ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS AND THE MEDIA:
THE COVERAGE OF INDIA'S 1991 GENERAL ELECTION
IN
THE INDIAN AND THE BRITISH PRESS

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

By

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BSc Agriculture (Hons) MA (Journalism)

Centre for Mass Communication Research
University of Leicester

1994

UMI Number: U069476

UMI

Dissertation Publishing

UMI U069476

ProQuest

TO THE MEMORY OF
MY REVERED FATHER
WHO LEFT FOR HEAVENLY ABODE
BEFORE I COULD RETURN TO HIM

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Balwinder Singh

## ABSTRACT

This study looks into the way India's 1991 general election was portrayed in the
newspapers of India and Britain. The thesis stipulates that while the elections
generated a keen interest in the Indian press, it kept a low profile in the British press.
However, the British press' attention was heightened when the former Indian prime
minister, Rajiv Gandhi, was assassinated during the same election campaign, which
failed to invoke a substantial and appreciable amount of coverage. While the Indian
newspapers, after providing an extensive coverage to the themes related to the
assassinated leader for one week, returned to emphasise the campaign and other
contemporary issues, the British newspapers relentlessly continued to fill their pages
with the same themes even over three weeks after the event had happened. The thesis
also argues that the British press accentuated far more than its Indian counterpart the
issue of violence in India during the 47-day long campaign.

It clearly emerges from the findings that during an election, the campaign agenda is
formed by the journalists rather than by the political parties/leaders. While the
newspapers of both the countries carried more media-initiated stories than party-
initiated, the British press outnumbers its Indian counterpart. It shows that the
sacerdotal role the British journalists are known to play in the coverage of the election
in their own country is dissolved when they report election in a Third World country.
Discussed in this thesis is also the fact that the powerful political actors and parties are
referred to more than the minor parties and their leaders. Nevertheless, the basic and
development issues like inflation, poverty, unemployment, education, rural
development etc. - notwithstanding their inclusion in the manifestos of virtually all the
Indian political parties - get a low priority in the press.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFP        Agence France Presse

AP         Associated Press (of America)

BBC        British Broadcasting Corporation

BJP        Bhartya Janata Party

BSP        Bahujan Smaj Party

Cong (I)    Congress (Indira)

HT         The Hindustan Times

IE          Indian Express

JD         Janata Dal

LTTE      Liberation Tamil Tiger Ealem

NF         National Front

PTI        Press Trust of India

SJP        Samajwadi Janata Party

UNI        United News of India

UPI        United Press International

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

The media are known to have a major role in passing on information to their audiences. Political message, however, seems to have engaged relatively more attention, than other fields, not only from the media practitioners but also from the research community. This is largely due to the significance of the political institutions, which envelop and affect, directly or indirectly, most aspects of life. The production of political information, therefore, is as important for the media persons as its supply for the political leaders, because they have common interests of reaching the audience, albeit for different intent and purposes. On the whole, both the groups are complementary to each other for their mutual existence and relationship in pursuit of their respective goals.

The aforesaid relationship between media and politics, on the one hand, entails primordially a severe competition among various political parties, of varying ideological shades, vying with one another to woo the potential voter through the optimum use of the mass media. On the other hand, the working of the media largely depends upon the organisational set-up and control, which is further embedded in the complex society of the present day. Political organisations and their leaders strive for better treatment at the hands of media practitioners, for they know that their image, as defined by and presented in the media, will cast an imprint on their ultimate target group, subsequently shaping and swaying the voters' attitude.

It will look very naive to gain the impression that politicians need the media only when they have to appeal to voters for their support. As a matter of fact, it is a continuous process, which may be heightened when the elections are on the corner, but, nevertheless, is equally, and under certain conditions more, important in between the

elections. However, given the short period of a few weeks, for instance in India, the political activity is at its peak during the elections. The election campaigns are organised by the political parties in such a way as to attract the maximum publicity from the media to influence the public in their favour. So, the election campaigns have, as J. Craik argues, 'a decisive outcome in the production of a government. They are not just an other event on the political calendar . . . rather elections entail a distinctive relationship between the contesting arenas of political practice emanating from the notation of representation in which the media have a peculiarly privileged position' (Craik, 1987: 67).

The emergence of political communication *per se* is not something novel to politics; it has been there ever since politics came to existence, though not necessarily with this nomenclature, as Dominique Wolton argues that 'political discourse was referred to by a variety of rather inglorious, even disparaging names, particularly since the twentieth century when, with communism and nazism, political communication came to be equated with propaganda' (Wolton, 1990: 9). The present day election campaign, however, is conducted in an atmosphere where mass media play an important and vigorous role and bring the leader and the electorate to a platform where they can interact with each other, though, in reality, the flow of information, more often than not, is from the leader to the voter than the other way round. J.S. Trent and R.V. Friedenberg, who have reviewed political campaign communication research since 1920s, inter alia, argue:

> The contemporary candidate needs the mass media, in part because voters
> have expectations regarding the media's role in providing information
> about the candidates and the campaign. Citizens rely on newspapers,
> newscasts, and televised political advertising to tell them about candidates,
> issues, and campaign itself. Moreover, candidates have found that they can
> efficiently reach potential voters only through the mass media.
>
> <div align="right">(Trent and Friedenberg, 1991: 113)</div>

The process, therefore, at best is a complex one in which there is seemingly a high degree of competition among the contending groups, be they political parties, the leaders thereof, or any other organisations. The public, vital though it is, in this process is only like the third party, wherein the main interaction takes place between the media and politicians, especially during the election campaigns. So, much importance is attached to the media, as Seymour-Ure (1974: 43), in the context of British elections, argues that 'one cannot talk sensibly of a national campaign at all in the absence of mass media . . . '. But, this is, *mutatis mutandis*, true of any other country, where the potential of media in building and setting the agenda is recognised and appreciated, as in his classic statement, Bernard Cohen, argues that 'the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about' (Cohen, 1963: 13).

Politicians alone are not, cannot be, capable of managing the media, which in the words of Bernard Rubin (1977) has come to be known as "scientific politics", or "management politics". They, therefore, engage specialised organisations to take up this job on their behalf to get the things done in the right direction, more efficiently and in a more effective way. These 'source professionals' tailor the message in such a ready-to-use manner that it suits the needs of the media, and that there are better chances of its being taken in. All this, then, becomes the part of modern publicity process, which 'involves a competitive struggle to influence and control popular perception of key political events and issues through the major mass media' (Blumler, 1991: 103).

Integrated in the media-politics nexus are the issues which play a significant part in mobilising and, to an extent, moulding the opinion of the people in favour of or against a particular political outfit or individual leader (cf., for instance, Patterson, 1976; McCombs and Shaw, 1976; Weaver, 1982; Harrop, 1986; Iyenger et al, 1982; Graber,

1989; Semetko, 1991). Obviously therefore, as stated before, parties and leaders will have their own issues, subscribing to the ideas they most believe in, mediated through the press, radio, television or any other means, meant for the consumption of the public. But, notwithstanding the expertise and 'source professionalisation' available to the contending parties, not all would be published as and when they wish. The media do not merely pass on the message as received, else their role in the now much talked about agenda-setting function will get eroded (Chapter 3). Implicit in this, therefore, is the fact that the media, partly because of their professional requirements, and partly because they have their own preferences, sieve the message and disseminate it in the way they deem fit.

While doing their professional duty of sieving and sifting the information at their disposal on a given day, the media give prominence to some issues while relegating the others (cf. Iyenger et al, 1982; Iyenger and Kinder, 1987). The literature is replete with research studies, as will be shown in Chapter 3, acknowledging the power of media in doing so and taking, in some cases, explicit lines in the favour of a specific political party or a leader (cf., Blumler, 1991: 111). Clearly then, the role of political communication is multifarious. To recapitulate that and more, let us sum up what Dominique Wolton so succinctly argues:

> The fundamental role of political communication is to prevent the political debate from closing in upon itself. It achieves this by integrating a diversity of themes, which then become political issues, and by facilitating the permanent process of selection, hierarchical classification and elimination which ensures the necessary flexibility of the political system. . . . Whereas the dream of every politician is to close political communication on the familiar themes, to avoid others being introduced, the role of political communication is to guard against such an eventuality since functioning in a closed circuit would be liable to detach the political word from the rest of society. . . . Political communication serves to regulate the principle contradiction in the democratic political system, which is to allow for the existence of two alternating systems, the one open and receptive to new

problems, and the other closed, to avoid eternal public debate on every matter.

(Wolton, 1990: 21)

The functioning and role of the political communication, mediated through the means of media, may differ in different political set-ups. It will depend, for instance, upon the strength of the press and the freedom it enjoys, its ownership and control, the socio-economic groups it caters to, the political party system, and the degree of competition among different types of media, and within the same medium, say newspapers. Due to these and some other factors, not all newspapers in a democracy may toe the same political line. The Indian press, despite a few chain newspapers, for example, is owned by a variety of different industrial groups and trusts, and, because of the language, geographical and cultural diversity, no particular newspaper is pervasive in influence (Chapter 2). The newspapers, therefore, offer different views on topical issues, and are hence read by different sections of society depending upon their adherence to a particular ideology, penchant for the subject, or purely for their entertainment aspect.

As said earlier, the media have their own professional commitments which, according to their practitioners, they try to meet, of course with varying degrees of success. The process of gathering, selecting, interpreting and presenting the information in the final product of readable material, however, is rather quite complex. Stuart Hall and associates argue that a significant aspect of media work is the activity of transforming an event into a finished news item . . . each paper has a particular organisational framework, sense of news and readership, so each will also develop a regular and characteristic mode of address . . . (Hall *et al*, 1981).

Besides, there are other concomitant factors, impinging upon the working of the professionals, which are manifest in the media output, reflecting the media's likes and dislikes for a political party and its agenda. However, giving the benefit of doubt to the

journalists, it appears that generally they may not take explicit lines themselves, though they might have to compromise their professionalism in the case of the severity of the situation keeping in mind the interest of his newspaper or its proprietor (Chapter 7). However, it should not be assumed that journalists do not nurture their own prejudices (cf., for instance, White, 1950). The question of political power creeping into the media content through the establishment has been quite well thrashed out and indicates that the power structure and media ownership may have common interests, lying in their mutual interaction, with the result that their relationship may come to influence the media performance, whichever the direction (cf., for instance, Bagdikian, 1980; Murdock, 1981; Bennet, 1988; Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

Finance is the elixir of media existence, particularly for the newspapers owned by private companies. The exorbitant costs incurred for the production of a newspaper are thus recouped through the commercials, liberally showered by both the public (government departments, for instance) and private sectors (industrial houses, for instance). The newspapers, therefore, watch their own interest of economic dependence - in the absence of which they will be well nigh dead - by not, perhaps, hitting as hard as they might at the foibles of the political system and private businesses. This can be best understood in the argument, advanced by Graham Murdock, that '. . . newspapers are enmeshed in the present economic and political system both directly through interlocking directorships and reciprocal shareholdings and indirectly through their dependence upon advertising. They therefore have a vested interest in the stability and continuing existence of the present system (Murdock, 1981: 208).

The media cannot be studied in isolation, however, because they are produced in the socio-economic system, of which the media producers themselves are part, and are obliged to use 'cultural symbols' (cf., Hartmann and Husband, 1974). At work, the journalists have 'relative autonomy' (for instance, Hall *et al*, 1987) and select the news-

hole on the basis of its conformity to newsworthiness (Chapters 3 and 7), which further obfuscates the matter insofar as there is no consensus on what the news values are. The working of journalists is further constrained by the ubiquitous lack of time, space, and resources. The sources from whom journalists get their daily dose pose a different kind of pressure; journalists have to oblige them by providing coverage (which is, perhaps, why they primarily give the information) and be always on the alert for being misused (which sources try, by planting stories or leaking half information). Sources, as a matter of fact, have a crucial contribution in the construction of a media message. It is hardly conceivable to write a story in print, or make a television programme, without the input of some sources, particularly in the specialised fields. For instance, in their study of a crime programme, Schlesinger and Tumber argue, 'although the police would continue to pursue criminals without television, without the active co-operation of the police, no programme such as *Crimewatch*[1] could exist' (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1993: 30).[2]

While the working of the press may greatly differ, as stated before, from one country to another, variation might be found even within the same political system. However, there is yet another side to it and that is when the media belong to one country, while it reports the happenings in another country. More pertinently so, if the media are Western and the events take place in a Third World country. The Western newspapers in general, and the four mighty international news agencies in particular, have been found to portray the Third World countries in a manner which has invited strong criticism from the representatives of the developing nations as well as some Western sympathisers (cf., for instance, Masmoudi, 1981; Lent, 1977; Hopkinson, 1979; Mankekar, 1981; Aggarwala, 1978; Thussu, 1990). The Western press has been held

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[1]Crimewatch UK is a television programme shown on the BBC 1, once in a month. As the name indicates, it deals with the unsolved crime cases, which are reconstructed with the help of actors, in an attempt to seek helpful clues from the audience; it is a popular programme.

[2]While there is no doubt that such a programme, which heavily draws from the police department, is difficult to make without the support of the police, the police are not helping without their own interest. As the authors quote, members of the audience, after having watched the programme, have given many a useful clues leading not only to the arrest of the criminals but also their conviction.

responsible for not giving adequate news coverage about the poor countries, and secondly covering them only when there is a crisis, political, social or economic. In brief, Third World countries object that the picture painted about them is at best distorted and at worst far from reality. The collective plea of the Third World nations for a fair deal in the international flow of information culminated in the demand of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), which was jibed at by Western journalists and scholars (Chapter 3).

The Third World countries, especially India which has strong historical connections with Britain, expect to be covered by the British media not only when there is war-coup-famine syndrome, but also to reflect its developmental side. India appears to have a logic to ask for that because hundreds of thousands of people of Indian-origin now live in Britain. Arguably, they would like to read more about their country, and surely when a VIP is assassinated and about the consequences thereof, but, reasonably, also when no assassinations, no violence, no hunger, no floods, no earthquakes take place. However, notwithstanding the developing countries' clamours, the Western journalists try to justify their position (Chapter 7).

So, this is the context in which the present research was undertaken. The subject is confined to India's elections and the medium refers to newspapers. Why this particular topic was conceived in the first place can be appreciated from various angles. Mass communication research in India has yet not taken off at the expected pace and much of what has been studied is centred around the audience and survey research (Vasudeva and Chakravarty, 1989). Furthermore, the field of political communication is largely unexplored, as Karkhanis (1981) argues that '. . . the role of the press in Indian politics, even though it is known that the Indian press has grown and matured over the years in its vitality as well as in its influence has been as yet overlooked' (p. 6). With this end, it was thought worthwhile to study the Indian election vis-à-vis its coverage in the press.

In the retrospect of the selection of the research topic, however, an incident happened right in the middle of the elections. This was the assassination of one of India's former prime ministers, Rajiv Gandhi. His murder might have invoked as much coverage in the press in the country and abroad as it did even if this had happened before or after the election (though its consequences on the political outcome would have been certainly greatly different), but the fact that it occurred during the election campaign, added to the significance of the elections. It was, therefore, decided to include the coverage of the murder as a case study. There was a sort of halt, as will be shown in Chapter 6, to the otherwise hectic election campaign coverage in the Indian newspapers, which started concentrating on the coverage of the themes associated with the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. In a way, the assassination changed the course of the final count of the seats in the favour of the Congress (I)[3] of which he was the president (Chapter 7).

As remarked upon above, the British newspapers showed much interest in the coverage of Rajiv Gandhi's murder and not only gave it extensive news coverage but also wrote articles, comments and editorials (Chapter 5). It was, at the time of the conception of the research, deemed interesting to know how the British newspapers covered the extended election campaign vis-à-vis their enthusiasm to report and analyse the assassination. It was also significant to look into the coverage of the elections as such in the British newspapers with regard to the complaints of the Third World countries that they occupy the Western press's space only when there is a grave crisis.

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[3]Throughout the thesis, the word Congress (I) refers to the Congress (Indira), the present ruling party in India. However, certain authors prefer Congress -I for Congress (Indira), and they are used verbatim. Congress, if otherwise not mentioned, refers to the original Congress party before the split.

DESIGN OF THE THESIS

The organisation of the thesis originates in the broad introduction of the subject, as mentioned in this very chapter, and moves onto the background of the elections through the theoretical and conceptual work developed over the past decades, and explains the methodology; it then offers the main findings of the study which are discussed and interpreted accordingly, both in the context of elections and later the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi; further the interviews with the journalists are discussed, while lastly the conclusion of the research is offered.

Chapter 2 sets the tone for the research work in hand, elections and press, that is. As will be discussed in that chapter the 1991 election was the second in the last 18 months; it was the first time India had to have two elections, and three prime ministers, within this short period. Essentially, it will be discussed as to what brought about to the holding of the elections in question. What political and constitutional compulsions were responsible for the conducting of the 1991 elections. The chapter will also briefly discuss the political system vis-à-vis the electoral system. There will also be a quick roundup of the newspapers used for this study.

Chapter 3 relates to the more theoretical paradigms as evolved and discussed by the research scholars. This will help in understanding how similar subjects have been critically studied by different authors in different situations. What sort of results were reached to explain the theory behind them, and the models that were evolved therefrom? This chapter will have three sections: the first will discuss the contributions of the press in general; the second will shed some light on the journalistic perspective; and the third will focus on the image of the Third World countries in the Western press, and in brief, NWICO.

Chapter 4 is meant to discuss, in the main, the research methodology used in this research. Before embarking on that, it will first give the background to the main research method, that is, content analysis. The chapter will move on to explain the rationale behind the inclusion of the British newspapers and the selection of the newspapers in India. The coding schedule and the interview schedule used in the research will be explained in this chapter, while the sample of the newspapers will also be elaborated.

Chapter 5 concentrates on the main findings of the content analysis of the newspapers. While presenting the findings, possible explanation and interpretation will also be offered, as and when required. For an easy understanding and better assessment of the results, some topics will be subsumed under various macro-groups and interpreted accordingly. To avoid the overloading of the chapter, some tables and data will be presented in the appendices at the end of the thesis.

How Rajiv Gandhi's assassination was covered in all the four newspapers will be the main focus of Chapter 6. A separate chapter was deemed necessary to analyse more fully how the newspapers in general, and the British in particular, highlighted the coverage. The journalists who were interviewed during the course of field work were also asked about their assessment of the outcome of elections in the wake of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination. Therefore, their own analysis of the situation will also be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 7 is based on the analysis of the interviews carried out with journalists, both Indian and British. As will be explained in Chapter 4, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. It will be shown how journalists perceive an event like an election; what news values do they have in mind while deciding the selection/rejection of an event as news. Their comments on the freedom of expression and the constraints they have to work under will also make up part of this chapter.

Main findings arrived at in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will be recapitulated in Chapter 8. On the whole, it would be discussed as to how the newspapers of India and Britain presented the India's 1991 general election and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Simultaneously, theoretical discussion would follow to conclude the thesis.

# Chapter 2

CHAPTER 2

PRELUDE TO THE 1991 ELECTIONS: AN OVERVIEW

The 1991 general election, the tenth in India, was held after just 18 months of the last one. Not only was this an unprecedented feature in the independent India, but it also witnessed the coming and exiting of three prime ministers in a row. In fact, when the results of the ninth Parliamentary Election produced a hung parliament, many thought it of short expectancy. It was argued that the campaign for the 1991 election had started as soon as V.P. Singh had assumed office as prime minister in November 1989 (*India Today*, April 15, 1991). To understand more fully, it is necessary to have the context of the events which led to the holding of the 1991 election. In addition, this chapter will give in brief the information about the process of elections in India and the newspapers selected for the purpose of this research.

Elections to the 545-member Lok Sabha, as the Lower House in India is known, are held in all the states at the same time, unless the government decides to exclude a particular state due to a law and order situation or a constitutional propriety. The process of polling, however, may spread over 2-3 days to cover all parts of the country.[1] Of the total strength of the House, 543 are directly elected on the basis of adult franchise, while the President may nominate not more than two representatives of the Anglo-Indian community, if none have been elected to the House. Each state and the Union Territory in the country is divided into constituencies. The allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha to the States and the division of States and Union Territories into constituencies is determined by the Delimitation Commission constituted under an Act of Parliament following the publication of the Census Report every ten years (PIB, 1991; Aggarwal and Chowdhry, 1992; Mirchandani, 1980).

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[1]India is a vast country, and it becomes very difficult to complete the polling in a single day. It is spread over 2-3 days to ensure the maintenance of law and order in all the areas. This facilitates the authorities to move the security forces from one place to those places which go to polls later.

To ensure uniformity of representation to the States in the Lok Sabha and uniformity in the physical demarcation of constituencies, the Constitution lays down that the ratio between the number of seats allotted to a State and the population of the State is, as for as practicable, the same for all States and that each State shall be divided into territorial constituencies in such a manner that the ratio between the population of each constituency and the number of seats allotted to it is, as far as practicable, the same throughout the State. This formula will not apply to the smaller states having a population of less than six million (Mirchandani, 1980). However, in 1976 the Forty-second Amendment froze the allocation of seats, as based on the 1971 census, until the year 2001. The action was taken so that no state would be penalised through loss of seats for effective implementation of family planning programmes.

The elections are called every five years, unless the ruling party falls short of the majority[2], or a no-confidence motion is passed against the ruling party, though the President is also vested with the power of dissolving the Parliament in special circumstances and can order fresh elections. As in Britain, the incumbent prime minister in India can choose the right time to go to polls before the term of the House comes to an end when the elections are due in any case. The whole process of electioneering is organised and controlled by the Election Commission. Each recognised political party is allotted an election symbol by the Election Commission, while the independent candidates are issued separate symbols. The voting is done through the secret ballot system.

The polling system in India has come a long way since the first election was held in 1951-52. While the process of voting took over four months to complete in the first

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[2]Although it seems unlikely, but due to the defection of a large number of members from one party to another may cause such a situation. When the BJP pulled its support from the V.P. Singh government in November 1990, the Chandra Shekhar group aggravated the situation resulting in the resignation of V.P. Singh, when its members parted way with the party in power.

election, now it takes only 2-3 days, though the number of voters has increased manifold (Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993). In the first two general elections, each candidate was allotted a separate ballot box, and the voter would put the paper in the box on which the symbol of the candidate he wanted to vote for was marked. However, it had many obvious difficulties, which were overcome by the procedure of stamping the ballot paper by the voter according to his/her choice of the contestant. In fact, in some of the polling stations even electronic voting machines have also been successfully used.[3]

India has a multi-party system in which several national political parties, as recognised by the Election Commission, participate in elections. The triangular and multi-cornered contests in most constituencies lead to the split of the vote and the victorious party fails to get the majority of the votes. Even the biggest win ever in 1984 of the Congress (I) could muster only 48 per cent of the total votes, notwithstanding the fact that it gained 79 per cent of the seats in the Parliament. In the states too, there exists a great anomaly; for instance, in Punjab the aggregate number of state assembly votes for the ruling Congress (I) party during the 1992 election was only 10 per cent of the total electorate (Singh, 1992; Wallace, 1993). It is the Congress party which has ruled India for most of the time since her independence, with short interregnum like 1977-80 when coalition of the opposition parties, that is Janata, came to power and later toward the end of 1989, when Janata Dal-led National Front took the reins but only to be replaced within a year by Chandra Shekhar (SJP), who himself lasted only for a few months. And the tenth elections were announced.

Indira Gandhi, the daughter of the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru (who remained the prime minister from 1947 until his death in 1964), took over the office of

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[3]In 1982, a first experiment was made with electronic voting machines at some polling stations in the Parur assembly constituency in Kerala. These ingenious battery-operated devices were designed in India and were the first in the world to be used in such simple first-past-the-post elections. They merely required the voter to press a button on the voting machine marked with candidate's name and the allotted symbol ... (Butler *et al*, 1991: 22).

the prime minister in 1966 after the sudden death of her predecessor Lal Bahadur Shastri, and remained in office until 1977, when, in the wake of the internal Emergency she had imposed in 1975, she was defeated by the opposition parties under the coalition of Janata. However after a short gap, she again rejuvenated her party with the victory and occupied the top position in 1980 until her murder in October 1984. The dynastic rule remained intact when her son Rajiv Gandhi, who was not holding at that time any position in the government, was asked by the then President of India, Zail Singh, to succeed his mother as prime minister. Within two months of having held the office, he announced the fresh elections. The Congress (I) party emerged as the strongest ever (the party had never won with such a big majority in the past - neither under Jawaharlal Nehru nor Indira Gandhi) and Rajiv Gandhi became the youngest prime minister of India.

Rajiv Gandhi, during his early days as prime minister, received favourable response from all sides, including, importantly, from the press. Rajiv Gandhi entered new accords with the warring groups in the states in a bid to bring peace and order; he also talked about liberal economic policies and socialism. With his open ideas against corruption and other malfunctioning of the government departments, he acquired the title of "Mr Clean". However, the euphoria was short lived, as Robert Hardgrave Jr. argues that 'the accords were unfulfilled, liberalisation was half-hearted, and the old guard reasserted itself in party power. Revelations of kickbacks in a major Indian arms purchase from the Swedish factory Bofors implicated the Office of the Prime Minister, and the term "Bofors" came to symbolise widespread corruption. On the defensive, Gandhi drew more tightly into his coterie and lashed out at his opponents. The press attacked him as immature, indecisive, and isolated' (Hardgrave, Jr., 1993: 226).

Marred by these charges and the others like that he was pro-rich, pro-urban, with a Western life style and foreign wife (Rajiv Gandhi's wife, Sonia Gandhi, is an Italian by birth) he was out-of-touch with the people, the position of the Rajiv Gandhi

government was further aggravated by the resignation (and ultimately his expulsion) of its senior minister V.P. Singh. Singh along with other opposition parties leaders started attacking the government even more stringently, while the religious and communal forces also surfaced during this time. Pushed to such a corner by situational and political factors, the Council of Ministers under the chair of Rajiv Gandhi decided on 17 October 1989 that India would go to polls in November.

Thus the ninth general elections were fought on, among others, four issues of inflation, corruption, communal harmony and establishing Panchayati Raj (*India Today*, 15 December 1989: 53). However, corruption was perhaps the sole major issue which people thought was the most important (Oldenberg, 1992; Ahuja and Paul, 1992), though some argue that it was the vote for change (for instance, Hurtig, 1992; Sinha, 1991). No clear verdict emerged from the elections, however. Although the Congress (I) was unable to get the majority of the seats, it still remained the single largest party with 197 seats (415 in 1984) and 39.5 per cent of the votes as compared to the coalition of the opposition parties under the umbrella of National Front, which got 143 seats and 17 per cent of the votes at the all-India level (Butler *et al*, 1991). The most impressive win was that of the BJP which received 11.4 per cent of the votes and was able to win 85 seats, first ever. Since the National Front was short of the required majority in the House to form the government on its own, it did so with the support of the BJP and the Communists "from the outside".[4] V.P. Singh became the Prime Minister of the first minority government in the history of independent India.

