Seibt 2013) who feel threatened by rising social inequalities and increasingly dissociated

¹⁵ See for example the programmatic title and description of the INMA South Asia Conference in Delhi 2013: "Print: Thriving in the Age of Digital" (22-23 Aug 2013): <http://www.inma.org/modules/event/2013SouthAsia/> (last checked Sep 11, 2013).

from their states and governments by what sociologist Saskia Sassen calls the “grand larceny”, i.e. when “too much of our taxes now goes to bail outs of banks and luxury projects” (Menon 2013). Similarly, many experts in India feel that it is not really about technology or the media format, but first and foremost the content and position or positionality of a newspaper which makes it either relevant or irrelevant for the readers. A lot of credibility and esteem for the Indian press derives from its important role in the struggle for independence. But as many critics have pointed out, this credibility is at stake when recurring cases of paid content, distorted representations of minorities or the negative effects of market censorship become more visible and increasingly determine the perception of the press in India.

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