Though the government had the outside support of other parties, the supporters did so due to their motive to keep the Congress (I) at bay and using the period as a waiting platform for next moves. This was particularly true in the case of the BJP which was thinking that by winning 556 of 1616 Assembly seats in the states in the February 1990

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[4]This meant that the supporting parties like the BJP and the Communists will not be a part of the coalition government but will vote for the government to ensure a majority in the Lok Sabha.

elections, it had brightened its chances of coming to power at the centre. Dipankar Sinha argues that 'the BJP's firm conviction was that it could form a government at the centre after the next parliamentary elections if it could take advantage of the dissension within the NF, the limited influence of the Left, the confused state of affairs in the Congress-I, and most important of all, the rising militant Hinduism' (Sinha, 1991: 602). However, the manner in which V.P. Singh was installed as Prime Minister left Chandra Shekhar a bitter man.[5] He was to, as would be shown later, prove the bone of contention in aggravating the situation leading to V.P. Singh's resignation.

Given the performance of the Janata-led coalition government (1977-80), there was little optimism about the survival of the V.P. Singh government for long. But, the end of the government came rather more quickly and abruptly than even the first coalition of 1977, which lasted 33 months (though during this period there were two prime ministers, the second, Charan Singh, remained just for 24 days). V.P. Singh had to give up even before the first anniversary of his prime ministership. Besides others, there were two major factors responsible for bringing down Singh's government: Chandra Shekhar's annoyance and BJP's resolution regarding Janambhoomi issue. Sinha (1991) argues that despite Singh's successful "method of conflict management", 'he committed a political blunder when he sidelined a leader like Chandra Shekhar and let him brew in humiliation'.[6] Secondly, he further argues, 'Singh underestimated the determination of the BJP when he avoided a solution to the controversial Babri Mosque-Ram Janambhoomi issue' (Sinha, 1991: 604).

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[5]There were at least three leaders, namely, V.P. Singh, Chandra Shekhar and Devi Lal, each of whom saw the potential of becoming the prime minister of India. In the process, however, the political game which followed, there was a compromise between Singh and Lal, according to which the latter would support the former to become the Prime Minister. In lieu of that, Lal would be second-in-command as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture. The plan worked out, but it were to manifest itself in such serious proportions that none of them, ultimately, was able to save his position.

[6]Dipankar Sinha argues that Singh's tactical "method of conflict management" is based on the premise that politics raises its ugly head wherever conflicts or competing options are found. Singh's approach, theoretically, directs one not to strive for "compromise", which according to him is another word for bargaining, but to manage contradictions inherent in all conflicts (Sinha, 1991: 598-99).

Besides, in an effort to gain popular support, strengthen his position, and undercut Devi Lal, V.P. Singh suddenly announced in August 1990 that he had decided to move on his party's pledge to implement the Mandal Commission Report and reserve 27 per cent of all central government jobs for backward castes (Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993). It should be mentioned here that it was during the Congress (I) government in 1980 that the Mandal Commission for the Backward Classes (after the name of its Chairman, B.P. Mandal, a former Bihar Chief Minister) was set up.[7] The Commission recommended that 27 per cent seats in all central government jobs be reserved for the backward classes, in addition to the 22.5 per cent already reserved for Scheduled Castes and Tribes.[8] While the Congress (I) never made the recommendations of the Commission public, let alone implemented them, V.P. Singh announced their implementation, causing a serious furore in all public spheres. This invited a strong criticism from all sides, especially high-caste students, some of whom attempted to set themselves on fire in protest and indulged in large scale arson across the country. The BJP was doubly upset: firstly, because this would create the caste war; and secondly, because it was not consulted, despite its support for the government.

So, Devi Lal's circumstantial resignation, V.P. Singh's unilateral decision to implement the Mandal commission's recommendations, and his failure to bring about peace to the troubled states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir accelerated the path to his downfall. The BJP in a bid to garner the Hindu vote had its interest in keeping the Ayodhya issue alive. To accomplish that, its leader, L.K. Advani undertook a 10,000 kilometre *rath yatra* (chariot pilgrimage) from Somnath on the Gujarat coast to Ayodhya, where construction of temple would commence on 30 October 1990. Since the place is disputed, there lied the potential danger of communal violence erupting between the

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[7] Above the untouchables in *the Hindu* caste hierarchy are those castes officially designated "Other Backward Classes" and defined by their low level of social and educational advancement. Predominantly rural, they account for 52 per cent of India's population and in many states command significant political power (see, for instance, Hardgrave (Jr.) and Kochanek, 1993).

[8] The term "Scheduled Caste" (used to refer to "untouchables") was adopted in 1935, when the lowest ranking Hindu castes were listed in a "schedule" appended to the Government of India Act for purposes of special safeguards and benefits. The Constitution of India has abolished untouchability.

members of the Hindu and the Muslim communities.[9] In view of the situation, Advani and his followers were arrested.

Under the circumstances, finally, the BJP withdrew its support from the government, and Chandra Shekhar, along with Devi Lal, caused a split in the Janata Dal and formed a separate party, SJD.[10] However, it has also been argued that 'it was eventually the BJP withdrawing support, rather than a split in the Janata Dal, that brought the V.P. Singh government down' (Butler *et al*, 1991: 28). Therefore, on 7 November, less than a year after he became the Prime Minister, the Lok Sabha rejected the motion of confidence with 346 to 142, as a result of which Singh resigned. With V.P. Singh out, and the BJP and the Congress (I) having refused to inherit the mantle, Chandra Shekhar came forward with his claim to form the government.

As it was, Chandra Shekhar, with his minuscule number of MPs, had to depend upon the Congress, which again agreed - like the BJP's support for V.P. Singh - to "support it from outside". It was 'one of the greatest shows of opportunism even by the standards of Indian politics' (Sinha, 1991: 607), for Chandra Shekhar had been an arch opponent of Indira Gandhi and her son, and their arrangement was beset right from the start with mistrust and opportunism, not to last long. Under the circumstances, on 10 November 1990, Chandra Shekhar was sworn in as the eighth Prime Minister of India, while Devi Lal as his Deputy.

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[9]There exists a mosque in Ayodhya constructed by Mughal emperor Babar, in the sixteenth century. *The Hindus* claim that the mosque came up at the place where Lord Ram was born, and a temple existed, which was destroyed for the sake of building a mosque. The place was declared disputable and was locked. The problem worsened in the 1980s, when the Vishwa Hindu Parishad gave a call for the "liberation" of the temple. The conflict that followed between the two communities claimed hundreds of lives. On 6 December 1992, hundreds of thousands of Hindus collected at the site and demolished the mosque which had serious repercussions the world over.

[10]Hopping from one party to another has been a characteristic of many a politician in India, mostly done with a view to keep clinging to power rather than any ideological preferences. To prevent this, the Anti-Defection Act, through the fifty-second Amendment, was passed on 15 February 1985. The aim of the Act is to stop members who are elected as representatives of one party 'crossing the floor' to join another party after the election. The Act greatly helped Rajiv Gandhi. However, if one-third or more of the members of a party break away, the Act recognises this as a 'split' in the party and does not disqualify the members of the breakaway faction, as it otherwise does. Chandra Shekhar and Devi Lal had enough members to avoid the law (see, for instance, Butler *et al*, 1991).

Chandra Shekhar's government was fraught with many problems right from the beginning. The things he wanted to do were not likely to appease his supporters in the Congress-I, for they had severe fundamental differences. Robert Hardgrave Jr. argues that Chandra Shekhar and Rajiv Gandhi were deeply distrustful of each other, and Chandra Shekhar knew it was only a matter of time before the Congress (I) would withdraw support, forcing elections that Gandhi believed would return his party to power (Hardgrave Jr., 1993: 233). However, Chandra Shekhar proved to be a tough man, while Gandhi underestimated him (Sinha, 1991).

That the Congress (I) was just buying the time and awaiting the right opportunity to pull the rug from under the Chandra Shekhar government's feet proved right rather quickly. Two constables from the Haryana police (the home state of Devi Lal) were seen keeping a vigil at the house of Rajiv Gandhi in early March. The Congress (I) men created a hue and cry against the surveillance of their leader's house.[11] In its bid to gain the political mileage out of this "trivial issue", the Congress (I) threatened to boycott the rest of the Lok Sabha session unless immediate action was taken against the Chief Minister and the Home Minister of Haryana. On Chandra Shekhar's refusal to oblige the Congress (I), Rajiv Gandhi boycotted the session that was to pass interim Union budget, causing a situation in which the government would not be able to have the required strength. But despite assurances from the Prime Minister to institute an enquiry into the episode, the Congress (I) continued the boycott (Sinha, 1991). Consequently, Chandra Shekhar, anticipating a defeat on the floor of the house, announced his resignation on 6 March 1991. The President later dissolved the

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[11]While Chandra Shekhar was taking into confidence the dissident Congress members and was believed to be engineering a revolt against Gandhi that would enable him to merge his party with Congress (I) and to assume leadership of the new Congress, Rajiv Gandhi, on has part, was in contact with dissidents in both the Janata Dal (S) and the JD, and it was rumoured in February 1991 that Gandhi had met with the President to discuss the possibility of forming, without new elections, a Congress (I)-led coalition government (Hardgrave, 1993: 233). In this context, the constables were believed to be posted by the government to see which members of the ruling party and the JD went to meet Rajiv Gandhi.

Parliament, announced that elections would be held and that the next sitting of the new parliament would be on June 5, 1991 (Butler *et al*, 1991).[12] Chandra Shekhar was asked by the President to continue until the elections were over. The political parties started girding up their loins for the tenth general elections within less than two years of having fought the last one.

The polling was to be completed in three rounds: 205 constituencies on 20 May; 115 on 23 May; and the remainder 190 on 26 May.[13] Elections in two troubled states of Punjab and Assam were to be held separately after the rest of the country had gone to the polls as stated. This was apparently done to ensure smooth running of the electoral process by replacing security forces from other parts of the country to these two states. However, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was excluded from the elections due to the unrest there. In all, therefore, 510 MPs were to be elected in the tenth general election.

With a massive electorate of over 510 million, India's tenth general election was the biggest democratic exercise in the world (the approximately 40 million 18-21 year old voters enfranchised for the first time due to the lowering of the voting age alone exceeded in number the total eligible voting population in many Western democracies). The number of the candidates too had swelled by 44 per cent within less than two years: compared to 6,160 candidates in the 1989 election, now there were 9,107 of them. To facilitate the voter to cast his vote, 594,797 polling stations were set up throughout the country. These were manned by approximately two million polling station personnel. The turn out of the voters was, however, less than encouraging as compared to the earlier elections; sweltering heat sweeping the country was given as the ruling factor, for elections are generally held during winters. Against the highest of 64.1 per cent in 1984, when elections were held in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's

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[12]However, due to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi on 21 May, the two remaining polling dates were postponed as a result of which the new parliament could not be constituted on June 5.

[13]The information given in the following paragraphs has been culled from various sources, including: Press Trust of India, 1991; Gould, 1993; Ahuja and Paul, 1992; Hardgrave, 1993; Hardgrave and Kochanek, 1993; Anderson, 1991; Mitra, 1992.

murder, and the lowest of 45.7 per cent in the first elections in 1952, the turn out in the tenth elections was 51.13 per cent.

The first round was held on 20 May, as scheduled. However, the following day Rajiv Gandhi was killed in a bomb blast in Tamilnadu, so the next two rounds were rescheduled. Accordingly, the 23 and 26 May polls were postponed to 12 and 15 June. The assassination in the middle of the campaign did have an effect on the outcome of the elections (Chapter 6). All the main political parties went to the electorate with their verbal promises, though all also had their manifestos printed setting the political, social and economic agendas in the event of their winning the elections. It so happened that the political machinations during the past 18 months or so gave clear rise to specific issues on which the parties fought the elections. In the process, therefore, Congress (I) made 'stability' as its issue, for there had been two opposition prime ministers in less than two years; V.P. Singh's JD-led National Front put forward social justice, reflected in the Mandal Commission Report, as the main issue; the BJP went to the polls with the aim of the accomplishment of their slogan of *Hindutva*, and stressed the need to construct a Hindu temple at the disputed place in Ayodhya (Chapter 5).

The elections have become an expensive affair, the tenth Lok Sabha poll alone costing the exchequer over Rs. 1540 million. In a closely competitive contest, each candidate spends far beyond the legal limit set by the Indian Election Commission. The laws governing campaign expenses allow, depending upon the region, up to 150,000 rupees ($7500 in 1991) for a parliamentary seat. It is argued that ceilings on campaign expenses are, in fact, openly flouted, in part because the ceilings are unrealistically low. Some MPs, on condition of anonymity, admitted having spent anything between Rs 1.5 and 2.5 millions (Kumar, 1991: 121). The parties, partly, collect the funds from big business houses. The Election Commission estimates that printing of ballot papers alone must have cost more than Rs 200 million in 1991 with over 10,000 tonnes of

paper consumed while another Rs 4 million or so would have been spent on about 1,500 litres of indelible ink.

Political parties spend lavishly on their campaigns. Besides advertisements in the press (television is not used for advertising), they depend heavily upon posters, stickers, hoardings, and, importantly, on transportation, including aeroplanes and helicopters. The BJP, for example, spent over Rs. 10 million, including eight million on press advertisements in 75 different publications (*India Today*, 15 May 1991). The Congress, on the other hand, spends the maximum on publicity. However, in the 1991 elections it brought down the budget to Rs. 100 million, half what it used in the 1989 campaign (*India Today*, 30 April 1991). All the VIP campaigners had at their disposal private aeroplanes to access even the remotest areas, while Chandra Shekhar, by virtue of still holding the PM's office, used Indian Air Force planes.

A recent addition to the election campaigning is the use of Video on Wheels, put to practice virtually by all the political parties. Giant screens projected popular leaders in far corners missed on their whistle stop tours. There was a great rush for booking video makers, sophisticated technology and high-tech media dominated the electoral battle. As the poll scene hotted up, special buses mounted with 150 to 250 cm video screens, hi-fi audio systems, projectors and generators, hit the campaign trail (PTI, 1991: 19).

THE NEWSPAPERS

Before I come to the actual newspapers selected for this study, let me give a brief account of the press in India. The growth of a thriving press has been inhibited by cultural barriers caused by religious, social and linguistic differences. Consequently the English-language press, with its appeal to the educated middle-class urban readership throughout the states, has retained its dominance. The English-language metropolitan

dailies, such as *The Times of India* (published in seven cities), *Indian Express* (published in 16 cities), *The Hindu* (published in seven cities) and *The Statesman* (published in two cities), are some of the widest circulating and most influential newspapers. In 1993 there were 35,595 newspapers (including 3,805 dailies) and magazines. In 1987 they were published in 93 languages. On 31 December 1989 the total circulation of newspapers and periodicals was 58,284,000 (*The Europa World Year Book*, 1994: 313). Besides, there are four news agencies: Press Trust of India, United News of India, Samachar Bharati and Hindustan Samachar. While the first two send news in English, the last two do so in other Indian languages.

The majority of publications in India are under individual ownership (61 per cent in 1984), and they claim a large part of the total circulation (39.6 per cent in 1986). The most powerful groups, owned by joint stock companies, publish most of the large English dailies and frequently have considerable private commercial and industrial holdings. For example, Indian Express group publishes nine dailies including the *Indian Express*, the Marathi *Loksatta*, the Tamil *Dinamani*, the Telugu *Andhra Prabha*, the Kannada *Kannada Prabha* and the English *Financial Express*; six periodicals including the English weeklies the *Indian Express* (Sunday edition), *Screen*, the Telugu *Andhra Prabha Illustrated Weekly* and the Tamil *Dinamani Kadir* (weekly). On the other side, The Hindustan Times group has the dailies: *The Hindustan Times* (Delhi and Patna), *Pradeep* (Patna) and the Hindi *Hindustan* (Delhi); periodicals: the weekly *Overseas Hindustan Times* and the Hindi monthly *Nandan* and *Kadambini* (New Delhi) (ibid.).

For the present research, two newspapers were taken each from India and Britain. The details about their selection etc. are given in Chapter 4. Presented here is a little more information about the newspapers themselves. The Indian press, especially English language, is known to have an obsession with politics (Drieberg, 1973; Haque, 1986), and plays a very important agenda-setting role (Haque, 1986). The organisation of the Indian press can be understood from the argument that it is 'commercially organised

and is run as a business organisation. Mainstream dailies, whatever their commitment to ideology or public interest and whatever constraints they may work under, would probably try to appeal as business organisations, to the greatest number of their readers' (Haque, 1986: 84-85).

*The Hindustan Times* was originally the venture of Akali Sikhs (Political wing of the Sikh community, predominantly settled in the north state of Punjab), who with the financial help from Sikh Maharaja of Nabha, wanted to have a publication of their own for their own motives (see, for instance, Murthy, 1966). The first editor of the paper, established in 1924, was a barrister and Oxford graduate, K.M. Panikkar, who edited the paper until his resignation when the newspaper changed hands and Ghanashyam Das Birla became the director, buying many shares in 1927. With this it became the first of the national dailies to be placed on a sound financial base and the most successful of them (Natarajan, 1962). Also, *The Hindustan Times* was the first notable national venture in the field of English journalism from the capital of India (Sahni, 1974). Now with a circulation of 328,100 (*The Europa World Year Book*, 1994), it is the most widely read newspaper among all those published from Delhi. Though there is not much empirical evidence available, *The Hindustan Times* is said to be a pro-Congress (I) newspaper (see, for instance, Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993). Murthy (1966) also argues that 'when Birla became the sole proprietor, it began to support the policy of the Indian National Congress' (p. 191) - of which the present Congress (I) is the offshoot.

*Indian Express*, on the other hand, was established in Madras in 1933 (Murthy, 1966). The newspaper was started, along with other language newspapers, by Ramnath Goenka, the famous industrialist of India, who was the first to start chain newspapers in India, called the "Express Group" newspapers (ibid.). Starting with six editions, *Indian Express* is now simultaneously published from 16 different places in India, with its own news service called Express News Service. As Murthy (1966) argues, *Indian*

*Express* played a 'valiant part in disseminating news about the national struggle', and 'gave unflinching support to the Indian National Congress' (p. 199), yet after Independence, and notably, in the recent years, it is said to be favouring the opposition to the Congress (Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993). It must be stressed, however, that there is no supporting concrete evidence available for its opposition towards Congress (I), though, nevertheless, it was the most coerced newspaper during the emergency days of Indira Gandhi's (Congress (I)) government (see, for instance, Pendakur, 1988; Verghese, 1978; Nayar, 1977). To a large extent, the journalists working for *Indian Express* say that it is an anti-establishment newspaper (Chapter 7). This could be the case because most of the time, after Independence, India has been ruled by the Congress party.

Among the two British newspapers, *The Times* is one of Britain's oldest newspapers. *The Times* began in 1785 as a small sheet called *The Daily Universal Register*. After three years, its founder and editor, John Walter II, changed its name to *The Times* (Merrill and Fisher, 1980). The 'best-known elite paper, *The Times* has always been considered the Establishment paper, a daily to read to keep up with the affairs of empire' (ibid.), *The Guardian*, on the other side, holds the distinction of being, 'Britain's only newspaper which has risen from the rank of a small provincial Manchester weekly to become one of the country's top quality national dailies' (ibid.). Run by a trust, *The Guardian* traces its history in *The Manchester Guardian*, founded in 1821. According to Merrill and Fisher, 'editorially, *The Guardian* calls its political stance "very liberal" . . . Ideologically, the paper thinks of itself as "centre-left", a position, though unpopular in some quarters, which shows *The Guardian* has not broken with the basic liberal-radical views of the earliest days of its history' (Merrill and Fisher, 1980: 150).

So far as the question of the British newspapers' ownership is concerned, *The Times* is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News International - the largest publishing organisation in Britain - whose three daily and two Sunday newspapers account for 31 per cent and 36 per cent of total circulation respectively (McNair, 1994). Bought by Murdoch in 1981, *The Times*' 61 per cent readership owes its affiliation to the Conservative party, while 18 per cent and 17 per cent of its readers favour the Labour and the Liberal Democratic parties respectively (data from MORI, as quoted in MacNair, 1994).

It is largely believed that the owners dominate their newspapers from the top down, and *The Times* does not seem to be an exception (see, for instance, Franklin, 1994). This is mainly because of the concentration of ownership and control in a single company/organisation, headed by an individual, like Rupert Murdoch or Robert Maxwell (the Mirror Group). However, apparently, there has to be a shift if the newspaper is owned, not by a single person, but rather managed by a trust, as is the case with *The Guardian*. *The Guardian* is owned by the Scott Trust (since 1936) which is responsible for the appointment of its editor, who can enjoy editorial autonomy. Although formed with mainly financial considerations in mind, the trust enjoined its members to see that the paper continued to be run on the same lines and in the same spirit as heretofore. This meant a radical commitment, but to a set of values and not slavishly to a particular party. Indeed by the 1960s the paper's general loyalty had shifted from the Liberal party to Labour (Seymour-Ure, 1974).

Unlike *The Times*, *The Guardian* is not in the hands of an owner whose financial interests widely vary. This is perhaps one reason why there is more editorial independence for its editor. Peter Preston, for instance, maintains that 'I can never recall a moment over the last ten years when the Trust has expressed any view on editorial/political matters. That has been left to the editorial team here' (quoted in Franklin, 1994). According to the MORI figures (as quoted in MacNair, 1994: 128), 59 per cent of *The Guardian*'s readers owe their allegiance to the Labour party, as

opposed to 22 per cent to the Liberal Democrats and 12 per cent to the Conservatives. As far as the circulation is concerned, *The Guardian* sells 418,026 copies daily as compared with *The Times'* 376,532 copies (ABC figures, 1992).

# Chapter 3

# CHAPTER 3

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This Chapter, as evidenced in the ensuing pages, will set the pace for more theoretical understanding of the work in hand. Specifically, it will discuss the contribution of the press in the formation of electoral campaign agendas; the factors responsible for differentiating coverage of various political parties, candidates and issues in different newspapers; the image of the Third World countries in the Western press; and, the perception of the journalists.

## 3.1 CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRESS

Few would refute the tremendous contribution of the media in modern society. Yet, the way the media function has been dissected and interpreted differently has led to analysts, often taking extreme positions. The consensus on the effects and influences of the mass media, therefore, eludes the critics. The role of the media in the political process, for instance is, at best, a complex one, for there are several factors that impinge on this role. There is no denying the fact that the role will vary according to a range of factors: the type of the medium, the place, the political set-up, the importance of the event, the organisational and ownership structure of the medium, the integrity of the people working for the media, access to the audience, the social and cultural environment in which the medium exists, and the influences and pressures which affect its working, though not necessarily in this order.

The mass media have acquired a central place, and thus a special status, in the society we live in. This is especially true of politics, for the politicians are the major primary sources of national political information (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Politics and mass media interact with each other, not only playing a significant role in the national

decision making processes but also framing public perceptions of events and social experiences (Gitlin, 1980). And this role of the media is not only confined to the first world, rather it is as much in evidence as in the developing countries (Desai, 1977), because as Cohen (1963) argued in his classic statement 'the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about' (p. 13).

After reviewing political campaign research over 70 years, Trent & Friedenberg reached seven principles of campaign communication. One, inter alia, is:

> That the media have tremendous power in determining which news events, which candidates, and which issues are to be covered in any given day. Thus a candidate's campaign must be focused, in large measure, around those sorts of issues, photographic opportunities, and events that will draw media attention and provide "sound bites" for the evening television newscasts. Whether these are pseudo events or real, pseudo issues or real, modern candidates do those things that will "play" to the media - that will call attention to themselves and their campaigns. Perhaps more important, because of the media, candidates do not do something and do not discuss some issues. Often what they fail to do is just as important as what they do.
>
> (Trent and Friedenberg, 1991: 113-114)

The media, as a matter of fact, have gained so much significance that no matter how important an event is in itself, it will not be noticed by the general public until the media draw public attention to it. This is particularly true for the events that happen at a distance, though the ones within the proximity of the audience too are, some times, known through the media exposure. Since journalism is the window to the world, most of the happenings are not known to the common man until they are reported in the media. On the other hand, it has been variously argued, that even an issue as important and significant as Watergate would not get the publicity it did if the media were not there. Lang and Lang (1981) suggest that without the media attention there would not

have been the same amount of controversy. In other words, media attention is a sort of pre-requisite for any happening to be known.

In the political process, elections assume great importance, for they 'are central to democracy, occasion mass political behaviour, determine who governs and thus affect the lives of all of us', and, 'by studying them we seek to deepen our understanding of how a key process of democracy operates, to discover how citizens make their voting decisions and to explain election outcomes' (Denver, 1989: 3). It is this importance of the relationship between elections and electorate which tempted the earlier researchers to study what, if any, impact mass media had on the voter's decision (see for example, Lazersfeld *et al*, 1948; Berelson *et al*, 1954).

Lord Windlesham has described political communication as, 'the deliberate passing of a political message by a sender to a receiver with the intention of making the receiver behave in a way that he might not otherwise have done. This definition contains three components: a political message; the method of passing or distributing the political message; and an intention to make the receiver respond in a particular way' (Windlesham, 1966: 17). Graber (1989) argues that the mass media are an important influence on politics because they regularly and rapidly present politically crucial information to huge audiences. These audiences include political elites and decision makers, as well as large numbers of average citizens whose political activities, however sporadic, are shaped by information they receive from the mass media. But why do audiences attend to the mass media message? Lazersfeld & Merton (1960) view mass media audiences as subscribing to the belief that 'if you really matter, you will be at the focus of mass attention and, if you *are* at the focus of mass attention, then surely you must really matter' (p. 498). So, whether one is in the news because he[1] deserves to be there, or because he deserves and that is why he is there, may not matter as much as

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[1]The word 'he' here does not mean that it refers to men only, and has not been used as a sexist term; it is used to denote both the sexes. In the rest of the text of the thesis, the usage of 'he' applies to both the male and female journalists.

the fact that he *is* there. And because he is there, he is likely to be noticed by the audience. The proposition may be as true for issues, parties, candidates etc.

It is interesting - because they are also, quite often, wary of each other - to note that media and politicians work in tandem. Neither of them is complete in itself in reaching the audience, which is their ultimate aim. The whole process of political communication has its basis in the two-way relationship between 'news assemblers' and 'news promoters'. This relationship could best be understood in what Blumler & Gurevitch have to say: 'political communication originates in mutual dependence within a framework of divergent though overlapping purposes. Each side of the politician-media professional partnership is striving to realise certain goals vis-à-vis the audience: yet it cannot pursue them without securing in some form the co-operation of the other side' (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981: 477).

While it is clear from the above and many other statements that the media and politicians work hand in glove with each other, it should also be unambiguously understood that those who have no means of power, political as well as economic, would not be in a position to exploit the media. They, therefore, will not be able to have their say, at least not in the way they want it to be. Consequently, the role of 'putting the reality together' is perceived to be left to the 'primary definers' and the 'purveyors'. Why people, in general, cannot assume such a role is explained by Ralph Negrine as follows:

> Few attempts to change public perceptions are achieved easily, nor can they be performed by all members of society. Those without power or legitimacy lack the resources necessary to capture the mass media. The planning and organisation required to lead the media and so define the 'real' issues and their meaning are outside the scope of 'powerless' individuals. Members of the general public usually only respond and react to media content: they are rarely in control of media work. In such ways political

actors, aided and abetted by the mass media, help construct images of 'reality'.

(Negrine, 1989: 13)

This sort of nexus between political actors, who define the 'reality', and the media, which pass it on, is further explained by Seymour-Ure (1974). While writing in the context of British elections, he also refers to 'continuous interaction between the behaviour of party leaders and managers and that of the mass media' (p. 43). Indeed, it is no exaggeration, he further argues, to claim that 'the campaign exists only as a control of the media: they give to the disconnected though more or less co-ordinated activities of the participants a kind of scrap-book tidiness, laying out the pieces in patterns, with prominence to some while others are tucked away at the back' (ibid.: 38).

The candidate necessarily looks to the press to get his platform across to the voters. Other means of communication, such as paid advertising and public gatherings, are available to the candidate, but they lack either the audience reach or credibility to substitute for news coverage. If the candidate is to impress his ideas on the public, he must have the co-operation of the press (Patterson, 1976). In fact, it has been argued that politicians win or lose elections today primarily on the basis of their successes or failures in the area of media management. Some times this management is described as "scientific politics" or "management politics" (Rubin, 1977: 160).

The political leaders are well aware of the potential the media have to deliver their messages to the target audience, in the case of elections, voters. Election communication may have a variety of different possible influences. In addition to influencing the decision about which party to vote for, election communication may also influence the decision to vote at all (Semetko, 1991). Politicians also know how to use the press to build their own images. According to Ansolabehere *et al* (1991),

'electoral strategies are increasingly aimed at gaining control over the flow of news coverage. By providing reporters with a continuous supply of newsworthy information, candidates are at an advantageous position to attract media attention by 'capturing' the process by which debates are organised, the candidates further influence what the press reports about them' (p. 118).

These and many more studies give us to understand that media have tremendous power to set the agenda for the public (for instance, McCombs & Shaw, 1976; Weaver, 1982; Harrop, 1986; Iyenger *et al*, 1982; Graber, 1989). The mass media, argue Lang and Lang (1966), force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about. Kraus and Davis (1976) are also of the opinion that television, newspapers, radio, and film seem to have enormous power in shaping public opinion of issues confronting society. By just paying attention to some issues while ignoring others, the mass media, deliberately or otherwise, may set priorities of concern within various sectors of the public (p. 213). Does all this lead us to believe that the press is omnipotent?

No, because the agenda-setting function of the media is not considered in absolute terms, however, several other studies conducted over time have shown the powerful role of media in this respect (for instance, McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McLeod *et al*, 1974; Weaver, 1982; Trenaman & McQuail, 1961 etc.). McCombs and Shaw (1972, 1976) argue that although audiences learn about public issues and other matters from the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the media place upon it. For example, in reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media apparently determine the important issues. In other words, the mass media set the agenda of the campaign. This ability to affect cognitive change among individuals is one of the powers of mass communication. In simple

words, voters do learn (for instance, Berelson *et al,* 1954; Trenaman & McQuail, 1961).

Asp (1983) attaches even more importance to media than the political party itself and thus concludes that the news media are more powerful than the parties as agenda setters for the voters. And that is why, as a latent consequence of telling us what to think *about,* the agenda-setting effect can sometimes influence what we think (Katz, 1980). All this moves a candidate from the role of a pure politician to play the new politics, what Graber (1989) refers to as 'media politics'.

So long as the media confine themselves to their role of setting agendas during the campaigns, it is understandable, but the matter gets complicated when instead they themselves become 'the campaigns' (Harrop, 1987), or instead of depicting the political environment, they become the 'political environment' (Graber, 1989) themselves. That is why, perhaps, Semetko *et al* (1991) are hesitant to use the term agenda-setting. They argue, rather, that the accurate term for the role of the news media in an American campaign might be agenda shaping, whereas some portion of their contribution to British campaigns might be termed agenda amplifying. But, does too much dependence on media serve any useful purpose in a democratic political set up? Not always, perhaps, as MacArthur argues commenting on 1992 British elections: 'so central was television to the three campaigns, and so directed were they to television, that many of the most experienced political commentators complained that democratic debate was being stifled' (1992: 30).

While MacArthur's argument appears to carry weight, it does not negate the contribution, and therefore the power, the media have. In fact, there is so much variety in the media available to the public, no medium, however powerful it may be, can dictate terms to the audience. At the same time, there is so much cut-throat competition among newspapers and broadcast organisations that no individual

newspaper, or for that matter any radio or television station, can afford to sell unfounded stories for long. Nevertheless, it can be argued, each newspaper will strive, while interpreting and analysing the social and political reality, to influence the audience in one way or the other.

In most of the research studies conducted on the agenda-setting function of the media the main concern has been to measure the influence of the media on the public's decision to vote. This, by and large, has been done by comparing the issues of the media with those that the public thinks are important. This implies that there could be no study, for example, on the agenda-setting function of the press without involving the response of readers. Of late, however, there have been attempts, particularly by Semetko *et al* (1991), to study the role of the media in the formation of campaign agendas from a different angle, that is, without the involvement of the audience.

It should be emphasised and made clear here that, in this study too, the agenda-setting function of the press has not been studied in its strictest traditional definition. Rather, the very beginning has been made with the assumption that press does have an agenda-setting/agenda-building and an influential role.[2] The model put forward by Semetko and associates (1991) has been made the basis, according to which the relative contribution of the press and the political parties/leaders to the formation of campaign agenda, as would be reflected from the coverage in the press of the India's 1991 election, would be studied. More emphasis has been put on the actual coverage of India's elections in the selected newspapers. The study will also try to focus on finding the pattern of the coverage of the electoral campaign *per se*, as well as looking at the emphasis the newspapers put on certain issues, candidates, political parties.

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[2]The study also tries to look 'beyond agenda-setting' (Gandy, 1982) insofar the interviewed journalists speak about their relationship with sources.

Notwithstanding the assumption above that the press contributes to the setting of agenda for the audience, it should be borne in mind that it is extremely difficult and bewildering to pinpoint who is responsible for setting the agenda. It would appear naive to put the onus of setting the agenda entirely on the media, as Langs argue that to say that media set the agenda is to claim both too much and too little (Lang & Lang, 1981). It is clear that there are certain issues which do not require extensive coverage in the media to be known to the public at large. Such issues most likely emerge from the audience's direct concern with them, though needless to say, media put them in the right context, political, social or economic. However, for the distant issues (referred to as high-threshold), as Lang and Lang argue, 'mere recognition is not enough. It requires a build up, which is a function of more than the amount of space and/or time the media devote to the story' (ibid.).

The Watergate issue is a typical example which illustrates why it could not draw sufficient attention from the audience during the 1972 US presidential election campaign, its coverage in the press notwithstanding. The same issue, however, assumed tremendous importance only a few months later, contributing, partly, to the events leading to the president's resignation. Why? Lang and Lang (1981) elucidate that the details of the incident seemed outlandish and their import difficult to fathom. Clear understanding of this case requires one to frame the Watergate affair in the overall context of the situation, especially political, prevailing at the time. In the authors' words:

> The process is a continuous one, involving a number of feedback loops, most important among which are the way political figures see their own image mirrored in the media, the pooling of information within the press corps, and the various indicators of the public response. We argue that a topic, problem, or key concern to which political leaders are or should be paying attention is not yet an *issue*. Important as the media may be in focusing attention, neither awareness nor perceived importance makes an issue. However, once the above-mentioned links are established, a topic

may continue to be an issue even if other topics receive greater emphasis from the media.

(Lang & Lang, 1981: 466)

The political campaign agenda, therefore, is the product of the combined power of the journalists and the political leaders to influence it in the way it appears in the newspapers, for example. It is, in fact, as Semetko *et al* (1991) argue, the discretionary power of either the journalists or the political parties, or the candidates thereof, which matters in the end. They explain at length, both at the macro and micro levels, a few of the differentiating influences that affect how much discretion both journalists and politicians have in setting campaign agendas (pp. 177-8). It is, perhaps, more due to this discretionary role of the journalists which makes the coverage of an important issue in one newspaper different than that of another, thus giving the newspapers a distinct look, as it reflects from their alignments towards and directions for different political parties and their leaders. This is how the press plays a major role in making some candidates, and certain of their characteristics, more salient than others (Weaver, 1982).

McLeod and associates (1974) carried out an agenda-setting study in Madison, a city in the Wisconsin state, which was served by two contrasting newspapers, that is, one with conservative thoughts, the other with liberal outlook. A content analysis of the two newspapers confirmed that their election agendas were indeed different. It was found that conservative paper devoted more space to America's world leadership and to the theme of combating crime, while the liberal paper paid more attention to the Vietnam War and the theme of 'honesty in government' (McLeod *et al*, 1974). Of course, it is because of their different treatment given to the news and views that different newspapers cater to different groups of readers and are thus identified and known by their commitment toward their specific objectives. Furthermore, they will

have varying degree of influence on the political system in particular and audience in general.

However, the media influence in itself cannot be explained in absolute and overt terms. For example, Weaver (1987) argues that the debate is centred not so much on whether there *is* media influence but rather on the *contingent conditions* that make for more or less of this influence. There seem, he says, three positions emerging from the various studies conducted over a decade: (a) The media are both necessary and sufficient in setting public agendas; (b) The media are necessary, but not sufficient in setting public agendas; and (c) The media are neither necessary nor sufficient in setting public agendas.

There are scholars who argue that the media are necessary but not sufficient in setting public agendas. For example, Lang and Lang (1981) studied in great detail the Watergate affair and its coverage in the US media. They concluded, as stated in the previous pages, that heavy coverage of the issue alone did not make it as explosive as it finally became, but there were other institutions like the Judiciary, the Congress, and other important political figures whose participation brought the issue to the limelight. There is not much support for the third option that media are neither necessary nor sufficient. The proponents of this proposition (for example, McLeod *et al*, 1974) argue that certain issues will be very familiar with the public even if there is no mention of these in the media. These may be the 'high threshold' issues which affect the people in general: for instance, the media do not have to tell them that inflation is a serious problem. However, it is the first condition which finds more favour with the researchers (for example, Weaver *et al*, 1981; Shaw & McCombs, 1977).

Notwithstanding the strong arguments in favour of the agenda-setting role of the press, it would be unrealistic to assume that audience would remain completely ignorant about important issues unless the media give them the information. People do learn

from their own interaction with their immediate surroundings. By holding only the media responsible for setting the agenda is, thus, narrowing down the scope of other contributing factors. In so doing, it would confine our understanding to know how actually this process works, say in the press. Oscar Gandy argues that 'we have to go beyond agenda-setting to determine who sets the media agenda, how and for what purposes it is set, and with what impact on the distribution of power and values in society' (Gandy, 1982: 7).

In this light, because information is at the heart of individual and collective decision making, control of information implies control over decision making, some organisations/people have the incentive in making information available to the general public at a much cheaper level they can afford to buy (ibid.). One of such agencies, among others, working behind the scene is the source of information - discussed later in this chapter - who can exert his pressure, to a varying degree, to have some information included, or even altered. The study of the working of 'information subsidies', and 'gatekeepers and their sources', Gandy (1982) argues, would make the understanding of the complex process of agenda setting more meaningful.

Weaver (1987) argues that '. . . it is not quite accurate to speak of the press *setting* agendas if it is mainly passing on priorities set by other actors and institutions in the society. In other words, if the press is acting mainly as a mirror or a transmission belt for various segments of the society, then it is not setting any agendas - it is simply passing on agendas set by others' (p. 176). Since it has been established that the press does play an important role in setting agendas (as shown earlier in this chapter), then, considering the above statement, the press is not merely passing on the priorities set by others. It is, therefore, implied that the coverage in the press of political parties, candidates and issues may be affected by the news persons' own preferences and/or biases, either implicitly or explicitly.

One can well understand the bias of any medium if it was under the direct control of the government (for instance, radio and television in India), but there are newspapers and print media which, though run by private organisations, do watch the interests of a particular party or a leader. While some papers take very explicit sides, others may not do so very openly, though, as Noam Chomsky argues, media serve the interests of dominant elite groups (Chomsky, 1993), and professional news practices serve political interests (Molotch & Lester, 1981). However, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to measure political bias in the media coverage, though it may be relatively easy to focus on structural or situational bias (see, for example, Hofstetter, 1976). The organisational set-up of the press, including ownership and control, also play, as described later in this chapter, an influential role in affecting the coverage.

Nevertheless, some newspapers at times take some overt lines and it becomes clear on whose side they are. For example, Bochel and Denver (1977) argue that no special study of the (British) national press is necessary to recognise that the principal leading articles are usually devoted to political issues and are normally partisan in tone, especially during election campaigns. In February 1974, of the principal daily papers in Britain, only *The Guardian* did not commit itself to a party (Butler & Kavanagh, 1974). Negrine (1989) is also of the opinion that newspapers do usually align themselves with certain political parties and do show their support for political programmes and policies in a variety of ways, some stronger than others.

But, despite the allegiance a newspaper owes to a specific party or a person, it is the way a candidate addresses his public that makes it worth noting by the reporters. Journalist's concern with what Lippmann called "the overt phases of events" also enhances the candidate's control by making what he says and does the major source of election news (Lippmann, 1965). Comstock and associates are also of the same view that any 'bias' that might be imputed was more due to campaign strategies deliberately adopted by the candidates rather than by the media coverage as such (Comstock *et al,*

1978). However, this view is contradicted by Mathews & Dahlem (1989) who carried out a quantitative content analysis study in the erstwhile Federal Republic of Germany in 1982-83. They argue that 'taking of sides was not so much the result of explicit evaluations but rather of selectively covering topics and perspectives in a manner favourable or unfavourable to the conflicting parties. This selective process in the mass media can be called instrumental actualisation' (Mathews & Dahlem, 1989: 48).

It is not only the policy of a paper to toe a particular line, but the bias also creeps in due to, what Pool & Shulman (1959) call 'fantasies' of the reporters, or if the events 'violated the editors' own sense of reality. This is where the concept of 'gate keeping' also comes in. The gate keeper may bring in his own prejudices which would then influence what appears in the newspaper. In the famous gate keeping study (White, 1950) a gatekeeper said:

> I have a few prejudices, built-in or otherwise, and there is little I can do about them. I dislike Truman's economics, daylight saving time, and warm beer, but I go ahead using stories on them and other matters if I feel there is nothing more important to give space to. I am also prejudiced against a publicity-seeking minority with headquarters in Rome, and I don't help them a lot. As far as preferences are concerned, I go for human interest stories in a big way. My other preferences are for stories well-wrapped up and tailored to suit our needs (or ones slanted to conform to our editorial policies).
>
> (White, 1950: 390)

Prejudices of the gatekeeper, however, will vary from one another. The selection criteria will also not be the same with all those who control the gates. The problem of media bias is far more complex than the media theory indicates, because, as Bennet (1982) argues, while in general members of the media do not *make* news but only *report* it, biases can and presumably do influence the *selection* of news items that are reported. This is as much true of normal times as during the election campaigns.

But why do reporters report in the way they do? Ansolabehere *et al* (1991) brings home the point: while clearly susceptible to the "guidance" of campaign operatives, reporters are not merely ciphers. They bring to the campaign their own expectations and objectives. Whether driven by boredom, cynicism, idealism, or by the norms of adversarial reporting, members of the press have ample opportunity to put their own imprint on campaign news. However, it is not always journalist's own bias, rather there are also other factors which impinge upon the journalistic practices. For instance, Halloran and associates argue that selection and presentation of news is not simply a function of conscious attitudes and deliberate policies. It springs from an underlying frame of mind which itself is related to occupational and institutional arrangements (Halloran *et al*, 1969).

Do journalists take sides on purpose? Not necessarily, and not, perhaps, always. To quote Herman & Chomsky (1988), 'the elite domination of the media and marginalisation of dissidents . . . occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news "objectively" and on the basis of professional news values' (Herman & Chomsky, 1988: 2). This view, though it does not blame the journalists directly, nevertheless, does not exonerate them either.

However, some scholars (for instance, Golding & Elliott, 1979) do give the benefit of doubt to the newsmakers. This school of thought believes in the inevitability of the presence of bias in the news, for they hold the structure of news making which conflicts with the occupational values and intentions of (broadcast) journalists, responsible. This conflict, according to them, derives from two basic dilemmas:

> First, the news attempts to be a comprehensive account of significant events in the world. Yet also, being finite, it has to be selective. Part of journalism's task is the intelligent selection of events in the world as newsworthy and the application to them of criteria of importance and

priority. Much therefore is omitted, and selection necessitates partiality and the intrusion of personal judgement and organisational need. The second dilemma derives from the commitment of news to convey objective, factual account of events, and at the same time to make them meaningful and comprehensible to the audiences. But even the simplest of contexts or explanatory additions will compromise complete objectivity. If news is restricted to the brief narration of unadorned reports it is reduced to a meaningless collage of separate facts; unrelated, pointless and random. If it expands to include explanation and background it introduces meaning with the inevitable intrusion of opinion and tendentiousness.

(Golding and Elliott, 1979: 17)

The authors further substantiate their argument: 'that these sins (intentional distortion, suppression or aspersion) are committed is beyond dispute. That they are normally endemic to journalism and systematically part of its daily practice is not . . . but commitments to objectivity, accuracy and honesty in broadcast journalism are usually sincere and serious' (ibid.). As is evident, the emphasis of these scholars is on the study of the *structure* of news making rather than the direct bias in the process. The corollary of this is that they do not say that there is intentional bias. Nevertheless, bias, which is there because of the process of production of news, is deemed to be a necessary evil.

Of course, media do not, and cannot, operate in isolation from the society they exist in. Nor, for the same and some other reasons, can they be absolutely free from various obligations, pressures and strains. Thus they would tend to continue to be presented in a way as defined, explicitly or implicitly, by the system, economic, political or social. To this effect, Semetko *et al* (1991) argue, 'the contribution of the media to the formation of campaign agendas is shaped by the political culture and structure of the society in which the media operate and is bounded by the parameters through which a given political culture defines the "permissible" interventionary function of the media, as well as the constraints that a political structure imposes on the performance of such function' (Semetko *et al,* 1991: 1-2).

It is not only the political set-up that would determine the role of the media in a society and would want them to work in a particular direction. There are other, sometimes more important, pressures, in particular, economic. The working of a news organisation, according to Hartley (1982), is heavily determined by its relationship with other agencies. He refers to two most important 'agencies' which are likely to have a say in the news. These are: capital (or commerce) and the state (or government).

Since finance is the lifeline for the existence and survival of any newspaper, those who provide it, especially through paid advertisements, try to exploit the newspapers to further their own interests. Shoemaker & Mayfield (1987) argue that sources of finance (including, of course, advertisers) are generally strongly influential on all aspects of news production and that a funder's ideology is likely to have an ultimate effect on editorial decisions relevant to the ideology. It is not the advertisers alone who influence the coverage of the papers, however. Also, the views of the owners of the newspapers are not only expressed in the editorials, but also fashion the news presentation (Banerjee, 1973). The internal pressure from the owners may not be direct and blunt. It may not even be apparent. In fact, the journalists (as subordinates) learn by habit to conform to owners' ideas (Bagdikian, 1980) and may have self-censorship which 'can also be unconscious in which case journalists may not be aware they are responding to pressure' (Gans, 1980: 251).

In India, for example, most of the influential English newspapers are owned by big industrial houses. Discussing particularly *The Statesman*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Indian Express* and *The Times of India*, Mulgaokar (1971) argues that these are owned by big business, which make them vulnerable to criticism that there is a built-in big business bias in their policies and in the selection and treatment of news. Apart from political and economic pressures, at times there is also a pressure of law (Bhattacharjee, 1984). This is, however, not to suggest that all newspapers in the world publish what their financiers or the political parties ask them. This should also

not be deduced that newspapers do not stand up against these pressures. However, the members of the audience seem to be aware of it and rather see it 'as legitimate for newspapers to take sides' (Robinson, 1972).

It is, invariably, clear from the literature cited hitherto, that the media assume an important role in the political process. This role becomes more predominant particularly during the election campaigns, for both the political parties (and representatives thereof) and the press want to reach the audience in a big way - the former in a bid to telling the readers/voters of the issues on which they contest the elections and the future policies they would adopt in the event of coming to power, and the latter inundating the public with more and more political messages from different angles and analyses of the on-going campaign so as to provide them with the opportunity of making their choices. In the process, however, the press gives more salience to some issues, candidates and parties than others, thus, affecting, in a way, the choice of the voters. As has been discussed above, the press may work in a partisan way beneficial to one political party or its leader than to the other. It has also been demonstrated that this might be done under various prejudices, pressures - social, political, economic - etc. which may come from outside agencies, and can also be there from within the news organisations. The ownership and control of a newspaper may also have an influence on its coverage. The socio-cultural environment is also a significant determinant, at some places more than at others, in the news production mechanism.

## 3.2 JOURNALISTS' PERSPECTIVE

Despite the rapid developments in the field of media technology responsible for having brought about the reality of the concept of a 'global village', it is still the human being which remains the single most indispensable 'ingredient' in the whole process of media production. It is the man (including, of course, the woman) who juxtaposes all the

important components, necessary for the production of news and other media programmes, into a presentable commodity. Hence, the journalist in a newspaper occupies a pivotal position in 'constructing the reality' for his readers. It would, under the circumstances, then, so happen that readers will form their opinion of the events, far and near, as they are presented - selected, written, edited, and may be opinionated - to them by the journalists. This is, however, not to suggest that a journalist is *solely* responsible for the whole process. In other words, this implies that he, important though his role may be, is only a member of the complex news organisation, while he is also, at the same time, a part of the larger society. The newspaper organisations do not exist or work in a vacuum. They are, in fact, closely interrelated with the other organisations and agencies which have, wittingly or unwittingly, their bearings on the news production system. The news persons have to depend upon a chain of sources embedded in the bureaucratic and capitalistic set-up, holding powerful images. Nevertheless, a journalist is bound to work under certain constraints which may impinge on the final outcome.

Although it is too simple to say that 'news is what newspapermen make it' (Gieber, 1964), countless events occurring in the world have 'no existence prior to the structuring intervention of the journalist' (Fishman, 1980) and do not become news until some 'purveyor of news gives an account of them' (MacDougall, 1968), which means that it is the account of event, not something intrinsic in the news itself (ibid.). It appears, therefore, that news is not as unpredictable as much journalistic mythology would have us believe. Rather, argues Schlesinger (1978), the doings of the world are tamed to the needs of a production system in many respects bureaucratically organised. This view, apparently, belies the one according to which 'news is supposed to be about new, unexpected things' (Hartley, 1982).

However, it can be argued that news is *supposed* to be about *new* and *unexpected* things, but *is not* always. Some issues may not be new but remain in the limelight

because they are important and concern the majority of the populace. Similarly, many events are not unexpected; in fact, they are in the news only because they were expected, for example, planned events are known to the journalists in advance and they cover them accordingly. This leads us to believe that the newsmakers know where the news is. Or, perhaps, because they are there, therefore, news is there. Although the ability of the journalists to sense an event as newsworthy is of paramount importance, it is not, by any means, absolute. For, there are some news values, or news factors, which enhance the chances of an event to be considered as news and thus reported. We cannot, however, ignore the fact that news depends on the social system and is socially constructed (for instance, Molotch and Lester, 1981; Tuchman, 1978; Hartmann & Husband, 1981; Hartley, 1982; Jensen, 1986).

Roshco opines that social structure is responsible for defining news, for social structure produces norms, including attitudes that define aspects of social life which are either of interest or importance to citizens (Roshco, 1975). Tuchman brings home the point as clearly, 'news is the product of a social institution, and it is embedded in relationships with other institutions. It is a product of professionalism and it claims the right to interpret everyday occurrences to citizens and other professionals alike' (Tuchman, 1978: 5).

Hartley (1982), while holding the same view, adds that news cannot be understood in isolation from other institutions. However, within the social institutions, some organisations, especially those dealing with the production of news, may be given priority. Such organisations have multifarious objectives; seeking profits is one. A much more vivid account of this argument comes from Ralph Negrine, who puts it in this way: 'the production of news takes place in large, hierarchically organised, technically complex and profit-making organisations. Journalists are part of such organisations and their work must reflect, and sustain, the needs of the 'profession' as well as those of their respective organisations' (Negrine, 1989: 137).

In other words, therefore, the message from the 'news promoters', through the 'news assemblers', reaches the 'news consumers' (Molotch and Lester, 1981) in the way the news promoters intend it to be. In the process, the readers may be deprived of the real content of the event, as Fishman argues, 'routine journalism communicates an ideological view of the world. What news workers end up reporting is not what actually happens, not what is actually experienced by participants or observers of news events. Instead, the journalist winds up weaving a story around hard data, which means the bureaucratic categories and bureaucratically defined events that agency officials mean to happen and need to happen' (Fishman, 1980: 155).

This adds another dimension which means that it is not solely the journalists who would rule the roost, for they too take the clue from some one else, called, in simple language, sources. Sources have an influential effect in the whole process of news construction, where journalists play the role of a mediator. Herbert Gans, therefore, argues, 'I view news as information which is transmitted from sources to audiences, with journalists - who are both employees of bureaucratic commercial organisations and members of profession - summarising, refining, and altering what becomes available to them from sources in order to make the information suitable for their audiences' (Gans, 1979: 80). News organisations are perpetually information-hungry. The various government departments and its public relations extensions, interest groups, and industry are dedicated to filling up this daily "news hole" (Bennet, 1988). He further argues that even the best journalism in the land (referring to the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*) is extremely dependent on the political messages of a small spectrum of "official" news sources (ibid.).

The sources, in fact, assume so much importance in the production of news that they have been termed as 'primary definers' (Hall *et al*, 1978), meaning that they are all powerful to define the social reality. According to this thesis, however, the media

personnel appear to have but only the secondary position in the news-production system. The corollary of this is that the journalists play only the mediator's role, while the real power lies with the primary definers, who decide what to get into or what to neglect in the presentation. No doubt the authoritative sources as 'primary definers' are very important in the media profession, and the more authority a source possesses the more he is likely to be referred to in the content (Gans, 1979; Nimmo, 1978), but the 'primary definition' has invited criticism (for instance, Schlesinger, 1991).

Schlesinger (1991) argues that the 'primary definition' does not consider the contention among the official sources, who might have different view point on the same but an important policy matter, in which situation it would be difficult to mark the primary definer. There is also, he further adds, the problem, among others, when the sources, powerful as they are, do not want to be identified and give the information as 'off-the-record'. However, despite the criticism of Hall's premise of 'primary definers', Schlesinger says that 'there is still undoubtedly a strong case for arguing that the way in which journalistic practice is organised *generally* promotes the interest of the authoritative sources, especially within the apparatus of government and state' (ibid.: 69).

It is then not the richness of the information which a source can provide to the journalists which matters, but finally, it is the power and the legitimation he commands which comes to play the definitive role. This is why, as Hansen and Linné (1994) in their study of the international comparison of journalistic practices argue, that despite the initiation of an issue, which finds a place in the media, by a pressure group like that of Greenpeace, the development and follow-up of the story does not mention the Greenpeace actors as often as the authoritative ones, including politicians, scientists, experts etc. Clearly, therefore, as Philip Schlesinger argues, 'it is necessary that sources be conceived as occupying fields in which *competition for access* to the media takes place, but in which material and symbolic advantages are unequally distributed. But the

most advantaged do not secure a primary definition in virtue of their positions alone. Rather, if they do so, it is because of successful *strategic action* in an imperfectly competitive field' (Schlesinger, 1991: 77).

This constant relationship between the newspapers and sources has stirred many issues regarding supremacy. While some claim officials have the upper hand (for instance, Gans, 1980), others hold the opposite view (see for instance, Hess, 1984). But there is little doubt that the centre of news generation is the link between reporter and official, the interaction of the representatives of the news bureaucracies and the government bureaucracies (Schudson, 1991: 148). In this regard, it is helpful to quote Schlesinger and Tumber (1994), who observe, 'given the distorted optic of the sociology of journalism, reporting is seen as targeting sources rather than targeted by them, as subject rather than object. Of course, it is - or can be - both' (p. 273). However, besides journalist and source, there is yet another element, which has, arguably, more power and influence to control the ideological direction and political content of the news. Parenti (1986) argues that as with any profit-making corporation, the chain of command runs from the top down, with final authority in the hands of those who own or who represent the ownership interests of the company.

In journalistic practices, there are, presumably, some criteria applied to the newsworthiness of the events on the basis of which they are either included or ignored in the coverage. Newsworthiness, as has been stated earlier, largely depends upon certain factors, which quicken the journalistic process in making news. In very simple terms, the more different news values a story contains, the greater its chance of inclusion (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). The news values apply to all kinds of media - print as well as electronic. It has also been argued that some criteria of news selection and presentation are common to all media of a specific culture, in fact, to all media of the world (ibid.).

Various experts have given different sets of news values, some (for instance, Whale, 1970; Hetherington, 1985) out of their personal experience in the field, and others (for instance, Golding and Elliott, 1979; Hartmann and Husband, 1981; Negrine, 1989), from their critique of the working of the profession and the professionals.

To begin with, there are some news values inherent in the events and thus play a role in the decision about what makes news. Herbert Gans (1980), for example, puts forward two such types of news values: topical and enduring. According to his explanation:

> Topical values are the opinions expressed about specific actors or activities of the moment, be they a presidential appointee or a new anti-inflation policy. These manifest themselves in the explicit opinions of news magazine stories and television commentary, as well as in the implicit judgements that enter into all stories. Enduring values, on the other hand, are values which can be found in many different types of news stories over a long period of time; often, they affect what events become news, for some are part and parcel of the definition of news. Enduring values are not timeless, and they may change somewhat over the years; moreover, they also help to shape opinions, and many times, opinions are only specifications of enduring values.
>
> (Gans, 1980: 41).

It is, apparently, too broad a categorisation which divides the whole gamut of news in two parts. It can be argued that some events, despite being of topical value, may have long lasting effect on the audience, and thus may affect the opinions, while, on the other side, events said to have enduring values, may also be of topical interest. Moreover, as 'enduring values are not timeless', it is difficult to say how long will they last. In the end, it rests with the journalists what they think is newsworthy (for details, see Chapter 7).

Hartley, though, does not talk about news values as such, yet he gives six major topics which, according to him, are the 'main preoccupation' of news. These are: politics, the

economy, foreign affairs, domestic news, occasional stories, and sports (Hartley, 1982: 38-39). Hartmann and Husband define two characteristics of newsworthiness, more from the angle of audience. They argue that conflict, threat, and deviancy all make news, both because information about these has a real importance to society, and because for various reasons, people enjoy hearing about them; a second feature that makes events more newsworthy is their ability to be interpreted within familiar framework or in terms of existing images, stereotypes and expectations (Hartmann and Husband, 1981: 294-95).

No doubt, the news values are of paramount significance for deciding what to report or what not to report, yet these tend to be sacrificed when wealth and power creep in. These pressures are not always external; the internal limitations imposed by the powerful media owners are as much, if not more, severe. (for details of pressures on journalists, see Chapter 7). Here, the role of 'propaganda model' is quite pertinent, according to which, money and power, are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public. This, what Herman and Chomsky call, a set of news "filters" falls under the following headings:

1. the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass media firms;
2. advertising as the primary income of the mass media;
3. the reliance of the media on information provided by the government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power;
4. "flak" as a means of disciplining the media; and
5. "anti-communism" as a national religion and cultural mechanism.

(Herman and Chomsky, 1988)

This, however, looks to be an extreme view, for if all the media, all the time, all over the world, were functioning under the "aegis" of the 'propaganda model', the

commitment of the journalists (see for instance, Weaver, 1982) towards their audience, then, is completely jeopardised, because all that reaches the reader has been "filtered", depriving him of the true picture. This, I must add, is not to deny the presence of "filters". The media in a capitalistic society watch the interests of the ruling class and those who own and control the media. In so doing, the media are likely to play to the tunes of the powerful lobby in the garb of bureaucracy, corporate, state and their allies (see for example, Parenti, 1986). Journalists also have to succumb to the pressures from the government of the day, particularly when they are reporting a crisis. In their comprehensive study of the working of the journalists, who accompanied the task force at the time of Falkland war, Morrison and Tumber (1988) revealed that the journalists were not happy the way they were treated by the then British government. They argue, 'not only were the broadcasters and other media personnel subjected to this pressure in the course of their work but they also found the results of their efforts the subject of attack' (ibid.: 282).

All the above works explicitly suggest that news is structured or socially patterned but some authors, notably Whale (1970), do not agree. John Whale, who has been a journalist, argues that, 'our product is put together by large and shifting groups of people, often in a hurry, out of an assemblage of circumstances that is never the same twice. Newspapers and news programmes could also be called random reactions to random events' (Whale, 1970: 511).

Not only does this statement say that news is not constructed, but also that there is no pattern involved in the collection of news. A former editor, Alastair Hetherington contradicts that news is not a series of 'almost random reactions to random events'. 'It is', he emphasises, 'a highly organised, systematic response based on years of personal experience among senior journalists' (Hetherington, 1985: 21). He further adds that, 'it is of course "an artificial human construct", because there are no God-given, ultimate,

objective means of measuring news priorities. But (it) is one to which most broadcasters bring a strong sense of public responsibility' (ibid.).

Hetherington places the social, political, economic and human 'significance' of events at the top of his list of criteria. His other criteria are: drama (excitement, action etc.); surprise (the unexpected, the fresh); personalities (royalty, show business, political actors, etc.); sex (scandal, crime etc.); and numbers (numbers affected etc.) (Hetherington, 1985: 8). Ralph Negrine also criticises Whale's concept of news: 'random reaction to random events'. He elucidates that :

> It is more usual, in fact, for the news media to select from a number of less spectacular occurrences. Yet, as research shows, not all occurrences have an equal chance of becoming news. Some obtain more media attention than others, whilst still others are completely ignored. . . . this suggests, therefore, that this is not the quality of the event itself which makes it news but rather that the event is recognised as newsworthy because it conforms to certain criteria of newsworthiness . . . one other weakness of 'random reaction to random events' approach to the study of news is that it ignores the organisational setting of news production. News production is continuous and has to be so if newspapers are to be produced every twenty-four hours . . . The process must be organised, routinized and freed from a haphazard supply of news so that the news vehicles appear professionally produced and at set regular intervals . . . A final criticism of this approach is that it overlooks the way in which news organisation can determine the newsworthiness of items and create news areas. News organisations exercise a great deal of power in deciding which areas they want to cover. Thus, they can decide to cover, or ignore, say, the environment and lead pollution . . .
>
> (Negrine, 1989: 143-44)

The most widely accepted set of news values, particularly applicable to the selection of foreign news, has been forwarded by Galtung and Ruge (1965: 64-91). They have described eight main conditions plus four culturally relevant factors, which an event should satisfy to qualify for news. These are: frequency, threshold, unambiguity,

meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition; and the culturally relevant factors are: reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons and reference to something negative. The last four factors can be further qualified: 'the more the event concerns elite nations, the more probable that it will become a news item; the more the event concerns elite people, the more probable that it will become a news item; the more the event can be seen in personal terms, as due to the actions of specific individuals, the more probable that it will become a news item; the more negative the event in its consequences, the more probable that it will become a news item' (ibid.: 68).

Despite their frequent use by researchers, the news values given by Galtung and Ruge (1965, 1981) have invited some criticism from Jeremy Tunstall. Some specific limitations of Galtung and Ruge study, according to Tunstall, are:

1. it deals only with news explicitly concerned with three foreign crises;

2. almost all the news originated through four Western international news agencies;

3. the study is based on news in only four Norwegian newspapers; (Tunstall, 1971: 117).

No doubt, the limitations of the Galtung and Ruge study, as put forth by Tunstall, are valid, but, then, almost each research has certain limitations and weaknesses. The findings of a study cannot be turned down altogether, merely because it had a narrow scope. Perhaps, no study, especially in social sciences, can be exhaustive, or for that matter, the findings cannot, probably, be universally applicable. In another study, Golding and Elliott (1979: 114-115) argue that news values derive from unstated or implicit assumptions or judgements about three things:

1. The audience. Is this important to the audience or will it hold their attention? Is it of known interest, will it be understood, enjoyed, registered, perceived as relevant?

2. Accessibility - in two senses, prominence and ease of capture. Prominence: to what extent is the event known to the news organisations, how obvious is it, has it made itself apparent? Ease of capture: how available to journalists is the event, is it physically accessible, manageable technically, in a form amenable to journalism, is it ready-prepared for easy coverage, will it require great resources to obtain?

3. Fit. Is the item consonant with the pragmatics of production routines, is it commensurate with technical and organisational possibilities, is it homologous with the exigencies and constraints in programme making and the limitations of the medium? Does it make sense in terms of what is already known about the subject.

So far, I have tried to explain news and the factors which determine the newsworthiness of an event. It has also been discussed that some events, notwithstanding the fact that they qualify to become news on the basis of certain news values, do not get reported, whereas, on the other hand, the journalists, because of their own preferences, or under certain pressures, give prominence to certain occurrences, which may not otherwise be 'suitable' for reporting. A reference has also been made to sources of information, who, explicitly or implicitly, hold the power to decide the fate of an event.

Journalists are a part of complex socio-cultural system and, in fact, it is well nigh impossible for them to get detached from it while reporting various happenings. Nasser (1983) argues that journalists are human beings and express themselves through their personal, political and cultural biases. The criteria used by journalists for selecting and reporting the news depend largely on the "news culture" in a given country and how gatekeepers view such concepts as news values, freedom of the press, credibility of the source, and government control of the media. For example, Hartmann and Husband (1974) argue that the British cultural tradition contains elements derogatory to foreigners, particularly blacks. The media operate within the culture and are obliged to

use "cultural symbols". This type of observation is what Schudson (1991) refers to as 'cutluralist' or 'culturological'.

The culturalist approach to the study of news production needs a little more space here. According to the culturalist thesis reporting is structured by cultural and ideological influences within which a journalist has the autonomy, while hierarchical supervision and control are not given as much importance. Curran (1991), while holding his belief in the presence of influences exerted by the cultural patterns of society, the repertoire of images and meanings readily available to journalists, and the wider context of ideological contest to which they are exposed, refers to the 'conditional nature of journalistic autonomy'. He further argues that 'the much-vaunted 'relative autonomy' of journalists (Hall *et al*, 1987; Murdock and Golding, 1977; Golding and Murdock, 1979) is best understood as 'licensed autonomy': journalists are allowed to be independent only as long as their independence is exercised in a form that conforms to the requirements of their employing organisations' (ibid.: 120). This is not to suggest that there is no place in this perspective for the materialistic approach. To understand it more fully, consider what is argued below:

> It focuses not on who *owns* the news media, but how those media are positioned relative to the power elites within society. It locates the source of 'bias' in the environment external to the journalistic organisations, so that content is not simply a function of ownership, nor of journalistic practices and rituals, but of the interaction between news organisations, the sources of their output, and other social institutions.
>
> (McNair, 1994: 48)

Stuart Hall is also the proponent of the opinion that cultural categories are more important than the structural ones. Even the much debated news values are still a kind of riddle, for journalists and researchers conforming to different schools of thoughts

believe in different sets of news values, therefore, rather obfuscating the issues. Hall (1973) tries to explain the dilemma of news values as follows:

> News values' are the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All 'true journalists' are supposed to possess it: few can or are willing to identify and define it. Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves. Further, they speak as if which is the 'most significant' news story, and which 'news angles' are most salient are divinely inspired. Yet of the millions of events which occur everyday in the world, only a tiny proportion ever become visible as 'potential news stories': and of this proportion, only a small fraction are actually produced as the day's news in the news media. We appear to be dealing, then, with a 'deep structure' whose function as a selective device is un-transparent even to those who professionally most know how to operate it.
>
> (Hall, 1973: 181)

Above is the account of journalistic practices in general, though these may vary a little when a journalist is reporting from a foreign country. The criteria applied to the selection of news is different then, which is more from the foreign reporter's own perspective. Berry (1990) argues that anyone who has lived abroad and reads foreign newspapers knows that the perspectives of journalists depend upon nationality . . . what a New Zealander or Indian reporter sees as news will differ from that of a US citizen because events effect each nation and its nationals differently (p. 144). Therefore, a foreign journalist' report will, when read by a native of the country from where it was dispatched, might give him/her an impression which could be different from what other local newspapers have to say about the same event. This is so because of certain limitations on the part of the foreign reporter vis-à-vis the local one.

To this effect, Jackson (1978) argues that where the home news reporter is subject to a readership likely to include some ration of informed critics who are on his doorstep, the foreign corespondent is operating largely in a vacuum. He has little contact either with his reader or his editors. He may well not see the published version of his story

until days after it has appeared by which time his protests about rewriting or other maltreatment of his copy will probably be drowned in the sea of new material flooding across the foreign editor's desk (p. 197). Does this statement imply that because there is no immediate criticism of the foreign reporter's coverage, he, therefore, remains ignorant whether or not his report was well received by the readers? But more important is the fact that since readers will know, most of the time, about the country what they read only from his reports, and those disseminated by the big international news agencies, there appears no simple way it can be remedied. The foreign journalists working for various newspapers would continue to be the persons responsible for forming their (readers') image. And this is one of the points raised by the Third World countries that their image is not what the readers know through the reports of their foreign corespondents on the staff of the newspaper and the world news agencies.

The literature cited above presents us a picture about journalistic practices. The theory thus explains that even though, at times, the journalists appear to have 'something' in-built in their minds which shapes their reporting, there is no consensus among those who study their working. While there have been some studies showing the media manipulations, Weaver (1982) rejects the "conspiracy theory" and argues that there is no systematic evidence that journalists generally select subjects to emphasise with the aim of treating audience members unfairly for the journalists' own ends. According to him, this will lower the credibility of the journalists. It is possible that journalists do not *intentionally* indulge in any partisan, opinionated reporting, but the above argument does not fill in the gap where many other influential agencies step in and affect the final published version. It is also possible that the journalists may not do anything for their 'own ends', yet some forces, for instance the ownership and control, work with such subtleties and finesse that the reporter might not even have a clue of that. The professionals maintain that they do not just pick and choose, but work in a pattern defined by news values and other journalistic practices. Most journalists also deny any pressures on them (see Chapter 7).

## 3.3 THIRD WORLD AND WESTERN PRESS

The Western media are often accused of either not covering the issues concerning the Third World countries adequately or distorting the image (Hopkinson, 1979; Lent, 1977; Aggarwala, 1978; Thussu, 1990; Masmoudi, 1981; Ng'weno, 1978).

Common Third World charges are that the Western media, including the big four news agencies, dwell on the negative in covering the Third World countries, and that the quantity of coverage of a Third World country is related to Western (American) involvement or interest in the area (Lent, 1977). He further argues that Western reporting traditionally has played up the violent and disastrous - in short, bad news. A comprehensive commentary on the portrayal of the Third World countries can be found in Masmoudi's words which follow.

> The present-day information system enshrines a form of political, economic and cultural colonialism which is reflected in the often tendentious interpretation of news concerning the developing countries. This consists in highlighting events whose significance, in certain cases, is limited or even non-existent; in collecting isolated facts and presenting them as a "whole"; in setting out facts in such a way that the conclusion to be drawn from them is necessarily favourable to the interests of transnational system; in amplifying small scale events so as to arouse unjustified fears; in keeping silent on situations unfavourable to the interests of the countries of origin of these media . . . .
>
> (Masmoudi, 1981: 80)

Galtung and Ruge (1965) try to reason out that this happens because of the cultural values attached to news. According to them, 'particular attention will be paid to the familiar, to the culturally similar, and the culturally distant will be passed by more easily and will not be noticed'. This seems to be quite understandable, but the problem arises when it is noticed and noticed only when there is something wrong happening in

the poor countries. Jackson (1978) agrees with the above mentioned authors that the reporter is not free of his own cultural imprinting, but he adds that 'efficiency' - or more usually inefficiency - is a common yardstick applied to Third World countries.

Jackson (1978) takes this argument further and says that he (foreign correspondent) can assume nothing but ignorance among his readers: they don't know who the president is, they can't remember what happened last, they don't necessarily even know where the country is. So inches of space goes on tedious repetition of salient facts and you get the shorthand stereotype phrases - 'oil-rich Kuwait', 'poverty-stricken Bangladesh', 'strife-torn Lebanon'. The moot question is why they should be portrayed only in the way they are, most of the time (p. 197).

It is not only that the information-poor audiences watch the world through the kaleidoscope provided, and controlled, by the information-rich few, the corollary of this is that 'the existing international information and communication system helps the Western powers to impose their value systems on the peoples of the Third World' (Boyd-Barrett and Thussu, 1992: 16). Also, by transmitting to the developing countries only news processed by them, that is, news which they have filtered, cut and distorted, the international media impose their own way of seeing the world upon the developing countries (Masmoudi, 1981).

The objections of the Third World countries about the imbalance in the information and communication system the world over are not ill-founded. There are, in fact, vivid accounts of how the Western media concentrates only on the negative and prefers to ignore the positive side altogether. Let me elucidate: two events happened at about the same time in India in 1980. It can be argued that both were "newsworthy". But, *Time*, the US magazine, in its issue of 15 December 1980 gave coverage only to the incidents of blinding in Bhagalpur jail, while completely blacking out India's entry into space by the successful launching of its satellite during the same period (Yadava, 1984). Again

in May 1984, the space voyage by an Indian was 'ignored or belittled by the Western media while the happenings in Punjab were played up' (ibid.). These are not isolated cases; the list of such cases in the poor nations could indeed be very long. In more recent studies, albeit conducted at a small level, the two British newspapers, *The Times* and *The Guardian* were found to be putting the emphasis on the theme of violence, election malpractices and disorder during India's Ayodhya crisis and Kenya's elections (Nair-Mulloth, 1993; Kamango, 1994). In these and other alike incidents, what criteria were applied for the selection? What emanates from the plethora of studies carried out in this direction, especially by the researchers from the Third World countries, is the negativity.

To counter this type of objection it is said that the Western media give the negative news not only about the Third World nations, but the same is the case about the happenings in the Western countries themselves. As Merrill (1981) argues that it is because 'atypical, unusual, and often sensational nature of news is a very basic part of the West's definition of news; therefore it is completely natural for Western journalists to call on such a definition when collecting and sending news from a Third World country' (p. 157). This argument, however rationally it might have been made, is too vague to compare the coverage of the Western and the Third World countries. Firstly, the Western reader has a wider choice of media to read about the happenings in his country and at the same time he is so close to the events. Secondly, and more importantly, it is *not only* the negative aspect that is covered and even if it is covered, 'readers have much more neutral or positive information to construct a more balanced overall picture of Western countries' (van Dijk, 1988a: 46). The same cannot be said about the Third World countries whose reporting is too scanty and tends to be negative. In fact, the negativity or stereotypical nature of news about many Third World countries are not incidental but structural and, therefore, ideologically ethnocentric (ibid.). The same yardstick is not applied while portraying the rich-few. As a mater of fact, the image of the Western developed countries, especially the United

States of America, that gets portrayed, for example, to the Indian readers is that of a major nuclear power, prosperous, and making tremendous progress in science and technology (Yadava, 1984). This suggests that the journalists of the Third World have different news values than those from the First World.

There is an acknowledged tendency among the Western media, including the wire services, to devote greater attention to the Third World in times of disaster, crisis and confrontation (Tatarian, 1977). Weaver and Wilhoit (1984), too, found that the Western news agencies focus on conflicts and crises when covering Third World countries. Ng'weno (1978) also argues that '. . . the trouble with the present Western treatment of news from the Third World is that there is not enough coverage of events in the Third World and that the little there is distorted' (p. 129).

The fact remains that the poor Third World countries have no alternative and that their dependence on the four big International news agencies, namely, AP and UPI of the USA, Reuters of Britain, and the AFP of France, is nearly total (van Dijk, 1988; Boyd-Barrett, 1986a). Comparatively, the First World newspapers depend less on agencies, for they have a better network of correspondents or news services. The media in the Third World countries cannot afford to match the technology and the number of correspondents at the disposal of both the International news agencies and the Western newspapers.

No doubt, on the part of the four international news agencies, they are heavily depended upon for their services due to some obvious reasons. Boyd-Barrett argues that points in favour of the "Big Four" are: the resources available to them, their generally non-government character, and their traditions of rigorous editing, comprehensive coverage, relatively high reliability and quality of delivery (Boyd-Barrett, 1986a: 250). While there appears no dispute over the credentials, just described, of the global news distributors, the same very positive factors, one can

argue, in fact are a step nearer to their monopoly, sowing the seeds of discontent and doubt for the developing world.

Though the countries from the Third World have long been voicing their concern for better, positive and balanced coverage in the mighty-four news agencies, it was not until 1973 when the Non-aligned Summit at Algiers discussed this issue more vigorously that it was translated into a more working force. As a result, UNESCO constituted an International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems under the presidentship of Sean MacBride, Irish diplomat and statesman. The Commission submitted the final report in 1980. Despite the copious work of the Commission, the Report itself devoted surprisingly little space to the particular question of news agencies (Boyd-Barrett, 1986b). While the Third World countries are the staunch supporters of the proposed New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), it has been criticised by the journalists from the Western World who lay stress on the "free flow" of information.

It is, therefore, obvious that there is no consistency in research studies carried out by the sympathisers of the Western view (see for example, Stevenson and Cole, 1984a and 1984b) and the Third World view. The critics of the NWICO maintain, as Nwosu (1983) argues, that the allegations (levelled by the Third World countries) are at best speculations without *empirical evidence* and at worst that the Third World governments are attempting to curb the "free" flow of information by government control of the media (emphasis of the author). On the other side, according to Phil Harris, 'the evidence available indicates that the Third World nations have a strong case. The present international information order is Northern dominated, does owe its origin to the interests of the imperial colonial powers, and does provide a Northern-oriented image of reality' (Harris, 1981: 358).

The coverage of Third World countries takes a U-turn when the interests of the Western countries are involved. Consider, for instance, the fiction writer Don DeLillo's commentary:

> If two countries fight that do not supply the Americans with some precious commodity, then the education of the public does not take place. But when the disaster falls, when the oil is threatened, then you turn on the television and they tell you where the country is, what the language is, how to pronounce the names of the leaders, what the religion is all about, and may be you can cut out the recipes in the newspaper of Persian dishes. I will tell you. The whole world takes an interest in this curious way. Americans educate themselves. TV Look, this is Iran, this is Iraq. Let us pronounce the word correctly. E - ron. E - ronians. This is a Sunni, this is a Shi'ite. Very good. Next year we do the Philippine Islands, okay?
> (quoted in Bennett, 1988: 38)

Another statement will reify the vested interest of the Western countries. Herman and Chomsky (1988), while explaining the propaganda model conclude that the 'US mass media will always find a Third World election sponsored by their own government a "step toward democracy", and an election held in a country that their government is busily destabilising a farce and a sham' (p. 141).

Most of what is presented to the world (80 per cent) flows from three centres, viz., London, Paris and New York, whereas the major agencies only devote somewhere between 10 and 30 per cent of their news to the totality of the developing world (UNESCO, 1980). This imbalance in the news coverage appears to be emanating from the bias the Western news agencies in particular, and the Western press in general, have against the poor countries. Mankekar (1981) argues that seen through unempathetic Western eyes and selected, written and edited to cater primarily for the needs of their home markets, the image the Western agencies project of the developing countries often turns out to be biased, distorted or frivolous, and the monopolistic Western media, for good or ill, are the sole image-makers of the developing countries.

This is all what has lead Mathur & Shrivastava (1984) to say that Western media have a "jaundiced eye" because of their prejudices.

That the coverage of the poor countries is not in consonance with the realities existing therein can be explained by an example that follows. The Indian correspondent based in the US complained that, though his country occupied a key position in international affairs, the kinds of stories the American editors preferred and printed related to a land of maharajahs, palaces, peacocks. He listed some: "Ten lions found mysteriously dead in Gir forests; return of ballot boxes from interior village delayed by tiger; dog in Cooch Behar killed while trying to save three children from king cobra; trickster sells tickets to women thrown to lions in Calcutta zoo" (Hopkinson, 1979: 29-37).

Weaver & Wilhoit (1984) agree that conflict and crisis are the main criteria for the Western agencies while covering the Third World countries, but they argue that this could be due to the fact that there simply is more open, armed conflict and crisis in these countries than in the more developed ones. It may be the case, but, why these countries should be in the news only when the foreign journalist decides them to be and what he decides is the developing countries' concern. Surely, in between these conflicts and crises there are, and in some countries quite enough, events which have got nothing to do with these criteria, and they too should be reported. Naturally, such portrayal, as is given, of the developing countries leaves the foreign reader, who gets the 'reality' only from the point of view of the foreign journalist, and/or those working for the four international news agencies, with the impression that, perhaps, nothing good or pleasant ever happens in these countries. Whatever misery the developing countries may be said to be going through, it would appear to be unrealistic to assume that nothing else qualifies to be in the news.

That the complaints of the Third World countries are, perhaps, a genuine concern can be understood in the same way as when the Americans themselves had a similar

problem[3]. When Reuters had the monopoly of world news in the 1920s, it shut off the Associated Press of America from the International arena of news. Kent Cooper, then general manager of AP, vigorously protested against Reuters's monopoly with the argument: "Americans want to look at the world through their own eyes, and not through the British eyes". Cooper went on to complain that Reuters gave a distorted image of America to the World, an image of a wild uncivilised country of Negro lynching and racial violence (Cooper, 1942).[4]

While there is no intention to use this 60-year-old complaint of the US as an alibi to justify the present-day case of the Third World countries, it is none the less, not unnatural to find the developing countries in a place they feel uncomfortable about. The nations of the First World, if they have swapped their position with their poor counterpart, may react in much the same way - even now. Boyd-Barrett argues that 'if media clients in the US or in the UK were dependent for their international news, not on the existing "Big Four", but on news agencies based in other countries, they would be unlikely to put up with such a state of affairs without protest' (Boyd-Barrett, 1986b).

## 3.4 CONCLUSION

Newspaper production is quite a complex task. In the main because a newspaper has to appear, in most cases, within 24 hours, there is always an element of hurry. Going to the spots, collecting facts, meeting various sources, cross checking, writing, editing, composing, printing, distribution are some of the most common features of daily routine of those entrusted with the responsibility of bringing out the copy to our door steps each morning. Since the journalist has to work against deadlines, at times,

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[3]For this explanation, see also Pisarek, W. (1992).
[4]Cooper, K. (1942) quoted in D.R. Mankekar (1981). For complete reference, please see the Bibliography at the end.

perfection (from the point of a conscientious reader) in the news presentation may not be there.

Specific events like elections put the newspersons' skills to test, not that other happenings are less important or easy to cover - not all, of course. It is particularly so because the ruling party of a nation is to be decided; the electorate have to make their choices about the political parties and candidates; the candidates stake all their resources in a bid to present themselves before the voters in the best possible way so as to win their favour. And in the process, all look forward to the media. Candidates vie with each other to rivet the attention of the media for more and better exposure of themselves and their parties. The media, as has been described in this chapter early on, have acquired for themselves tremendous power to set the priorities of the campaign agendas before the readers.

The journalist is *a* key person in the process of bringing the campaign issues to the reader. Onus also, invariably, rests on him for analysing the rhetoric of the contestants and putting it in the right context before the readers in a simple and lucid manner. It must be emphasised, however, that there are several constraints under which the reporting is done, especially during electoral campaigns when political pressure, presumably, is at its peak. The news production is, as said above, a complex phenomenon in which no single individual is all in all, though some, by virtue of being on the top in the hierarchy, exert more power than others. The proponents of the capitalistic theory argue that the journalists serve the interests of the state, the corporate and other powerful and influential actors in the society, thus implying that media play a subordinate role. The ownership and control factor also has a bearing on the working of the journalists.

The production of the newspapers does not occur in a vacuum, and, therefore, is shaped by the relationship the newspaper organisation has with other agencies. Since a

journalist is a part of the social and cultural system, his working gets influenced, explicitly or implicitly, by the cultural symbols that he is bound to use. Some newspapers have their preferences for certain political party and certain candidates which may, at times, be reflected in the coverage. However, it is not always easy to discern, especially during elections when the candidates and the political parties usually get a fair deal. In any case, most journalists believe, as will be shown in Chapter 7, that they work with integrity.

The research in hand is studying the pattern of the coverage of the India's 1991 general elections in the newspapers of two countries - the one in which the election takes place, and the other, far away, yet with historical affinities where at present several hundreds of thousands from Indian origin reside; they have apparently an interest in the political affairs of their mother land. The Western press, including the big four International news agencies, have come under criticism, particularly from the developing countries, for their imbalanced coverage of the happenings in the Third World countries. The complaints of the Third World nations manifested themselves in the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the late seventies, which was not only criticised by the Western scholars, but also jibed at - they claim that it is an indirect way of censoring the free flow of international information.

While the US, Britain and some others have already dissociated themselves from the UNESCO under whose aegis the NWICO was founded, the coverage of the Third World countries, as will be shown in Chapter 5, continues, not wholly but partly, to be as it was.

# Chapter 4

CHAPTER 4

DESIGN OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main thrust, as discussed in the previous chapters, of the research in hand has been to investigate the trend of the coverage of India's elections in the selected newspapers. The newspapers' content, therefore, ought to be studied to know the way in which they referred to the actors/sources and covered the themes, which, perhaps, may not be *the* important ones, but, the papers (or the journalists) thought them to be. Content analysis, as a method, has been extensively used by researchers in the past (e.g. Hartmann and Husband, 1974; Patterson, 1980; Mohsen, 1991; Semetko *et al*, 1991).

Content analysis vis-à-vis its merits and demerits as a methodology will be discussed in this chapter along with the description of the rationale behind the selection of the papers as well as the time period for the study and the coding schedule for analysing the content. The study has also used qualitative method to answer some specific questions, particularly related to the coverage of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination which took place the day after India went to polls at the first stage. Interviews were conducted with certain journalists, during the field visit, to elicit their views about the elections in question. The logic, therefore, behind these interviews will also be explained in this chapter. Towards the end of this chapter relevant research questions are given the answers to which will follow in the following chapters.

4.1 METHODOLOGY

4.1.1 Content Analysis: Definitions and Advantages/Disadvantages

Social scientists have defined content analysis in different ways (e.g. Budd *et al*, 1967; Weber, 1985; Berger, 1991; Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 1980; Carney, 1972;

Holsti, 1969), but many of them have some commonalty. One of the first definitions came from Berelson, who defined content analysis as a research technique for the 'objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (Berelson, 1952: 18), though later this definition invited some criticism.

Let us consider, for a while, the explanation of the above definition as offered by Stempel III, which follows.

> Objective to begin with means the opposite of subjective or impressionistic. Objectivity is achieved by having the categories of analysis defined so precisely that different persons can apply them to the same content and get the same results. Systematic means, first, that a set procedure is applied in the same way to all the content being analysed. Second, it means that categories are set up so that all relevant content is analysed. Finally, it means that the analyses are designed to secure data relevant to research question or hypothesis. Quantitative means simply the recording of numerical values or the frequencies with which the various defined types of content occur. Manifest content means the apparent content, which means that content must be coded as it appears rather than as the content analyst feels it is included.
>
> (Stempel III, 1989: 125-6)

There seems to be some confusion in this explanation, however. His definition of the term 'objectivity', as '. . . different persons can apply them to the same content and get the same results', is some what eluding the actual meaning of objectivity. This, in fact, is what we know as *reliability*. Krippendorff's argument that 'reliability assesses the extent to which any research design, any part thereof, and any data resulting from them represent variations in real phenomena rather than the extraneous circumstances of measurement, the hidden idiosyncrasies of individual analysts, and surreptitious biases of a procedure' (Krippendorf, 1980: 129) give a clear idea.

In fact, reproducibility is one of the types of reliability which is very close to what Stempel III calls objectivity. Weber argues that reproducibility, sometimes called *intercede reliability*, refers to the extent to which content classification produces the same results when the same text is coded by *more than one coder* (Weber, 1985: 17). However, absolute objectivity is said to very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve (see, for instance, Holsti, 1969; Carney, 1972). Notwithstanding that it is the best tool for doing what it is capable of - for example, the work in hand - it has nevertheless its imperfections (Carney, 1972).

Another definition putting stress on the 'overt' side of the message is given by Budd *et al*: 'content analysis is a systematic technique for analysing message content and message handling - it is tool for observing and analysing the overt communication behaviour of selected communicators' (Budd *et al*, 1967: 2). While both these definitions (Berelson's and Budd *et al*'s) have been criticised for considering only the 'manifest', or 'overt' content, the first one has, in addition, drawn attention of other researchers on its concept of quantitative. The analysis of the manifest or overt content, no doubt, is very important to draw conclusions about what the written message reflects, but, obviously, it does not add anything to our existing knowledge about the factors responsible for the production of that kind of content. It is, indeed, worth looking at the hidden content which will tell us about the environment in which the manifest content was created. The social or/and cultural context, therefore, should be analysed to make our understanding better and clearer about the production of the communication message. To achieve this end, a chapter using the interview method will also be incorporated (Chapter 7) and so would be the one using qualitative method (Chapter 6).

In Berelson's definition the 'quantitative' aspect has the limitation of just measuring the frequencies of the units as defined under different categories. The critics argue that measuring space or, for that matter, counting the frequencies of various words may not

be very useful to reach any meaningful conclusions, because there is certainly more than what is counted or measured. It is quite clear that though we can base our judgements on the quantification of data emanating from the content, we will remain as ignorant about the forces or the relationships working behind the quantity of content the analyst is analysing.

'Focusing on the quantitative description show the type of events that made news. The procedure cannot, however, be used to study the event or its social consequences or effect. For a researcher to understand the consequences of media contents, how they are gathered and produced and how much personal attitudes influence the production process, it would be necessary to carry out production or audience studies' (Mohsen, 1991). This, however, is not to undermine the usefulness of the content analysis as a method to study the message of mass communication or, for that matter, in any social context. In fact, it depends upon the content one wants to study, and, accordingly, a suitable and appropriate method needs to be applied. Given the type of the subject I am studying, there is a clear choice, on my part, to use the content analysis. It gives me the impression that no other method, whatever its merits, could, perhaps, do any better to research the topic in hand.

While discussing the pros and cons of content analysis vis-à-vis other methods, Carney argues, 'content analysis is a general-purpose analytical infrastructure, elaborated for a wide range of uses. It is intended for any one who wishes to put questions to communications (pictorial and musical, as well as oral and written) to get data that will enable him to reach certain conclusions. Some content analyses are more objective than others. All are more objective than impressionistic assessment of the same question and materials. None are perfectly objective, though some approach this goal remarkably closely' (Carney, 1972: 26). There is an implied caution in this argument that an element of subjectivity may creep in if there is less of reliability in the application of the

method. However, as discussed previously, one can avoid the risk of subjectivity by achieving more of reliability.

To overcome the much criticised side of content analysis, that is, manifest content (Berelson, 1952), Holsti has put forward his own definition in which there is no mention of the manifest content. He argues that 'content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages' (Holsti, 1969). Likewise other researchers, instead, stress that the method is successful in making 'valid inferences' (Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1985).

While the largely held view that the analysis of manifest content is not sufficient to draw a clear picture of the happenings cannot be shrugged off easily, it is, indeed, necessary to study the apparent content so as to base our further analysis on the conclusions thus reached. If, for instance, we want to know the extent of coverage in the press of a particular political party, it is of utmost importance to have a closer look at its printed content in various newspapers. On the basis of this kind of analysis - of course, involving a large number of issues over a period - one may find that the newspaper 'A' gives much more attention to the issues of a political party 'X' than those of the party 'Y', whereas in the case of the paper 'B' it is the other way round. These results then may be interpreted in that the press favours policies of a political ideology, particularly if these findings are replicated consistently over a long period. That is why 'in respect of politics, content analysis can help to establish the sources and the political direction of mass media, especially in the case of news' (McQuail, 1992).

As a matter of fact, content analysis has several advantages like 'sureness about facts' and 'explicitness' of the method of procedure (Carney, 1972: 17-18). Webb (1966) argues that, compared with the technique such as interviews, content analysis usually yields unobtrusive measures in which neither the sender nor the receiver of the message is aware that it is being analysed. Hence, there is little danger that the act of

measurement itself will act as a force for change that confounds the data. Because of its unobtrusive nature content analysis is a way of avoiding the problem of researcher's influence on individuals (Berger, 1991), and, therefore, bringing in any bias (Budd *et al*, 1967). Large amounts of data like in the present case, where over 3,000 items have been coded, can be analysed and summarised through the means provided by content analysis. Reliability and presumed validity are paramount features of this method, through which the results can be empirically verified, and, therefore, cannot be passed as a mere matter of opinion.

In addition, the results of content analysis can be presented in a very precise and lucid manner, which facilitates one's understanding. The simple percentages may be easily grasped and are more meaningful than intuitive judgements. This advantage of content analysis may be best summed up in Holsti's words: 'foremost among the arguments is the degree of precision with which one's conclusions may be stated. Descriptions such as '45 per cent' or '27 times out of a possible 30' convey information more precisely than statements such as 'less than half' or 'almost always''' (Holsti, 1969: 9).

Since each methodological operation has some kind of limitations, it is best left to the researcher as to what method, he thinks, would give him better understanding of the content he wants to study, which, of course, further depends upon the research questions one is trying to get answers to. Taking everything into consideration, it was decided to use content analysis to study the content of the selected newspapers, while interviews, as said in the beginning of this chapter, were conducted to elicit the views of the journalists. As stated earlier, the study is going to look into the content of the newspapers to find out the relative importance of the political parties/leaders and the journalists in the formation of the campaign agenda in the press. For the accomplishment of this, I have borrowed the coding method from Holli Semetko and associates (1991), who in their research content analysed the British and the US newspapers. How exactly the items and the visuals were coded to know the relative

contribution of the press and the parties as well as 'others' is given towards the end of this chapter.

There have been many uncertainties on the political front in India in the recent past (Chapter 2). After having decided to study India's most recent elections, the question that came up was what should be studied and how. Since the aim of the research, primarily, was to investigate the way the newspapers in two different countries - the one in which the event takes place, and the other from the West - covered India's electoral campaigns, it could well be done by analysing the issues of the newspapers published during that period. Although the content analysis is an appropriate method to do the needful, interviews with press persons (see the explanation later in this chapter), who actually covered the campaign, were also carried out to have their side of the opinion.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed - the former to know the interest of the papers to cover, interalia, particular actors and themes, and the latter to study the particular event of Rajiv Gandhi's murder which took place during the campaign, and due to which the electoral process was delayed by over three weeks. Both the methods are complementary to each other, as Pool argues, 'it should not be assumed that qualitative methods are insightful, and quantitative ones are merely mechanical methods for checking hypotheses. The relationship is a circular one; each provides new insights on which the other can feed' (Pool, 1959).

For the quantitative analysis, relevant items on/about elections as well as on/about Rajiv Gandhi's murder were coded with the help of a pre-tested coding schedule, whereas qualitative analysis was put to use for an insight of the coverage in the various newspapers of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

## 4.1.2 INTERVIEWS WITH JOURNALISTS

It was decided to elicit related information from the journalists who participated in the coverage of the Indian elections. The views of the journalists, who were present during the election campaign, would allow analysis of the newspapers' content in a more meaningful way. Whether what they observed, or thought at the time of the campaign, was reflected in the content of the newspapers they worked for, will give a better understanding of the coverage of the election campaign.

In addition to obtaining their opinions about the campaign, they were asked questions the answers to which will tell the conditions under which they had to work, especially during the important phase of political activity, hereinafter called election campaigns. Their views were invited on the pressures they had, the concept of news values, the important issues on which the elections were fought, the preferences, if any, of their newspapers etc. (Chapter 7).

Not only the journalists who followed the leaders during their campaigns and collected stories from all parts of the country were selected for interviews, but also those who work on the desk and are responsible for giving the final shape to the stories; they include, for instance, the chief sub-editors and the news editors. Similarly, the people at the top of the hierarchy - that is, the executive editors - were also involved in the process of interviews. This was mainly done to know as to how much freedom they allowed their journalists, and what editorial policy they pursued.

Since the study has also included two newspapers from Britain, it was deemed important to elicit the views of the foreign journalists working both for *The Guardian* and *The Times*. Both these journalists were based in the capital of India, New Delhi. It would be interesting to know their feelings about the working environment in a

country not of their origin, and especially about the India's 1991 elections. In all, 16 journalists were interviewed in person and the interviews were recorded.

## 4.1.3 CHOICE OF THE PRINT MEDIUM

Before the selection of the newspapers is discussed, let me, in the first place, explain as to why the print medium, not the broadcast media, was taken up for this study. One could well argue that since India is mass-illiterate the choice of print medium was misplaced. Since only little over half, 52.11 per cent to be precise, of India's population can read or write, in such a situation, therefore, it would seem to be illogical to work on newspapers. It has also been argued that 'in developing countries, radio is the only medium that can really be labelled "mass", where a large proportion of the population can be reached by radio broadcasts and possess the means to receive them. No other medium now has the potential to reach so many people so efficiently for information, educational, cultural and entertainment purposes' (UNESCO, 1980). This does not seem to be the case insofar as dissemination of political information is concerned. For example, a recent study conducted in Pakistan has shown that radio was not a major source of information on the election campaign (Goonasekera and Gilani, 1992).

However, the choice of the print medium has to be looked at from three stand points. Firstly, and most importantly, broadcast media in India work under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, and have been much criticised for covering only the political party in power, and not being fair to all other opposition parties. Because, 'communication sector - post and telegraph, railways, airlines, radio, television, documentary film - is controlled by the state', therefore, 'each of the services is organised into a centralised bureaucracy, vulnerable to abuse by the ruling party' (Pendakur, 1991). Mulgaokar (1971) also voices similar concern: 'All India Radio is an instrument which is capable of being used for governmental propaganda and has been so used on occasion' (Mulgaokar, 1971: 20).

On the other hand, the press in India is owned and controlled by the private sector, and is free from any direct interference from the government. The electronic media are not very reliable, as Ravindran argues that even though Doordarshan (Indian television) and All India Radio can boast of their ability to reach the majority of the population, they are not the news media most relied upon for news and current affairs as they are inextricably tied with the task of government propaganda (Ravindran, 1990: 58). Under these circumstances, therefore, the selection of the electronic media may not have been the right choice for this kind of research.

Secondly, although radio, as discussed above, has a better potential to reach publics, yet there is no evidence wherein this has been used as an effective communication medium for election purposes in India, as Shrivastava argues:

> Though radio is the most powerful medium for India, neither radio nor television can be used for election campaign communication directly. After the 1977 General Elections, the Janata Government had provided for broadcast time to each political party at national and state level so that their spokesperson could put across the party point of view. This practice is still continuing but **neither is there any enthusiasm to listen to such broadcasts, nor have these broadcasts been found very effective** (emphasis added).
>
> (Shrivastava, 1992: 105)

Thirdly, the British broadcast media, television in particular, are assumed to give less coverage, as compared with that by the newspapers, to an event taking place in a far off country. And since the idea was to have a sort of comparison, it became obvious to study the newspapers rather than the radio or the television. In addition, access to newspaper issues was much easier than it would have been to secure tapes from broadcast organisations due to cumbersome bureaucratic constraints.

## 4.1.4 WHY THE BRITISH NEWSPAPERS?

The Western media are often criticised for either not covering the issues concerning the Third World countries adequately or distorting the image leading to an imbalance in the news flow. (for instance, Hopkinson, 1979; Lent, 1977; Aggarwala, 1978; Golding & Elliott, 1979; Weaver, 1984).

The above criticism formed the basis, though not exclusively, of the idea behind the inclusion of the newspapers from Britain. One more equally valid factor stemmed from historical reasons. India has been under the British Raj and it was during the latter's long rule that the press in India came into being (the first newspaper in India was brought out on 29 January 1780). In fact, some of the newspapers started by the British are still being published - of course, under different management, and with different editorial policies - reminiscing the British legacy. So, it was assumed the British newspapers may show some interest in the elections in one of their past colonies. It was thought that India, being the largest democracy in the world, may get attention from the Western press. Another consideration which whetted my interest to take up the British newspapers emanated from the fact that quite a substantial number of residents now staying in various parts of Britain, originally, came from the Indian sub-continent (the figure, according to the 1991 Census Report for Great Britain, stands at 840,255), who, apparently, have interest in the affairs of the countries of their origin. It was, therefore, assumed that the British press, and the selected newspapers in particular, would have enough coverage of the elections in India to inform this section.

Most of the studies in the past have concentrated on measuring the coverage in the Western press about sudden and dramatic events, not lasting for a long period. It was my assumption that the duration of an event may have some effect on its coverage - probably, the longer the event, the more is likely to be its coverage. As the 1991

electoral campaign in India lasted 47 days, it was thought to be long enough to find the difference in the coverage.

Research has also shown that the Third World tends to be reported only when there is violence, disaster, conflict, war, famine, crisis, inefficiency - in short bad news happening in the poor, or so-called developing, countries (for instance, Lent, 1977; Jackson, 1978; Tatarian, 1977; Aggarwala, 1978; Yadava, 1984). Going by the same yardstick, it was assumed in the present piece of research that the coverage in the British newspapers of Rajiv Gandhi's killing - apparently a 'crisis' event - should show a different trend than that of exclusive election news. This particular event, therefore, will be assessed against this background.

On the basis of the evidence available, one would assume that the British press might not be interested in an event happening in a far-off country, in this case India. However, the past and recent evidence shows that the Indian press, on its part, portrays a constructive image of the developed nations (for instance, Yadava, 1984), and that it also gives good coverage to the elections in the Western rich countries (for instance, Singh, 1993). Singh, who studied the Indian press editorial coverage of the 1992 British election, argues that there was an encouraging response within the Indian English language press about the issues and the aftermath of the British elections (Singh, 1993). On the basis of these and other studies, it was hypothesised that the British newspapers would give a wider coverage to the issues involved in the elections in India, which would mean that some of the election stories may be given prominent display and may also draw the attention of the editors to write editorials on them. It was further hypothesised that since election campaign is a long-term event, it would find more coverage than an event which occurs instantly and is of short duration. The interest also lies in looking into the shift, if any, in the Western press coverage of a Third World country's big political event.

## 4.1.5 SELECTION OF NEWSPAPERS

It is quite a difficult task to select certain newspapers while leaving out the others, but the scope of the study had to be narrowed down in view of the limited time and funds at the disposal of the researcher. It was, therefore, decided to take two newspapers published in each of the countries, viz. India and Britain. It was further suggested to select one newspaper each known for its leaning towards political power and the one opposing it. It is not very difficult to do so as Negrine argues, 'in general newspapers do usually align themselves with certain political parties and do show their support for political party programmes and policies' (Negrine, 1989: 62). *The Mail, The Express,* and *The Times* have always preferred 'conservative' parties (*Op cit.*).

Another classification of the newspapers has been given on the basis of their ownership and working - as being on the left (of-centre) e.g. *Mirror, The Guardian* or firmly to the right, as *The Times* (Hetherington, 1985). So, *The Times* and *The Guardian* were selected from Britain. However, it was, relatively, a trifle difficult in the case of India, mainly for two reasons. First, both the English-language and the vernacular press are strong and influential in their own rights thus making the choice dodgy. Second, in general there is, unlike Britain, no clear-cut political affiliations of newspapers (apart from, of course, those brought out by the political parties themselves) on the basis of which selection could be made. No doubt, there have been some occasional, albeit casual, references about certain newspapers' tilt towards a particular party, yet, no empirical evidence is available. The issue was resolved by borrowing arguments from a previous study which confined to English newspapers rather than those in other Indian languages. It gave two reasons in favour of the English dailies.

> (1) English being the associate official language and the main medium for intellectual exchange among the elite across the country the English dailies continue to occupy a very significant place in India especially among the decision makers; and

(2) Though some of the language dailies command higher individual circulation than the English dailies, their circulation is confined to specific linguistic regions only.

(Yadava, 1984)

These criteria fit well in and are valid for even this study, and therefore, two English dailies published from New Delhi, namely, *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* were selected. Besides, both are among the nation's 'representatives of the quality press' and each could be called a "national" newspaper because of its circulation and interest' (Merril and Fisher, 1980). In addition, *The Hindustan Times* is said to have had a soft approach towards the Congress, the party which has been in power for most of the time since India's independence. This is, arguably, also due to the fact that the Chairman of the Board of Directors of *The Hindustan Times* is a member of the parliament representing the Congress (I) party. On the contrary, *Indian Express* incurred the wrath of the Indira Gandhi's (the Congress (I) leader and the then India's Prime Minister) Emergency rule (1975-1977) more than any other publication (Nayar, 1977; Pendakur, 1988), and consequently, after the Emergency, it was known for its anti-Congress (I) stance[1], though it is, of late, said to have had a soft approach towards the main opposition party in the Parliament - Bhartya Janata Party (BJP).

Another important factor for the choice of these two newspapers was that while *The Hindustan Times* is the largest circulated paper in Delhi, *Indian Express* has the maximum combined circulation from all its publication centres spread over the country. In fact, in the absence of a solid proof of their political association, at least at present, it was decided to take these two newspapers which may be broadly classified as conservative (*The Hindustan Times*) and liberal (*Indian Express*). The study may

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[1]After the emergency was over and the elections were announced, *Indian Express* became very popular newspaper. It is said that the Delhi edition of *Indian Express*, which normally had a circulation of about 100,000 copies, registered daily sales of over 300,000 copies within the space of a month. In contrast, *The Hindustan Times*, which continued on a collaborationist path, saw its circulation drop by about 60,000 copies (Verghese, 1978).

throw some light on their preferences for and affiliations to the political parties in India.

## 4.1.6 PERIOD OF THE STUDY

In a study like this where election campaigns are involved, it is not difficult to pre determine the time period for the analysis. Usually, the whole campaign period is taken to observe any changes in the trend of news coverage in the newspapers (for instance, Patterson (1976) studied the entire period of 11 months in the American elections). Unlike the American elections, the campaign period in India lasts only three to four weeks. Though the political activity starts immediately after the dissolution of the Lok Sabha (the Lower House), the actual campaign takes off only when the election dates are announced, and particularly after the last date for withdrawal from the arena.

Some researchers (for instance, Negrine, 1989; Seymour-Ure, 1974) argue that to focus only on the campaigns may not be as useful as to include the period before and after the elections. However, the focus of this research is in the main to study the campaign period only, and therefore it was decided to take up the entire period from the last day of withdrawals to the last polling day. In fact, in this particular election, the campaign actually got elongated due to the assassination of the former Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, as a result of which the polling fixed for May 23 and May 26 was postponed to June 12 and June 15.

Consequently, the study spanned 47 days, from April 30 - the last day for withdrawals - to June 15 - the last polling day. While the total period, that is 47 days, for this study, is more as compared with what Semetko *et al* studied for the 1993 British general election campaign (24 days), it is less than 1984 US presidential election campaign of 67 days (see Semetko *et al*, 1991). While *The Guardian* does not come out on

Sundays, and *The Times* is published under a different editorial team, the inclusion of the latter would have caused a sort of imbalance and, therefore, it would not be prudent to do so. On the same analogy, the Sunday issues of the newspapers from India were also excluded. There were six Sundays during the whole period of campaign, so, in all, 41 issues of each newspaper were taken for the study. In the end a total sample of 164 issues was studied.

All kinds of items related, directly or indirectly, to elections appearing in the selected newspapers were studied. These included news, editorials, photographs/cartoons/ drawings, articles, view point, review, letter to the editor, analysis/comment, interview/profile, advertisement and speech. Anything else was included under 'others'. Rajiv Gandhi was killed while he was about to address an election gathering; the incident was extensively covered in the newspapers. Since his murder took place during the election campaign, it was decided to include that in the analysis. So, all items on or about his assassination were also coded.

### 4.1.7 CODING SCHEDULE

To content analyse such a massive number of items, a coding schedule was prepared. The major questions coded through the coding schedule were about the actors/sources referred to and the themes included in each item, along with the classification of items, place of publication, author of the item, and many more, as given in the coding schedule. Items were also coded to determine the source of initiation of the predominant subject contained in them. In addition, photographs and cartoons were also coded on the similar basis.

Special attention was given to include all possible actors and themes/issues in the coding schedule so that each single item could be coded. A pilot study involving one newspaper from each country was carried out. In this case *The Times* from Britain and

*Indian Express* from India were taken over three different periods of one week each, that is, one week before the Rajiv Gandhi's murder (May 13-18), one week covering the murder (May 22-28), and one week after the murder (June 22-28). In *The Times*, there appeared 8, 26 and 5 items in the three weeks respectively. Since the number of items was more than normal during the week in which Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated, it was decided to analyse this episode more closely. In *Indian Express* 328, 351 and 158 items were recorded for the corresponding period.

It should be mentioned here that though the pilot study was carried out for three different periods, it was later decided to confine the actual content analysis up to the last polling day, that is, 15 June. This was done to keep the number of the items within manageable limits. In addition, the moot point was to analyse only the election campaign, therefore, newspapers were not included beyond 15 June.

Through this pilot, 51 actors were identified which were further categorised under five groups, namely, main actors, regional parties, individuals (main aspirants for prime ministership), extremist organisations, and others. Similarly, 60 themes/issues were identified during the pilot study. Under both actors and themes, a category of 'others' was included in the coding schedule. Any actor or theme not covered under the identified names was kept under this category.

In the beginning of the coding schedule usual descriptive information was given. This included the item number, name of the newspaper, year, month, date and day, and page number on which the item appears. Further, position of the item was given like front, inside, or back page; news classification was done on the basis of the heading of the page or the section, for instance, 'elections '91', 'overseas', 'national', 'regional', 'pollspeak', 'editorial', 'business and economy', so on and so forth. Type of the item was classified on the basis of whether it was a lead story, news story, editorial, article, letter

to the editor, photograph, advertisement etc. Provision was also made in the coding schedule to code any photographs, cartoons or figures.

There were several categories under which author, who wrote the item, or the source who released it, could be put, for example, special correspondent, political correspondent, news agency, bureau etc. The coding schedule had mentioned various places from where the item could originate. The analysis of this category will tell about the importance of the place where most of the items came from.

One of the most important categories in the coding schedule was 'news sources/actors quoted, interviewed or referred to'. This category, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, was further sub-divided. The main sources were the highest figures in the country (for instance, president, prime minister), ministers, election commission, political parties and their leaders, and state level leaders. The second category included the main political parties at the regional level, followed by another category in which the main aspirants for the office of prime minister were included. There had been quite some unrest in some parts of India, where some extremist organisations were working. Therefore, these groups were put into one more category. Despite this general categorisation, there were still some actors who could not be put under any of these categories. To solve this problem a broad category - 'others' - was provided under which the rest of the actors were coded.

Themes/Issues was another very important category in the coding schedule. All possible themes found during the pilot, were put under this category. Again to avoid any pitfalls, another group, in the end, was identified as 'others'. It was observed during the actual coding that there were some themes which were not identified during piloting. However, these were not repeated too often. While there were 60 themes/issues identified in the pilot study, analysis of each may not show as such

meaningful results as when they are pooled together, on the basis of some commonalty among them, in a small number of groups (Chapter 5).

For determining the relative contribution of the political parties/leaders and journalists to the coverage of the campaign agenda in the selected newspaper, items were coded on the basis of the initiation of the predominant subject of the story. With regard to the political parties only the five major parties were considered for this type of analysis; any item the subject of which was initiated by the minor political parties and independent candidates was classified under the category 'others'. In the case of the visuals (photographs and cartoons), a similar method was employed; the mug shots, for instance, were coded as initiated by the party/candidates. Visuals were also analysed to find out whether they were favourable, unfavourable or neutral to the parties/ candidates. The details of this coding procedure are provided later in this chapter.

Some other characteristics of the items were also recorded, for instance, headline, sub-headline, the first sentence of the lead, the editorial title and salient points in the editorial. Besides, caption and description of the photograph, and comment and description of the cartoon were also recorded on a separate sheet. (Appendices B, C, D)

## 4.1.8 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, to supplement the method of content analysis of the selected issues of the newspapers, interviews were conducted with certain journalists. Their views, it was proposed, will help in understanding the analysis emanating from the data collected through the coding of 3219 items. Before proceeding for the field work, therefore, a comprehensive interview schedule was prepared in which questions were framed in such a way as to extract the maximum information from the journalists. To find out whether the interview schedule would

work successfully, it was pre-tested by interviewing the journalists, who themselves covered the India's elections. The interview schedule was amended accordingly.

## 4.1.9 RELEVANT MATERIAL

As stated in Chapter 1, the research in hand is perhaps the first of its kind focusing as it does on the coverage of the India's 1991 general election in the newspapers of two countries. While there is dearth of the relevant research based material which could be referred to, particularly in this study, some material as published in the contemporary newspapers and other publications in India would be used for the purpose of making the things clearer and putting them in the right context. The actual newspapers used in this research may be referred to where necessary. However, one specific publication, *India Today*, a fortnightly published from New Delhi, would be used more often than any other literature in the Indian situation.

Why *India Today* has been singled out for this purpose is because, firstly, it is the largest circulated magazine in the country in the English language, 'is truly national, not only in terms of reach, but in character and coverage as well . . . the significant point is that political influentials are avid readers of *India Today*' (Ravindran, 1990). Secondly, the opinion polls carried out by the magazine, in association with research based organisations, have left a lasting imprint with their precision to the nearest point since the 1984-election. Ravindran argues that in heightening the importance and relevance of what polled opinion holds for political influentials and the mass public, *India Today* has made a signal contribution to the growth of polling as a distinct discipline . . . the present nation-wide polls by *India Today* are considered to be the most extensive ones ever carried out in this country (ibid.). Thirdly, the establishment of the magazine is said not to follow any particular political line, and its contents are known to be reliable and objective.

## 4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Though, broadly speaking, the research was designed to see the trend of the coverage of election campaign in the second most populous country in the world in the newspapers of two countries, yet, specifically, it was carried out to answer the following questions. In addition, the relationship of the coverage of the election campaigns will be delineated at two levels. First, in the Indian and the British newspapers on the whole. Second, within the newspapers of the two countries i.e. comparing the conservative and the liberal newspapers in each of the countries.

4.2.1 AMOUNT AND PROMINENCE OF THE COVERAGE: The amount and the prominence of the coverage about election campaigns in the newspapers will be analysed to see the similarities or/and differences between the newspapers of India and Britain. While the amount will be the number of the items, the prominence will be judged from the position of the items - whether it is on the front page and the lead story, or just on the front page, or in the inside pages. It is assumed that the more the prominence given to the items the more, it means, the newspaper attaches importance to the event. It is hypothesised that since the Indian English-language press gave significance, by writing editorials, to the 1992 British elections (Singh, 1993), the British newspapers may also do the same in relation to the Indian elections.

4.2.2 IMPORTANCE OF THE ACTORS: In almost all news stories in newspapers references are made to some actors, or sources, perhaps, to authenticate the contents. It does not mean to say that in the absence of these actors, or sources, the item will be refutable, but to an average reader the references do convey a better meaning. It should be made clear here that referring to an actor does not mean that he is also the source of information for the journalist - he may or may not be. To see how well placed various actors are in the coverage of a particular newspaper, the degree to which they are quoted or referred to will be analysed. The actors could be the individual political

leaders, political parties, experts, psephologists or any one of those included in the coding schedule. It is assumed that the more a leader or his party is quoted, or referred to, as an actor, the more will be the importance attached to the actor from the point of view of the press.

4.2.3 RELATIVE CONTRIBUTION OF LEADERS/PARTIES AND JOURNALISTS: Who contributes more to the agenda in the press? Is it the leaders, their party, or the newspaper and its journalists? Some stories, on the one hand, may be the plain presentation of the facts as passed on to the journalists by the political parties or their leaders. Such stories will be called party/leader-initiated. On the other hand, when some items are written by the journalists from their own point of views, of course based on the facts, and the cues are not taken as such from the actors referred to, these items will be termed media-initiated. The opinionated articles, analysis stories and editorials will also fall under the latter category.

The classification of the party- or media-initiated news is similar to the one used by Semetko *et al* (1991).[2]

> Party- or candidate-initiated news stories were those in which the predominant subject of their story stemmed from politicians' planned public statements or activities. This included, for example, speeches or statements made by candidates and party leaders at rallies and on the hustings, and candidates' activities on the campaign trail . . . Media-initiated news stories were defined as those in which the predominant subject stemmed from reporters' activity, such as questions to politicians during press conferences or while on the hustings. They also included investigative reports, issue

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[2]Hansen and Dickinson, while analysing the science coverage in the British media, have classified *source-initiated* stories as those triggered by press releases, press conference, or direct contact with the media initiated by the scientists themselves or by the scientist's institutions; *media-initiated* are the stories in which a journalist uses his or her own established scientific contacts; the stories emerging from *'science-forum'* publications (journals etc.); and stories which arise because of *inter-media* relationships, stories which appear in a programme or newspaper *after* first appearing on a television or radio programme or in a newspaper, suggesting a process of cross media agenda-setting (Hansen and Dickinson, 1992: 370-371).

stories, analysis, poll stories, and stories taking elements from different time periods. In some cases, election news was initiated by others (neither the candidates/parties nor the media) . . . "others" included minor political parties as well as non-party actors such as experts, voters on the street, pollsters, onlookers, royalty (not applicable to my analysis), world leaders, business people, and other media.

<div align="right">(Semetko <em>et al,</em> 1991: 28)</div>

4.2.4 IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUES/THEMES: This is a significant question inasmuch as it would tell about the importance a newspaper accorded the issues of the campaign. It is assumed, like the actors, the more the reference to an issue/theme the more the significance, and therefore the seriousness of the newspaper to cover it. It would also be possible to know the concern of the press and the political parties/leaders about the issues on which the election was fought.

4.2.5 WHAT MEANINGS THE VISUALS CONVEY: Photographs and cartoons are an important part of the newspaper layout. Not only they make the paper look better but are also capable of conveying the message, often, in less space. The visuals will be analysed on the basis of whether they are party- or leader -initiated or media-initiated. The question will also address the depiction of the visual. That is, whether a photograph/cartoon is favourable (positive), unfavourable (negative), or neutral to the leader shown therein.

This classification, again, is similar to the one adopted by Semetko <em>et al</em> (1991). If the photograph shows a leader as speaking, arriving, presenting something, or otherwise engaged in a planned public appearance it will be taken as leader-, party-initiated. On the other hand if hecklers, demonstrators, mistakes, private glimpses of the leader, or some other unexpected events are depicted then the photograph will be considered as media-initiated. While the standard mug shot (passport-photo like) will be taken as party-initiated, the cartoons will be coded as media-initiated. Likewise, if a leader is

depicted as smiling or receiving applause, it will be coded as favourable or positive. A photograph will be considered as unfavourable if it depicts fewer number of people gathered, hecklers, or leaders' gaffes. Photographs which do not fit well in these categories will be considered as neutral.

4.2.6 HOW RAJIV GANDHI'S ASSASSINATION WAS COVERED: Although this would not have been a part of this study under the normal circumstances, Rajiv Gandhi's murder gave altogether a new turn to the election campaign, and, perhaps, had bearing on the final outcome of the elections. It was not only because of his position as a past Prime Minister of India but also, as predicted by opinion polls and political pundits, as the future Prime Minister. Since his killing took place amidst the campaign, and, in fact, while he was just to address the electorate, it became, in the process, too significant an event to leave out of the analysis. It will, therefore, be seen what impact his elimination from the political scene had on the coverage of the campaign. As such, the way his own murder was covered by the press, both Indian and British, will also be assessed.

Here it is hypothesised that, since the press in the West is often accused of depicting only the negative side of the poor countries, the amount of the news coverage of the Rajiv Gandhi's murder would be more than that of the election campaign coverage in the British newspapers.

4.2.7 THE JOURNALISTS' PERSPECTIVE: It does not, perhaps, need any evidence to say that not all what the journalists think is written and not all what they write is published in the newspapers, due to one or another reason, however. The content analysis of the selected newspapers should be able to show the trend of the coverage of the elections. However, it was thought important to record the impressions of the journalists - whose stories became the subject of analysis for this research - about the campaign, issues, pressures, Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, and its impact. The analysis, therefore, of the interviews recorded with the journalists will give their viewpoints.

# Chapter 5

# CHAPTER 5

# CONTENT ANALYSIS - RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A coding schedule was prepared to carry out the content analysis of the selected newspapers. Items relevant to the election campaign appearing in these newspapers were coded and analysed. It may be recalled that a few pertinent research questions were raised in the preceding chapter; the main findings, therefore, will focus on them, though some other important ones will also be presented.

## 5.1 AMOUNT AND PROMINENCE OF THE COVERAGE

In all, 3219 items appeared between 30 April and 15 June in the four newspapers. It should be added here that normally the campaign period for the general elections in India is about three to four weeks, but, in this particular elections, the campaign got extended due to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, a former prime minister of India, when he was going to speak in a public rally in favour of one of his party's candidates in the South. This, eventually, became 'the longest-lasting electoral exercise since the first general election in 1952' (*Indian Express*, 15 June 1991).

Originally, the polling was scheduled to take place on three different days - 20, 23 & 26 May 1991. Had the schedule been maintained, the polling would have finished by the evening of 26 May. However, this did not happen. The first leg polling was completed on 20 May in a violent atmosphere in which 41 people were killed (*Indian Express*, 21 May 1991), while the following day Rajiv Gandhi died in a bomb blast. This created a very serious situation in which the Indian Election Commission announced, amid a lot of controversy, the postponement of the remaining two days polling until 12 & 15 June, thus providing, by default, more time for the newspapers to

report about the extended part of the campaign. The sudden extension in the campaign placed the political parties in a difficult position, for most of them had already exhausted their funds and energy. The interest of the electorate too, perhaps, was subdued.

In the wake of the Rajiv Gandhi murder, there was, as will be shown later in this chapter, a sudden fall in the election related items. The focus, naturally, shifted to the coverage of the murder. It appears that there would be fewer items, than 3219, if the election campaign was not prolonged due to the human bomb blast in which Rajiv Gandhi and others were killed

Figure 5.1

Percentage of Items in Four Newspapers

The Times
53.0 / 1.6%

The Guardian
48.0 / 1.5%

Indian Express
1323.0 / 41.1%

The Hindustan Times
1795.0 / 55.8%
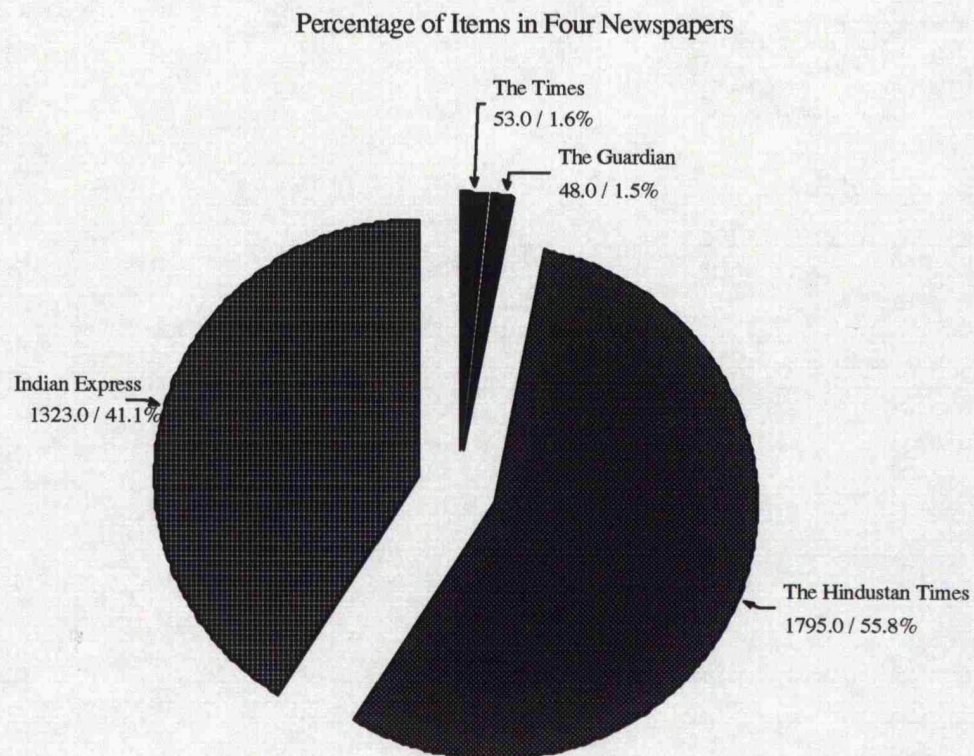
Out of the total items, that is, 3219, most (96.9 per cent) appeared in the two Indian newspapers, while the British newspapers published 3.1 per cent. A cursory look at the Figure 1 shows that among all the newspapers, *The Hindustan Times* published the maximum (1795) items, that is over a good half of the total (55.8 per cent). Its other Indian counterpart, *Indian Express*, came second with 1323 items (41.1 per cent). Between the British newspapers, there was no considerable difference. While 53 items (1.6 per cent) appeared in *The Times*, 48 items (1.5 per cent) were coded from *The Guardian*. Items were coded for the whole of May as compared with a single day in April and 15 days in June. Therefore, the largest number of items appeared in May. Secondly, most campaign activity was witnessed during the month of May. Table 5.1 shows that the maximum number of items (2592) were coded in the month of May followed by 549 in June; and 78 in April.

Table 5.1

Number and Percentages of Items (Month-wise) in All Newspapers

|  | April | May | June | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Hindustan Times | 39 (1.2) | 1431 (44.5) | 325 (10.1) | 1795 (55.8) |
| Indian Express | 38 (1.2) | 1075 (33.4) | 210 (6.5) | 1323 (41.1) |
| The Times | - | 45 (1.4) | 8 (0.2) | 53 (1.6) |
| The Guardian | 1 | 41 (1.3) | 6 (0.2) | 48 (1.5) |
| Total | 78 (2.4) | 2592 (80.5) | 549 (17.1) | 3219 (100.0) |

Compared with the recent election content analysis studies in Britain and the United States, it can be said that Indian newspapers' coverage of the elections was extensive in relation to what the newspapers of the two Western countries covered. While covering the British elections of 1983, *The Times* and *The Guardian* printed 625 and 640 stories respectively for the entire period of the campaign lasting three and a half weeks (Semetko *et al*, 1991). On the other side, the two US newspapers, namely,

*Indianapolis Star* and *The Louisville Courier-Journal,* printed 332 and 371 stories about the US Presidential elections in 1984 (ibid.). Even if the unusual long period of the Indian elections (though, it was still shorter than in the US, where the papers were coded for 67 days) and the Rajiv Gandhi's assassination are taken into consideration, the number of election related items in the two newspapers was far more than the said British and US newspapers.

The total number of items appearing in different newspapers shows that Indian newspapers were far ahead in the coverage of the elections than the British newspapers. While it is obvious for the newspapers of India to give wider coverage to its elections, or any other significant event, the press in Britain, for reasons stated in Chapter 4, would be expected to give "respectable" space to important happenings in India. However, from the view point of the foreign correspondent of *The Times*, there is only a limited amount of space per country in the world and if there is a Tiananmen Square, if there is a Berlin wall collapsing, if there is a Gorbachev resigning, then the 'nuisances of Indian politics matter not a jot' (Thomas, *The Times*, 1992). He also argues that he has got to cover seven other countries, and that is why there is not as much coverage of India from the Indian reader's point of view. While his explanation may look like justifying his case, in fact, it is, given the treatment meted out to the Third World countries by the Western press, far from convincing and rather seems more in the same line, as explained in Chapter 3. There is, however, a considerable difference, relatively speaking, in the coverage when India plunges into a serious crisis in the killing of its important leader (Chapter 6).

What else do the figures in Table 5.1 reveal? *The Hindustan Times* gave much more coverage to the election campaign as compared with *Indian Express*. It seems that since *The Hindustan Times* sells far more copies in and around the capital city than *Indian Express*, it published more election related items to satiate its readers, and

therefore, attached more importance to the elections. It is a paradox that *Indian Express*, which is published simultaneously from 16 different places in the country and has an elaborate news collection network published fewer items than *The Hindustan Times*, but, as its news editor put it, 'we fared well'.

This could be explained in terms of the volume of the newspaper. On an average *The Hindustan Times* published 20 pages a day during the study period as compared with 16 pages in *Indian Express* (it should be made clear here that no calculations were done to know the amount of advertisements and other non-story items). This is why, perhaps, there was more scope for the coverage of elections in *The Hindustan Times*. However, there is an interesting point to note in Table 5.1. Within the paper, *Indian Express* published more percentage of items (81.2 per cent) during the month of May than what *The Hindustan Times* did (79.7 per cent) in the same period.

## 5.1.1 POSITION OF THE ITEMS

While all reporters and correspondents of a newspaper write only the important stories, on the basis of either the news values, or what their professional judgement says, yet, it remains with the desk-people (news editors, chief sub-editors etc.) to allocate position to an item. All items included in a newspaper on any single day have relatively more significance (though the measurement of significance is purely the prerogative of certain individuals only) than the ones left out. The process, according to one of them, 'is just automatic' (Tripathi, *Indian Express*, 1992). Whatever the criteria for the placement of an item, those appearing on the front page are supposed to be the most important on a particular day, whereas less critical items are printed either on the last page or the inside pages.

As is clear from Table 5.2, as many as 83.8 per cent items related to election campaign appeared on the inside pages in contrast with 13 per cent items which were printed on the front page; only 3.2 per cent items were placed on the back pages of the four newspapers. This finding corroborates the results of an earlier study done in Britain and the US (Semetko *et al*, 1991) in which the bulk of the election coverage appeared on inside pages. It was found that over 87 per cent and 89 per cent of the items appeared on the inside pages of the British and US newspapers respectively. The corresponding figures for the front pages in the British and US newspapers were 13 and 11 per cent respectively.

Table 5.2

Position of the Items

|  | Front Page | Inside Page | Back Page |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Hindustan Times | 201 (11.2) | 1504 (83.8) | 90 (5.0) |
| Indian Express | 207 (15.6) | 1111 (84.0) | 5 (.4) |
| The Times | 4 (7.5) | 49 (92.5) | - |
| The Guardian | 6 (12.5) | 35 (72.9) | 7 (14.6) |
| Total | 418 (13.0) | 2699 (83.8) | 102 (3.2) |

Table presents position of the items in the newspapers; figures in parentheses represent the percentages of items within the newspapers.

As far as the Indian newspapers are concerned, both printed a substantial number of items (201 and 207 respectively in *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express*) on the front page. This comes out to be, on an average, 4.87 (*The Hindustan Times*) and 5.04 (*Indian Express*) stories each day of the election campaign. It is obviously clear that since there is only one front page as compared with many (up to 22 in *The Hindustan Times*) inside pages, total amount of items has to be far more on the inside pages. Similarly, why *Indian Express* had fewer (only four per cent) stories on the back page

(in relation to five per cent in *The Hindustan Times*) is due to the reason that this page is reserved only for the sport oriented items.

Figure 5.2

Position of Items in Newspapers
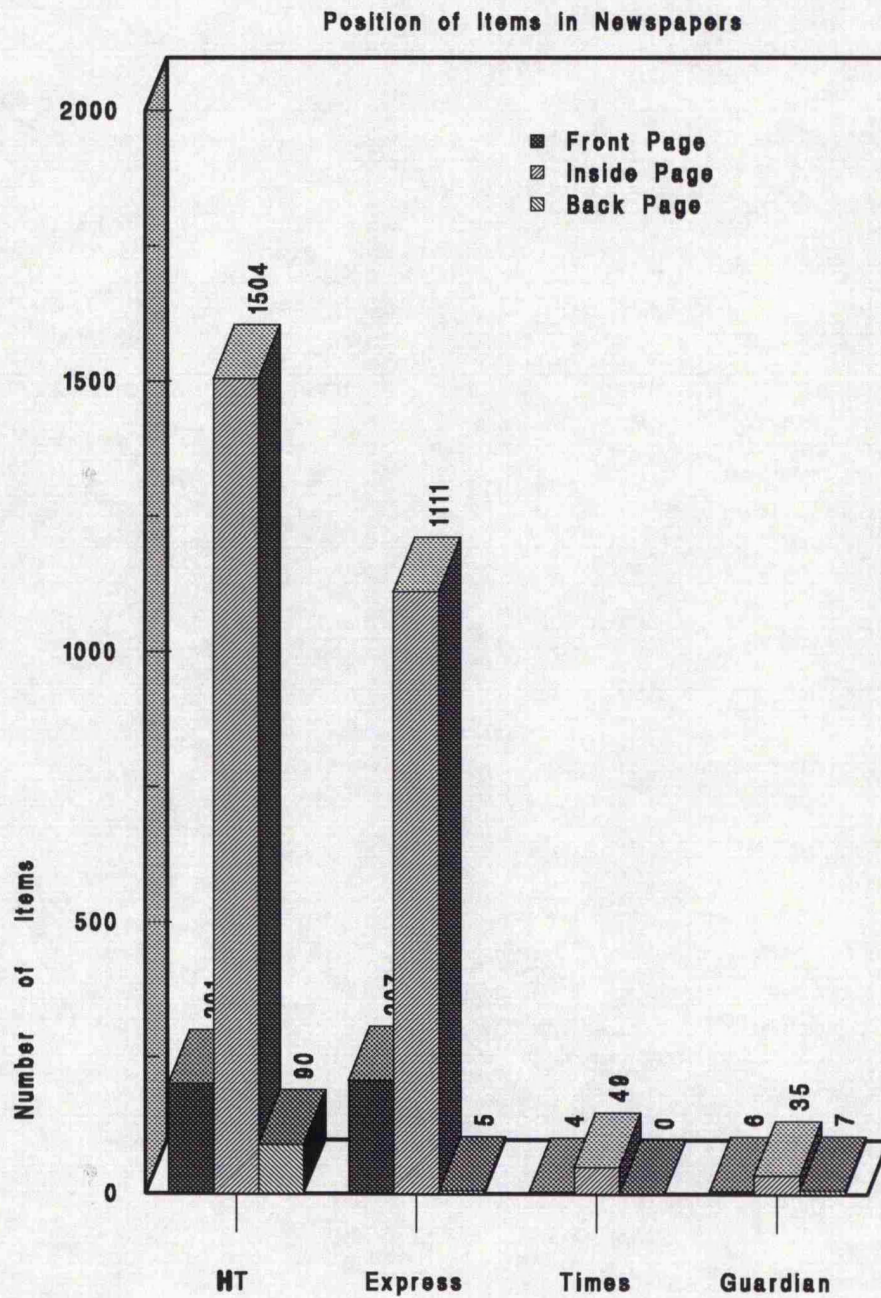
Although *Indian Express* printed fewer items than its other Indian counterpart, within its pages, it gave, apparently, more prominence to election related items by placing 15.6 per cent of items on the front page in comparison with 11.2 per cent in *The Hindustan Times*. The figures in Table 5.2 show that *The Guardian* printed 12.5 per cent of items on its front page as compared with *The Times*, which put 7.5 per cent of its total items about Indian elections on the front page during the whole period of the campaign. Likewise, *The Guardian* again took the lead by printing 14.6 per cent of the items on the back page, while no item appeared on the back pages of *The Times*.

What is worth analysing here is the fact that even though *The Guardian* appears to have given the front page to 12.5 per cent of its total items, as a matter of fact, it seems to be an illusory image. For, the items which were printed on the front pages of both, *The Guardian* and *The Times*, were about the Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Not a single item, whatsoever, was given the front page treatment until the news about Rajiv Gandhi's killing first started coming in. The findings thus show the conformity to the news value that if a big personality is killed, it would make an instant news.

To this effect, Brucker argues that 'it is a basic function of journalism that the bigger, the more off-beat, or the more bloody the spectacle, the greater the news value . . . it merely reflects the ineluctable fact that readers will flock to a story that has shock value but ignore one that is routine' (Brucker, 1973: 175). It is, however, a very debatable question as to whether the news persons give priority to 'shock value' of news because, they think, the readers want it, or the readers read it because the journalists leave their audience with Hobson's choice (Chapter 3).

5.1.2 ITEM CLASSIFICATION[1]

Items were classified on the basis of the type of the page/column they appeared on. Generally, newspapers designate all the pages with specific titles and items relevant to these titles are placed there, though, at times, these conditions may not be strictly followed.

Table 5.3

News Classification

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian | Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elections '91/ Lok Sabha Elections 1991 | 452 (25.2) | 412 (31.2) | 1 (1.9) | 3 (6.3) | 868 (27.0) |
| Overseas/ International | - - | 1 (0.1) | 43 (81.1) | 12 (25.0) | 56 (1.7) |
| National/ National & Regional/State | 134 (7.5) | 46 (3.5) | - - | - - | 180 (5.6) |
| Delhi Poll - Scene | 93 (5.2) | 52 (3.9) | - - | - - | 145 (4.5) |
| City | 73 (4.1) | 76 (5.7) | - - | - - | 149 (4.6) |
| Editorial/ Comment & Analysis | 36 (2.0) | 35 (2.6) | 3 (5.7) | 5 (10.4) | 79 (2.5) |
| Letter to the Editor | 67 (3.7) | 49 (3.7) | - - | 2 (4.2) | 118 (3.7) |
| Brief/ City briefs/ Capital Notebook/Poll Briefs | 55 (3.1) | 33 (2.5) | - - | 2 (4.2) | 90 (2.8) |
| Others | 797 (44.4) | 507 (38.3) | 3 (5.7) | 12 (25.0) | 1319 (41.0) |
| Total | 1795 (55.8) | 1323 (41.1) | 53 (1.6) | 48 (1.5) | 3219 (100) |

Table presents news classification under various headings; * Total will not be 100, as not all categories have been given for the sake of brevity.

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[1] Since only very few and important observations have been picked up from the table concerning news classifications, it will not be appropriate to give the whole Table here. For details, see Appendix G.

According to the figures in Table 5.3, the maximum percentage (27 per cent) of the items appeared on the pages titled Election 91, Lok Sabha Elections 1991 etc. in all the four newspapers. However, when looked at the individual papers, as shown in Table 5.3, while 25.2 per cent items within *The Hindustan Times*, and 31.2 per cent in *Indian Express* (the largest percentage to appear under a single category) were on the election pages, most of the items (81.1 per cent) in *The Times* were on the Overseas page, as were 25 per cent in the case of *The Guardian.*

The second largest percentage (5.6 per cent) of the items to appear under any specific page/column was printed on the National/National & Regional/States in the case of Indian newspapers, followed by 4.6 per cent and 4.5 per cent on the pages designated as City and Delhi Poll Scene respectively. While 3.7 per cent of the total items were classified as Letter to the Editor, 2.8 per cent came under In Brief/City Briefs/Capital Notebook/Poll Briefs, and two and a half per cent on the Editorial/Comment & Analysis pages. Interestingly, despite special pages allocated to the inclusion of election items, 41 per cent were placed on 'other' pages. This explains the tremendous flow of items during the election campaign which could not be contained in the special pages.

## 5.1.3 TYPE OF ITEM[2]

To understand more fully as to what exactly was the item - news, editorial, comment, photograph, letter and so on - all relevant items were coded according to their type. The contents of Table 5.4 show that the maximum number of items (72 per cent) in all the newspapers put together were categorised as news. This finding is in consonance with what other researchers have found in the past (for instance, Sigal, 1973;

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[2]Table 5.4 may not contain all the types as given in the coding schedule, for only important ones are given; to see the table in full, consult Appendix H.

Hartmann *et al*, 1974; Mohsen, 1991). Between the Indian newspapers, both *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* were very close to each other so far as the percentage of news was concerned; 72 and 73 per cent respectively. The British newspapers, between themselves, also printed almost the same number of news.

Table 5.4

Type of Item in Newspapers

| | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lead Story | 33 (1.8) | 27 (2.0) | 2 (3.8) | 3 (6.3) | 65 (2.0) |
| News Story | 1292 (72.0) | 966 (73.0) | 32 (60.4) | 29 (60.4) | 2319 (72.0) |
| Editorial | 36 (2.0) | 33 (2.5) | 3 (5.7) | 2 (4.2) | 74 (2.3) |
| Article | 7 (.4) | - | - | 1 (2.1) | 8 (.2) |
| Letter to Editor | 67 (3.7) | 51 (3.9) | - | 2 (4.2) | 120 (3.7) |
| Analysis | 189 (10.5) | 72 (5.4) | 7 (13.2) | 9 (18.8) | 277 (8.6) |
| Photograph/ Cartoon/Drawing | 96 (5.3) | 71 (5.4) | 7 (13.2) | - | 174 (5.4) |
| Profile/Interview | 37 (2.1) | 47 (3.6) | 2 (3.8) | 2 (4.2) | 88 (2.7) |
| Advertisements | 34 (1.9) | 54 (4.1) | - | - | 88 (2.7) |

Table shows type of the item as appeared in four newspapers; figures in parentheses represent percentages within the newspaper.

During the campaign, newspapers keep analysing the situation and present analysis by their own analysts as well as outside experts. This is, understandably, done to provide an in-depth insight of the electoral activities of the contesting parties and leaders. That analysis is given due importance by newspapers reflects from the fact that 8.6 per cent of the total items were 'analysis', second only to news. Although *The Hindustan Times* printed the maximum number of items of analysis (189) of all the newspapers, a striking fact, as the data show in Table 5.4, is that both the British newspapers (within the newspaper) published a greater percentage (18.8 & 13.2 per cent in *The Guardian* and *The Times* respectively) of analyses than the Indian newspapers. It may be the case that the British newspapers included more analyses for easy consumption of their

readership of the elections in India, for the readers, because of the geographical distance, may find it difficult to understand the intricacies of the campaign.

Photographs are an integral part of newspapers. While some photographs accompany the news or analysis, some are complete in themselves. The figures in Table 5.4 indicate that 5.4 per cent of the total items were exclusively photographs, thus stressing the importance of the photographs. However, not all the newspapers individually treat it that way. *The Guardian*, for instance, did not give a single exclusive photograph during the period of the study. While both the Indian newspapers gave almost the same percentage of photographs, *The Times*, out of the total items in it on the subject, printed 13.2 per cent of them. Table 5.4, it should be mentioned, does not show the total number of photographs which accompanied the items and, therefore, were coded separately (Table 5.5).

Profiles, both of the personalities and the important constituencies, are published to give detailed information. The information on constituency profiles, usually, tells about a quick review of the past history, the leaders who have been representing it, the mood of the electorate, the factors, if any, responsible for returning a candidate to the Parliament, and likely outcome of the election in question etc. The profile on individuals, similarly, introduces them about their political activities, the plus and minus points of their life style, their way of convassing, and their likely chances of winning the elections etc. In short, profiles give background information to refresh the knowledge of the readers. Out of the total items in all the newspapers, 2.7 per cent were related to profiles.

A revealing point, as can be seen from the figures in Table 5.4, is that *Indian Express* published far more profiles (47 in number) than any other newspaper, and particularly its Indian counterpart, *The Hindustan Times* (37). In contrast with 2.1 per cent in *The*

*Hindustan Times, Indian Express,* within itself, printed 3.6 per cent profiles. This finding suggests that *Indian Express,* as compared with *The Hindustan Times,* gave more significance to background material of the constituencies and leaders. And this too when it gave less overall space to items than what *The Hindustan Times* did.

Advertisements play a major role in the economy of a newspaper. It is an open secret that no respectable publication (apart from those published by the Indian government departments or other non-profit organisations) can survive for long in the absence of a regular flow of commercials. While, more often than not, commercials come from industrial and business concerns, other institutions, such as educational, cultural, social and like, also advertise in the newspapers. There are, albeit occasionally, some advertisements coming from individuals as well. During the election campaign, political parties and leaders buy space in the newspapers to entice the voters to vote in their favour. Some political parties even engage professional agencies to issue advertisements, in the newspapers of their choice, in a bid to woo the electorate.

In all, there were 88 advertisements in the Indian newspapers during the period between 30 April and 15 June 1991. Once again, *Indian Express* took the lead in this respect; there were 54 advertisements in it in relation to *The Hindustan Times* wherein 34 advertisements appeared. Not only the number of advertisements in *Indian Express* was more, but also the proportionate space, within the paper, given to advertisements was more than double *The Hindustan Times.* It is, in fact, surprising because *The Hindustan Times* had more number of pages and is said to be very popular amongst the advertisers. It appears, therefore, that *Indian Express* was more favoured by the interesting political parties and leaders who wanted to convey their messages to the voters through its pages.

Editorials occupy a pivotal place in a newspaper. The editors give their opinion on topical issues through editorials. Even a newspaper's preference, if it is there, for a certain political party can be found in its editorials. All the four newspapers, as emanates from Table 5.4, wrote editorials during the campaign period, some more than the others. A total of 74 editorials (2.3 per cent of the total items) were coded in 164 issues of the selected newspapers. *The Hindustan Times* published 36 editorials, *Indian Express* 33, *The Times* 3 and *The Guardian* 2. A small point is noteworthy here. Though *Indian Express* wrote three fewer editorials than *The Hindustan Times*, yet the ratio of the editorials to the total items within the paper in the former was more than the latter. It appears that *Indian Express* gave a little more attention to address to their readers through the columns of the editorials. However, the percentage of the editorials in the two Indian newspapers was less as compared with those in the US and British newspapers which covered the elections of their respective countries (Semetko *et al*, 1991).

Another type of item was coded as 'lead' story. A look at the contents of Table 5.4 reveals that *The Hindustan Times* gave lead to 33 items, while *Indian Express* to 27 items. Whereas *The Guardian* presented three stories as lead on the front page, its other British counterpart treated two items as lead. It can be further deduced from the table that out of 41 days, *The Hindustan Times* presented the election news as top story on as much as 80 per cent of days, whereas *Indian Express* treated such news as lead on 66 per cent of the days it was analysed for. These figures speak of the importance the Indian newspapers gave to the stories related to elections. Again, however, the number of lead stories in the Indian newspapers compared with the British and the US newspapers was less (Semetko *et al*, 1991).

## 5.1.4 PHOTOGRAPHS

The figures in Table 5.5 show the amount of photographs published in the four newspapers. A close look at the table would tell that a total of 476 photographs (sum of each column's total multiplied by the number of photographs that column represents; for example, column 5 has 9 items with four photographs in each item. The total number of photographs in this column, therefore, is (9x4)= 36) appeared in the selected newspapers. This number also includes the exclusive photographs, which were coded as a separate item, though (Table 5.4). The table further shows that while 9.5 per cent of the total items had one photograph each, 23 items, with a varying degree in the selected newspapers, had two photographs each. Some items were coded even with many more photographs; one item in *Indian Express* had as many as 13 photographs. The total number of photographs reveals that newspapers give high priority to the inclusion of photographs.

Table 5.5

Number and Percentages of Photographs

|  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 13 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hindustan Times | 1632 (90.9) | 138 (7.7) | 13 (.7) | 7 (.4) | 4 (.2) |  | 1 (.1) |  |  |
| Indian Express | 1165 (88.1) | 137 (10.4) | 5 (.4) | 4 (.3) | 5 (.4) | 2 (.2) | 3 (.2) | 1 (.1) | 1 (.1) |
| The Times | 27 (50.9) | 24 (45.3) | 2 (3.8) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| The Guardian | 37 (77.1) | 8 (16.7) | 3 (6.3) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Total | 2861 (88.9) | 307 (9.5) | 23 (.7) | 11 (.3) | 9 (.3) | 2 (.1) | 4 (.1) | 1 (.0) | 1 (.0) |

Between the Indian newspapers, *Indian Express* seems to have attached more significance to photographs than its counterpart. *Indian Express* had 12.1 per cent items to have had photographs as compared with *The Hindustan Times* which had 9.1

per cent such items. Even if the total number of photographs is taken into account, *Indian Express* printed 227 vis-à-vis 207 in *The Hindustan Times*. Between the British newspapers, *The Times* printed 28 photographs in relation to 14 in *The Guardian*.

## 5.1.5 AUTHOR OF THE ITEM

Usually, almost all items have a credit line from which it is possible to know their authors. The stories can be filed by a reporter, a correspondent, a news agency, any combination of theses, or by foreign staff, foreign editor, and so on. There are, however, stories which do not bear any names, and there are stories which have the names of the author/source sans his/her designation or position. The latter type of authors were kept under the heading 'not specified'. Table 5.6 gives an account of the authors who wrote the items. Apparently, the Indian newspapers mainly used the items sent in by their own reporters. *The Hindustan Times* had 772 items (43 per cent within the newspaper) by their reporters. *Indian Express,* on the other hand, had 516 (39 per cent) such items.[3]

There are two major English news agencies in India, Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI), which are subscribed to by the Indian English newspapers, though vernacular press also subscribes to the agency services. It is noteworthy, as the data in Table 5.6 show, that a substantial number of items in both the Indian newspapers was used from the two national news agencies, which speaks of their importance.

*The Hindustan Times* printed a total of 374 items taken together from PTI and UNI, which makes a little over one fifth (20.8 per cent) of the total coverage. Likewise,

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[3]It is worthwhile to note here that *Indian Express* has its own news service under the name Express News Service, which collects and distributes information throughout its 16 editions spread all over India.

*Indian Express* too used 21.2 per cent of its entire election coverage from these Indian news agencies together. However, dealt with separately, it is quite revealing that the PTI service is much more sought after than the one offered by the UNI. The figures in Table 5.6 depict that while *The Hindustan Times* used more than twice the amount of items sent by PTI than that of UNI, *Indian Express* also used nearly double the amount. There is, therefore, a clear evidence in favour of PTI as a much used agency than UNI.

Table 5.6

Author of the Items

| | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | Guardian | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reporter | 772 (43.0) | | 1 (1.9) | | 773 (24.0) |
| ENS | | 516 (39.0) | | | 516 (16.0) |
| PTI | 261 (14.5) | 176 (13.3) | | | 437 (13.6) |
| UNI | 113 (6.3) | 105 (7.9) | | | 218 (6.8) |
| Others | 129 (7.2) | 79 (6.0) | | 9 (18.8) | 217 (6.7) |
| Photographer/ Cartoonist | 46 (2.6) | 3 (.2) | | | 49 (1.5) |
| Joint Agencies | 17 (.9) | 27 (2.0) | | | 44 (1.4) |
| Correspondent & Agency | 18 (1.0) | 16 (1.2) | | 1 (2.1) | 35 (1.1) |
| Reader | 12 (.7) | 6 (.5) | | 1 (2.1) | 19 (.6) |
| Expert | 11 (.6) | 2 (.2) | | | 13 (.4) |
| Joint Correspondents | 5 (.3) | | 2 (3.8) | 3 (6.3) | 10 (.3) |
| Reuters | | 1 (.1) | 3 (5.7) | | 4 (.1) |
| AP | 1 (.1) | | | 3 (6.3) | 4 (.1) |
| Foreign Staff | | | 2 (3.8) | | 2 (.1) |
| UPI | 1 (.1) | 1 (.1) | | | 2 (.1) |
| AFP | 1 (.1) | | 1 (1.9) | | 2 (.1) |
| Political Correspondent | 1(.1) | | | | 1 (.0) |
| Diplomatic Correspondent | | | 1 (1.9) | | 1 (.0) |
| Not Specified | 406 (22.6) | 391 (29.6) | 43 (81.1) | 31 (64.6) | 871 (27.1) |

Table shows the number of items under various categories of authors; figures in
parentheses represent the percentages of those items within the newspaper.

The services of the four International news agencies were used to the minimum. It can be seen from the data in Table 5.6 that a meagre 0.4 per cent of the total coverage in all the four newspapers was provided by the mighty four. While only four items were used released each by Reuters and AP, the use of UPI and AFP was further reduced to two items each. This can be explained in terms of the nature and proximity of the

event. Since it was an event mainly taking place within the national boundary, there was no need to depend upon the International news agencies, for the Indian newspapers have their own well established news gathering system in the country. Why the British newspapers did not depend much on the 'big four' is also due to the fact that they have their own correspondents based in India.

Another thing which is outstandingly clear from this study is that elections, though they are primarily a political activity, are, in the main, covered by the generalists, not by special or political correspondents. It is so because the number of specialists, particularly in the Indian newspapers, is far less than those who are in the category of generalists. It is, in deed, the collective effort of all people on the staff of the newspapers. The stories are mainly filed by the individual reporters. It is apparent from Table 5.6 that only a small percentage of items was covered jointly either by the agencies, correspondents or agency and reporter. Again, no substantial number of items was authored by the experts either.

As mentioned early on, when the names of the authors are given along the story, their titles are not usually stated thus making it difficult to know whether he is an expert, general reporter or a specialist. Over 27 per cent of the total items in all the newspapers did not mention the position of the authors, and were, therefore, classified under 'not specified'. This was apparently more common in the case of British newspapers than their Indian counterparts.

## 5.1.6 LOCATION OF AUTHOR/SOURCE

It is easy to know from the date-line[4] of an item its origin in the Indian newspapers, though in some cases the place mentioned is the one from where a story is actually filed. The figures in Table 5.7 show that the largest number, that is, 1346 items (41.8 per cent) emerged from the capital city, New Delhi.

Table 5.7

Location of the Author/Source

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Delhi | 743 (41.4) | 554 (41.9) | 25 (47.2) | 24 (50.0) | 1346 (41.8) |
| Indian State Capital | 406 (22.6) | 290 (21.9) | 7 (13.2) | 2 (4.2) | 705 (21.9) |
| Indian City | 297 (16.5) | 241 (18.2) | 2 (3.8) | 2 (4.2) | 542 (16.8) |
| Not Specified | 133 (7.4) | 135 (10.2) | 15 (28.3) | 17 (35.4) | 300 (9.3) |
| Other Indian Place | 142 (7.9) | 54 (4.1) | 2 (3.8) |  | 198 (6.2) |
| More than One | 24 (1.3) | 6 (.5) | 2 (3.8) |  | 32 (1.0) |
| Neighbour | 17 (.9) | 8 (.6) |  | 1 (2.1) | 26 (.8) |
| Washington | 11 (.6) | 14 (1.1) |  |  | 25 (.8) |
| London | 15 (.8) | 9 (.7) |  |  | 24 (.7) |
| Other World City | 5 (.3) | 12 (.9) |  | 2 (4.2) | 19 (.6) |
| Others | 2 (.1) |  |  |  | 2 (.1) |

Table shows location of the author/source; figures in parentheses show percentage of items from a particular location, within the newspaper.

The capital city is the seat of power; both the Houses of Parliament[5] are there, as, obviously, are most of the government ministries. Naturally, there is concentration of all the VIPs, and therefore, political activity here is much more than at any other place in the country. Delhi is metropolitan and is internationally important, for all foreign

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[4]Date-line, as in most Indian newspapers, refers, on top of the story, to the place from where, and the date on which it is filed.

[5]There are two houses of Parliament: the Upper House is known as Rajya Sabha and it is a permanent house; the Lower House is called Lok Sabha, whose normal life is five years, unless election is called earlier due to a variety of reasons.

offices of the embassies the world over are here. Delhi is also a central place for media; apart from the government run electronic media, most influential publications, newspapers, magazines etc. are published from here. By these considerations, therefore, most important sources are to be found in the capital of India. In addition, the Indian Election Commission, which is entrusted with the responsibility of organising the elections, and for taking critical decisions regarding malpractices in the form of booth capturing, hooliganism, electoral corruption etc., has its headquarters in this city. In the event of sudden death/killing of a candidate, the Commission decides to defer the polls to another date; it also announces repoll in certain places in a constituency, if complaints are received and found valid. The media have to be close by for reporting all these and other decisions.

During elections, all political parties hold daily press conferences, in which basic information is provided for the press about their electoral campaign strategies throughout the country. Journalists, on their part, have easy access to most VIP sources, for all national political parties have their head offices based here. There is even a possibility of inclusion of important information at the eleventh hour, because both the personalities and parties that matter and the media are in the close vicinity of one another. It is noteworthy here that the British newspapers concentrated even more in the national capital - Delhi - than the Indian newspapers. From the figures in Table 5.7, it can be observed that both *The Times* and *The Guardian*, had as many as 47.2 per cent and 50 per cent of the items respectively originating in Delhi. It explains that there is more news, due to the reasons already provided, in Delhi and that is why, perhaps, the foreign correspondents collect more stories from there.

The next important locations, after Delhi, as evidenced in Table 5.7, are the capitals of states in the country from where 21.9 per cent of the total items were filed. The explanation offered above also holds true for the state capitals. Analogously, the

capitals of the states are the seats of power at the state level where the state level parties, and the state level units of the national parties, have their headquarters. Also, there is relatively more concentration of the media in the state capital than at any other place in the state. The third place, in that order, goes to the 'other Indian cities' from where 542 items (16.8 per cent) came. The trend for the first three places is as true for the overall coverage in all four newspapers, as for the individual papers. These findings point to clear evidence that most political activity takes place in the big urban cities or it is, at least, made to appear like that, for together these places are the location of four out of every five items, 80.5 per cent to be precise, during the campaign. Only 6.2 of the total coverage came from 'other places in India'.

A substantial percentage (9.3 per cent) of items originated from the places whose location could not be determined. This is so because some items like editorials, articles, features etc. do not bear any date line, and therefore, their origin cannot be known from the text. Secondly, many items (2.8 per cent - Table 5.3) under brief/capital notes/city briefs, again, do not mention the place of their origin, thus increasing the number of items under this category. This is more the case with the British newspapers which, together, had 63.7 per cent items which were coded under the category place 'not specified'. British newspapers in general do not give the date line.

Between the Indian newspapers, there was a marked difference in one of the categories - 'other Indian place'. Within the newspapers, the figures in Table 5.7 show, the reporters of *The Hindustan Times* sent nearly double (7.9 per cent) the items from common places in the country than what *Indian Express* did (4.1 per cent). This suggests that the former newspaper gave more importance than its counterpart to even not-so-important places. This appears to be a bit paradoxical, for *Indian Express* is known to have an extensive network of news collection through its own Express News

Service, and one would assume it to have given relatively greater coverage to the areas other than Delhi, state capitals and big cities.

## 5.1.7 ACTORS QUOTED OR REFERRED TO

It is difficult to conceive of an item in a newspaper in which no actors or sources are quoted or at least referred to. Invariably, all journalists have to depend upon sources who supply them with necessary information. While some sources are named and identified in the news coverage, others are disguised for the sake of anonymity. The reference to sources lends authenticity to the news and readers can make out who is saying what and who is taking what position, especially during the election campaigns. Referring to certain actors also saves the reporter of any responsibility of the correctness of the facts. However, not all sources and actors are referred to with the same frequency; some who hold important positions and are on the top in the hierarchy are most sought after as compared to those who can provide but only a limited and occasional information, and therefore the latter are referred to less frequently.

Though it may not always be the case, the more a source/actor is quoted or referred to the more important he/she is for a newspaper. In the process, therefore, certain political parties, and leaders thereof, are referred to more often than the rest. Newspapers may have their own preferences and thus may refer to particular people or institutions more frequently. There may be more than one actors referred to in an item. In this study, in each item up to five actors were coded according to their appearance in the story. Table 5.8 shows the actors/sources referred to in all (irrespective of their having been quoted as Actor 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) the newspapers together in the descending order. How individual actors were referred to in the press is analysed later in this chapter.

The contents of Table 5.8 show how all 52 actors/sources were quoted or referred to in total in all the newspapers. Since the figures are given in the descending order, it is very simple to judge how each one of them faired. In over half of the items in all the newspapers together, Congress (I) party was the most frequently referred to, that is 1697 times, followed by the Bharatiya Janata Party and Janata Dal/National Front which were referred to 1346 and 1017 times respectively. Among the five major political parties, viz. Congress (I), Bharatiya Janata Party, National Front, Samajwadi Janata Party, and the Communist Parties, contesting elections Congress (I) clearly had an edge if the frequency with which it was referred to is any indicator.

While there could be many differentiating views for the Congress (I)'s highest frequency in the whole press coverage, there is no denying the fact that Indian National Congress, of which the Congress (I) is an off-shoot, is by far the oldest party in the country. Founded in 1885, it was the major actor in the pre- independence era and was responsible for stirring a sort of movement against the British Raj. Secondly, Congress party has been in power for most of the time since India achieved her independence in 1947. It is also credited with a better network at the grass root level spreading in almost all parts of the country (see, for instance, Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993). Comparatively all other existing political parties in India are a recent phenomenon and have their following concentrated only in some pockets.

Table 5.8
Frequencies of Actors

| ACTOR | COUNT | PCT OF CASES |
|---|---|---|
| CONGRESS (I) | 1697 | 52.7 |
| BHARTYA JANATA PARTY | 1346 | 41.8 |
| JANATA DAL/NATIONAL FRONT | 1017 | 31.6 |
| RAJIV GANDHI | 861 | 26.7 |
| INDIAN ELECTION COMMISSION | 533 | 16.6 |
| SAMAJWADI JANATA PARTY | 391 | 12.1 |
| CPI/CPM | 336 | 10.4 |
| V.P.SINGH | 305 | 9.5 |
| INDIAN PRIME MINISTER | 268 | 8.3 |
| STATE CHIEF MINISTERS | 245 | 7.6 |
| ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE | 196 | 6.1 |
| MILITARY/POLICE/CRPF | 184 | 5.7 |
| INDIAN CABINET MINISTER | 161 | 5.0 |
| SONIA GANDHI | 137 | 4.3 |
| INDIAN PRESIDENT | 126 | 3.9 |
| LTTE | 103 | 3.2 |
| PUNJAB MILITANTS | 78 | 2.4 |
| DMK | 72 | 2.2 |
| VISHWA HINDU PRISHAD | 70 | 2.2 |
| NEIGHBOUR COUNTRIES | 69 | 2.1 |
| AI-ADMK | 64 | 2.0 |
| P.V. NARASIMHA RAO | 63 | 2.0 |
| BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY | 58 | 1.8 |
| SHIV SENA | 56 | 1.7 |
| STATE GOVERNORS | 49 | 1.5 |
| WORLD LEADERS | 44 | 1.4 |
| AKALI DAL PARTY | 42 | 1.3 |
| INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE | 37 | 1.1 |
| TELUGU DESAM PARTY | 35 | 1.1 |
| ASOM GANA PRISHAD | 34 | 1.1 |
| JMM | 25 | .8 |
| CIVIL SERVANTS (STATE) | 24 | .7 |
| PSEPHOLOGIST/POLLS | 20 | .6 |
| EXPERTS/INTELLECTUALS | 17 | .5 |
| INDIAN DIPLOMATS | 17 | .5 |
| CIVIL SERVANTS (INDIA) | 16 | .5 |
| WORLD NEWS AGENCIES | 11 | .3 |
| CIVIL LIBERTIES ORG. | 10 | .3 |
| N.D. TIWARI | 9 | .3 |
| INDIAN NEWS AGENCIES | 9 | .3 |
| STATE MINISTERS | 7 | .2 |
| SHARAD PAWAR | 7 | .2 |
| MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT | 5 | .2 |
| ARJUN SINGH | 5 | .2 |
| KASHMIR MILITANTS | 5 | .2 |
| NEIGHBOUR COUNTRIES OFFICIALS | 4 | .1 |
| NEIGHBOUR COUNTRIES MEDIA | 4 | .1 |
| PRANAB MUKHERJEE | 3 | .1 |
| OTHERS | 404 | 12.6 |
| TOTAL | 9279 | 288.3 |

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as is clear from Table 5.8, was, after Congress (I), the second most frequently mentioned actor in totality. Tracing its origin to Jana Sangh, one of the four national opposition parties which merged in 1977 to form the Janata Party, BJP came into being after the grouping broke up in 1980. The rightist party has close links with the Rashtryia Swayamsevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (see for instance, Kumar, 1991). BJP with 85 seats - first ever to have won so many seats from just two in 1984 - in the last parliament was the runner-up in the 1991 elections, and a top gainer at that with 119 seats. Newspaper-wise coverage of all the political parties will be discussed later in Table 5.11.

The third most frequently referred actor in all the coded items was the Janata Dal-led National Front, an alliance of various political parties; it was referred to as many times as 1017, that is, 31.6 per cent of the total items. Janata Dal came into being towards the end of 1988 with the merger of Janata Party, Jan Morcha and Lok Dal. It garnered support from certain regional political parties and came to be known as National Front before the 1989 elections. National Front formed a minority government with the help of BJP and the Communists, with V.P. Singh as Prime Minister after its victory in 1989. The government, however, could not celebrate its first anniversary and was forced to resign after BJP withdrew its support (Chapter 2).

The figures in Table 5.8 suggest that among the five major political parties as mentioned above, the remaining two, that is, the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP) and the Communist parties were mentioned the least, in that order. The SJP, which was the ruling party (Chandra Shekhar, the Prime Minister immediately before the 1991 elections were announced, belonged to the SJP) until the elections in question, was referred to only in a total of 12.1 per cent cases. Similarly, out of the main contestant parties, the Communists were at the lowest rung, as far as their mention is concerned

in the selected newspapers. It can be further explained that the SJP was never the popular party given the total number of its MPs - a mere 54 - when it formed the government with the support of Congress (I). In fact, the SJP was a splinter group from the Janata Dal; it first broke out as Janata Dal (Socialist), and was later renamed SJP. As a matter of fact, it never went to people as it was, SJP, when it ruled for a mere four months. In the 1991 elections the SJP could win only five seats.

Similarly, the Communist parties do not have a mass base in India, and have their sympathisers mainly in two states, Kerala and West Bengal, where they have formed the governments in the past (In West Bengal the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has been in power since 1977). The Communists have been shifting their support to the one or the other national level parties, but have their concentration only in pockets (see, for instance, Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993). Though the nomenclature suggests that they are the national parties, yet, practically, it is not the case, and, perhaps, that is why they were not referred to as many times as other political parties at the national level.

The two actors, as is reflected in the Table 5.8, mentioned very frequently after the three main political parties, were Rajiv Gandhi (at number four) followed by Indian Election Commission. As it would be seen in Chapter 6, Rajiv Gandhi was referred to so many times, mainly because of his assassination, though he had his important position as a leader of the largest party and a former prime minister.

The Indian Election Commission is a very important and powerful organ. It is an autonomous body with a large number of responsibilities ranging from voter registration to the successful holding of elections. The onus of making new regulations related to candidates, election dates, polling, countermanding an election, looking through complaints of malpractices by the supporters of candidates, counting,

declaring results etc. also rests with the commission. Once the pace has been set for the elections, the commission becomes a regular and favourite beat for the news persons. In the 1991 elections, for example, in the wake of the Rajiv Gandhi murder, it was the commission which had to involve itself swiftly in order to announce new dates for the remainder two rounds of polling. However, in the 1991 elections, the commission became the most controversial organisation with its chief taking some "sudden", unilateral decisions on countermanding, repoll, fixing of new dates after the Rajiv Gandhi murder, elections in Punjab etc. (see, for instance, issues of any major national newspaper of election campaign days).

Among the individual leaders, V.P. Singh, a former prime minister of India, was referred to the most, that is, 305 times, after Rajiv Gandhi, followed by the care taker prime minister, Chandra Shekhar (268 times). Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the leader of the BJP was the next leader to be referred to in 6.1 per cent cases. Though Sonia Gandhi, the widow of Rajiv Gandhi, was neither a candidate for the elections, nor aspirant for any other post, yet her name was mentioned as many as 137 times. After the assassination of her husband, Rajiv Gandhi, she was in the news mainly because many of the Congress (I) members were keen to make her the leader of the party which she refused on more than one occasion.

Some extremist organisations and regional parties also found a mention in the coverage of the elections (for detailed analysis, see later in this chapter). Despite such an extensive coverage of the elections, several actors, as described in Table 5.8, were referred to in even less than one per cent cases, thus showing that they were not important enough, at least from the journalists' point of view, to be referred to in the press.

## 5.1.8 THEMES/ISSUES

To have an idea as to what mattered to the press insofar as election issues are concerned, all relevant items were coded for up to four themes. After having read the whole item, the four themes would be picked up in order of their importance in the item. There were items, as in the case of actors, which had only one theme, whereas others had up to two, three, four and even more, though a maximum of four themes were coded. Table 5.9 shows the total themes in all the 3219 items regardless of their appearing in different newspapers. The detailed analysis will follow later on in this chapter.

To give a fair idea as to what themes were the most important[6] for the newspapers, the table on next page contains all the themes in their totality, that is, as many times as they appeared in all the items of all the newspapers put together. It is abundantly clear from the table that election as theme was the most popular in the entire coverage of the elections, as it was mentioned in 34.5 per cent of the cases. The second most coded theme in the coverage was related to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi which found a mention in 20.2 per cent items (Chapter 6).

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[6]It should be qualified that importance here refers to the mere number of times a theme/issue is quoted. It is not considered as to whether an issue was quoted as primary, secondary, tertiary or fourth. It will be discussed at length later in this chapter when the themes are regrouped into macro-themes.

Table 5.9

Frequencies of Themes

| Theme | Count | %age of Cases |
|-------|-------|---------------|
| Elections | 1109 | 34.5 |
| Gandhi Assassination | 650 | 20.2 |
| Campaign/Convassing | 444 | 13.8 |
| Ayodhya | 314 | 9.8 |
| Law & Order/Unrest | 223 | 6.9 |
| Terrorism/Violence | 217 | 6.7 |
| Mandal Report/Reservation | 202 | 6.3 |
| Stability | 200 | 6.2 |
| Poll Predictions/Analyses | 157 | 4.9 |
| Religion | 154 | 4.8 |
| Punjab Problem | 152 | 4.7 |
| Voting/Polling | 133 | 4.1 |
| Countermanding Elections | 120 | 3.7 |
| Sympathy Wave | 119 | 3.7 |
| Rigging/Booth Capturing | 118 | 3.7 |
| Communalism/Violence | 107 | 3.3 |
| Political Alliance/Coalition | 101 | 3.1 |
| Poll Violence | 99 | 3.1 |
| Others | 94 | 2.9 |
| Casteism | 91 | 2.8 |
| Politics | 85 | 2.6 |
| Political Murders/Killings | 81 | 2.5 |
| Succession to Rajiv Gandhi | 77 | 2.4 |
| Secularism | 71 | 2.2 |
| Rising Prices | 70 | 2.2 |
| Corruption/Malpractices | 67 | 2.1 |
| National Unity/Integrity | 64 | 2.0 |
| Manifesto | 61 | 1.9 |
| Kashmir Problem | 61 | 1.9 |
| President's Rule | 55 | 1.7 |
| Judiciary/Legal/Courts | 44 | 1.4 |
| Repoll | 42 | 1.3 |
| Unemployment | 40 | 1.2 |
| Economic/Finance | 39 | 1.2 |
| Withdrawal/Retire | 39 | 1.2 |
| Assam Problem | 38 | 1.2 |
| Civic Problems | 31 | 1.0 |
| Defection | 29 | .9 |
| Education | 23 | .7 |
| Women | 23 | .7 |
| Dynasty | 21 | .7 |
| Poverty | 21 | .7 |
| Constitution | 17 | .5 |
| Rural Development | 15 | .5 |
| Resignation | 14 | .4 |
| Centre-State Relations | 13 | .4 |
| Relations with Neighbour Countries | 9 | .3 |
| Foreign Policy | 9 | .3 |
| Commerce/Import-Export | 9 | .3 |
| PM's Office | 8 | .2 |
| Agriculture | 8 | .2 |
| Science/Technology | 6 | .2 |
| Sri Lanka/Tamil Problem | 5 | .2 |
| Democratic/Human Rights | 4 | .1 |
| Autonomy of Media | 4 | .1 |
| Military/Defence | 4 | .1 |
| Environment | 4 | .1 |
| Communications | 2 | .1 |
| Health/Welfare | 2 | .1 |
| Total | 6019 | 187.0[*] |

*The total of percentages is more than 100 because of the multiple coding.

The third theme was again related to the campaign itself, while the issue of Ayodhya, on which the BJP fought the elections, was found in 314 times. The next two issues are related, in general, to the law and order vis-à-vis violence and were on top of any other political issue taken up by the political parties, except BJP's temple issue. This shows the state of affairs what India was during the entire campaign period. There has been unrest in some parts of the country for quite some time and it was manifested even in the coverage of the newspapers.

The seventh and eighth rank went to the two original issues of two major parties, namely, Janata Dal/National Front's Mandal and Congress (I)'s stability, which were mentioned, in that order, 202 and 200 times respectively. Since there are 60 different themes as mentioned in the coding schedule, it may not be worthwhile to describe each one of them here in detail, for such analysis and discussion will follow later in this chapter when the themes are regrouped in macro themes for better understanding. Which newspaper covered which theme will also be discussed.

## 5.2 REGROUPING OF SOURCES/ACTORS QUOTED OR REFERRED TO

There were a total of 52 sources/actors in the coding schedule, and all items were coded on the basis of the actors quoted or referred to. The actors/sources, as they were quoted or referred to in their entirety, have already been presented in Table 5.8. However, it may be helpful to understand more meaningfully the importance of sources/actors if they were regrouped into categories on the basis of their similarity and like characteristics. These major groups will then be systematically analysed vis-à-vis their coverage in different newspapers. Following is the list of 10 groups at the macro level in which all 50 sources have been stratified.

1. POLITICAL PARTIES
- Congress (I)
- National Front/Janata Dal
- Samajwadi Janata Party
- Bharatiya Janata Party
- Communist Parties
- Bahujan Samaj Party

2. ASPIRANTS FOR PRIME MINISTERSHIP
- Rajiv Gandhi
- Chandra Shekhar
- V.P. Singh
- Atal Bihari Vajpayee

3. OFFICIAL SOURCES (National Level)
- President of India
- Cabinet Ministers
- Member of Parliament
- Indian Election Commission
- Civil Servants/ Bureaucrats (National Level)
- Military Officials/Police Officials/Paramilitary forces

4. OFFICIAL SOURCES (State Level)
- State Governor
- Chief Minister
- State Cabinet Minister
- Civil Servants/Bureaucrats (State Level)

5. MILITANT ORGANISATIONS
- LTTE
- Kashmir Militants
- Punjab Militants
- Shiv Sena
- Vishwa Hindu Prishad (VHP)

6. REGIONAL PARTIES
- Telugu Desam Party (TDP)

- DMK
- AI-DMK
- Asom Gana Prishad
- Akali Dal Party
- Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)

7. INDIVIDUAL LEADERS
- P.V. Narasimha Rao
- Sonia Gandhi
- Arjun Singh
- N.D. Tiwari
- Sharad Pawar
- Pranab Mukherjee

8. NEIGHBOUR COUNTRIES
- India's Neighbour Countries
- Neighbour Countries' Officials
- Neighbour Countries' Media

9. WORLD LEADERS AND MEDIA
- World Leaders
- International News Agencies/Other media

10. OTHERS/MISCELLANEOUS
- Psephologists/Opinion Poll Organisations
- Experts/Analysts/Intellectuals
- Indian Diplomatic officials
- Indian News Agencies/Other Media
- Civil Liberties Organisations/Leaders
- Independent Candidates
- Others

Table 5.10

Frequencies of Actors

| | Actor/Source as a group | Sum of N | Percentage of counts* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Political parties | 4845 | 52 |
| 2 | Aspirants for Prime Ministership | 1630 | 18 |
| 3 | Official Sources at the National Level | 1025 | 11 |
| 4 | Official Sources at the State Level | 325 | 4 |
| 5 | Militant Organisations | 312 | 3 |
| 6 | Regional Parties | 272 | 3 |
| 7 | Individual Leaders for Leadership of the Congress (I) | 224 | 2 |
| 8 | Neighbour Countries and their officials | 77 | <1 |
| 9 | World Leaders and International News Agencies | 55 | <1 |
| 10 | Others/Miscellaneous | 514 | 6 |
| | Total | 9279 | 100 |

*Percentage figures have been rounded to the nearest point.

The contents of Table 5.10 show the frequency with which the regrouped sources/actors were mentioned in all the items. As is evidenced in the table, political parties appeared in the newspaper content most frequently - over half of the total actors/sources referred to were the political parties. Understandably, election is a drama enacted mainly by the actors of political parties. Though there is a large number of candidates who portray themselves as independents, and not belonging to any particular political party, very few get actually elected. For instance, in the 1991 elections, there were a total of 5230 independent candidates, but only one could enter the Parliament, while 99 per cent forfeited their deposits. The voters increasingly vote for the candidates of major political parties, and virtually ignore all but the two or three "serious" contenders for the seat. It is, therefore, not surprising that only the political parties are mentioned, represented through their candidates, which, invariably, take the political line as given in their manifestos or decided by the party leadership. The independent candidates were mentioned only in 37 items (Table 5.8).

Figure 5.3

Actors Quoted in All
(all newspapers together)
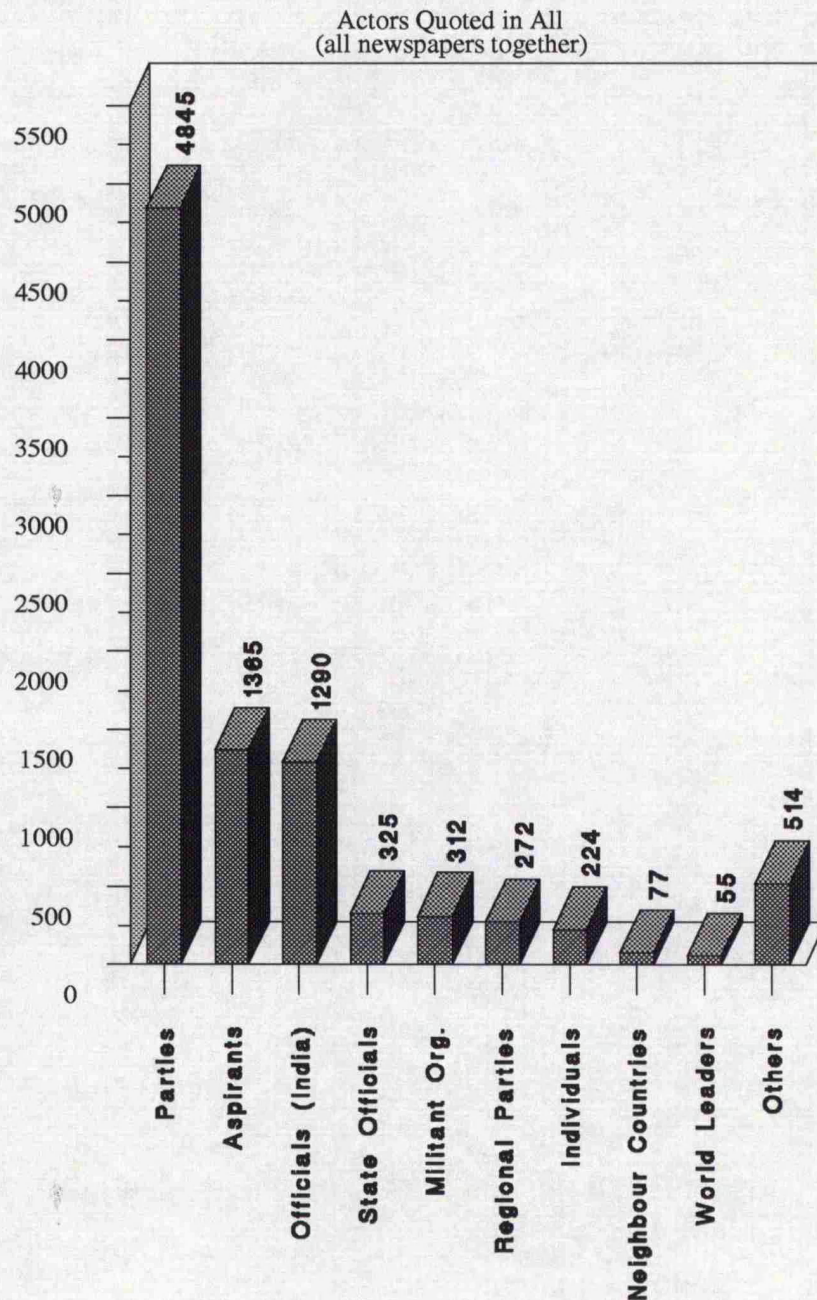


The second and third place in that order went to the candidates aspiring after the top post of prime ministership (18 per cent), and national level official sources (11 per cent). It is noteworthy here that even the second and third most frequently mentioned sources/actors are far behind (nearly less than one third) the first. Rankwise, the next four positions went to the sources/actors who were referred to, more or less, within a

close range. The sources/actors belonging to the neighbour countries, and world leaders were given but only a trifle treatment, that is, less than a single per cent. Miscellaneous actors/sources, though seem to have been mentioned quite often, yet, most, except two, of the actors/sources regrouped under this macro level category appeared in less than one per cent counts in the entire coverage of elections.

## 5.2.1 COVERAGE OF ACTORS (AT MACRO LEVEL) IN DIFFERENT NEWSPAPERS

Before I start discussing the macro level sources in detail, let us have a look how the regrouped actors were covered in the four selected newspapers. For an easy understanding, the graph that follows should give a fair idea about the quoting of the actors/sources (in groups) in both the Indian and the British newspapers.

Figure 5.4

Actors Quoted at Macro Level
(Newspaper-wise)
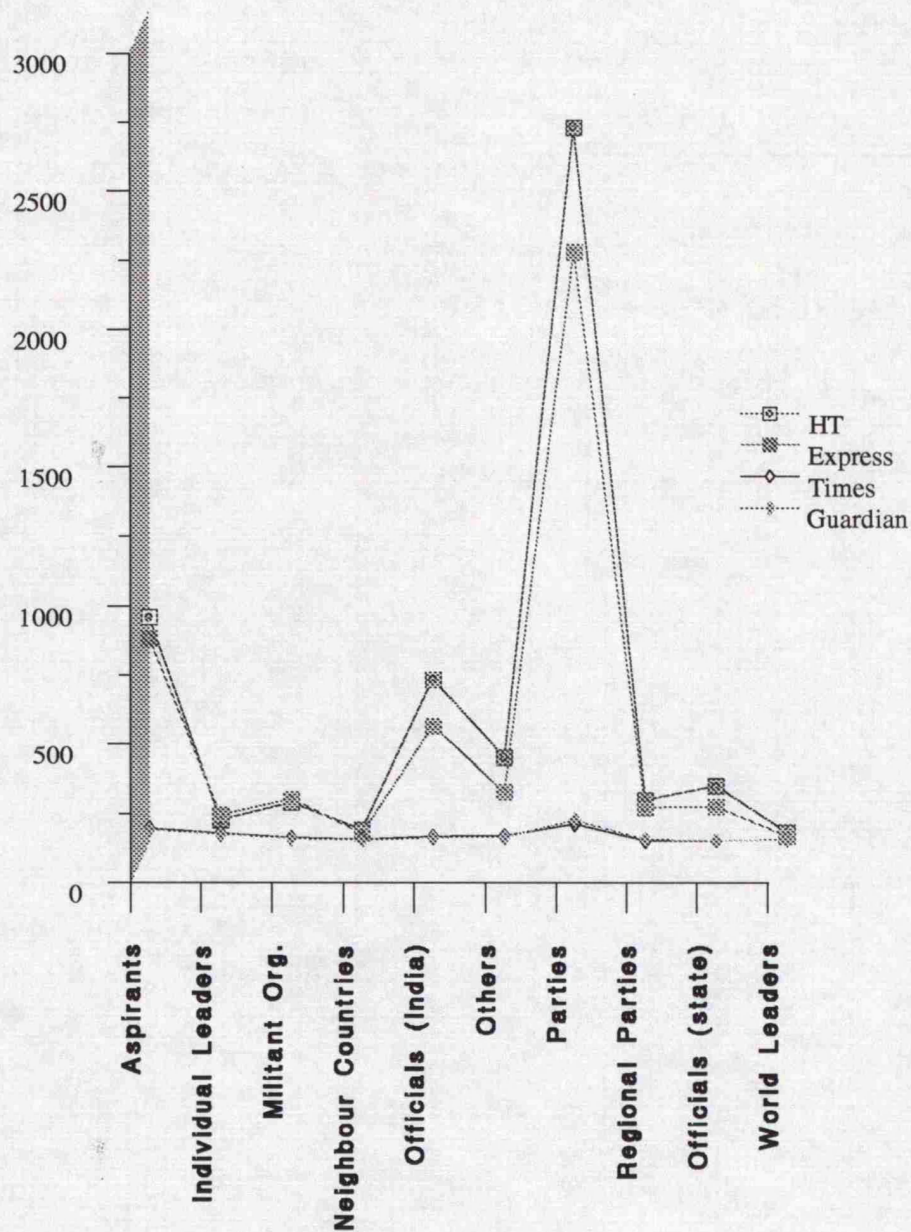


A clear picture emerges from the graph above that in all but two categories of sources/actors *The Hindustan Times* was ahead its Indian counterpart, *Indian Express* in quoting sources/actors. Of course, the British newspapers were far behind the Indian

ones. As far as the militant organisations and the individual leaders (aspirants for Congress (I) leadership in the wake of its chief Rajiv Gandhi's assassination) are concerned *Indian Express* referred to these two sets of actors more than *The Hindustan Times*. The coverage of actors, individually and in groups, will be discussed in the ensuing pages taking into consideration the individual newspapers.

## 5.2.2 POLITICAL PARTIES AND NEWSPAPERS

As it has been previously shown, overall the most prominently mentioned group of actors was the political parties, which formed over half of the total actors referred to in all the 3219 items. In this section the coverage of various political parties will be discussed as they appeared as sources/actors in the four newspapers. It is pointed out here that only the major five parties will be the centre of focus, for they were the main contestants in the arena. The results are presented both in tabular and graphic forms.

Table 5.11 shows that Congress (I) party was referred to the most not only overall but also by all individual newspapers. As described earlier on in this chapter, this party has ruled India for most of the time since her independence. Two of its leaders, in fact, namely, Jawahar Lal Nehru and later his daughter, Indira Gandhi, remained the prime ministers of India respectively for over 16 years and nearly 16 years. Indira Gandhi's son, Rajiv Gandhi also completed one term of five years. It is, however, altogether a different story that the party never got even a half of the votes polled; the highest scores have been 47.8 per cent in 1957 (Weiner, 1983), and 49.6 per cent in 1984 (see, for instance, Rubinoff, 1993: 253) when Rajiv Gandhi swept the polls held in the wake of his mother Indira Gandhi's assassination, though arguably it was an unusual election wherein a sympathy wave prevailed due to the sudden murder of the prime minister in post (the Congress (I) then had nearly 79 per cent strength in the parliament).

Table 5.11

Frequencies and Percentages of Counts of Political Parties

|  | Cong (I) | BJP | NF/JD | SJP | CPI/CPM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hindustan Times | 910 (19) | 718 (15) | 530 (11) | 197 (4) | 192 (4) |
| Indian Express | 720 (18) | 590 (15) | 470 (12) | 187 (5) | 138 (3) |
| The Times | 33 (18) | 17 (9) | 3 (2) | 4 (2) | 2 (1) |
| The Guardian | 34 (18) | 21 (11) | 14 (7) | 3 (2) | 4 (2) |

Table shows the frequencies in all of five major parties as they were mentioned, as actors/sources, in all items. Figures in parentheses show percentages of counts *within* the newspaper; the percentages have been rounded to the nearest point.

The contents of Table 5.11 and the graph present an unambiguous picture of the state of art of the political parties as they were referred to as sources/actors in the four newspapers. Clearly the Indian newspapers were way ahead the British newspapers in quoting the Indian political parties staking their claims over the electorate, as actors in the coverage. Explicitly, the Congress (I) as an actor was again on the top of the agenda of all the four newspapers. It can, therefore, be safely concluded that the one party that expressly was in the news was the Congress (I). One particular reason for referring to more actors/sources belonging to the Congress (I) party may be that the party had fielded the maximum number of candidates. As compared with BJP (479), Janata Dal (317), and SJP (353), the Congress (I) had 493 candidates in the field (*India Today*, July 15 1991; Press Trust of India, 1991). In this light it can be argued that since there were more candidates to be covered, there were, therefore, more references to the Congress (I) party.

Figure 5.5

Parties as Actors/Sources in Newspapers
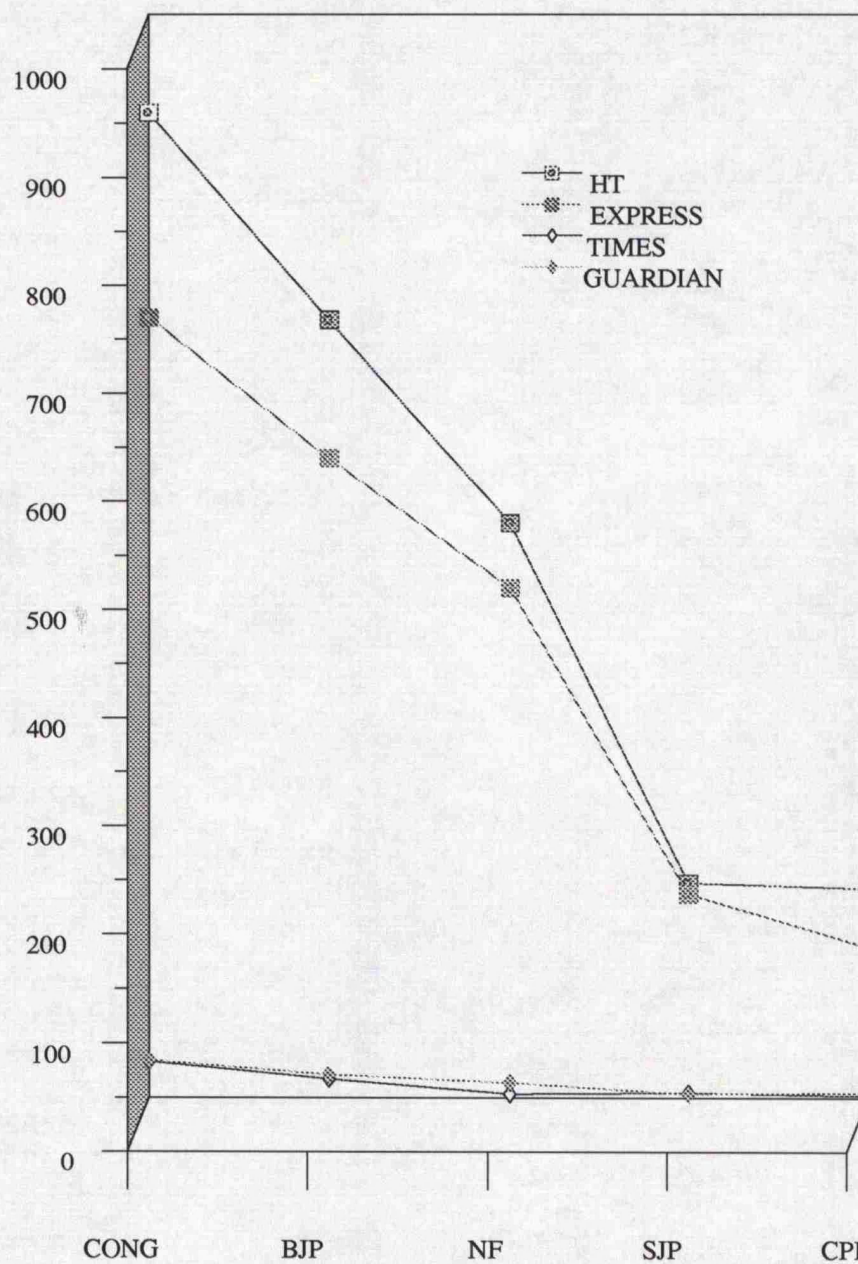


What else do the results of Table 5.11 reveal? A combined look at both the table and the graph shows a remarkable similarity in the trend of coverage of political parties in all the newspapers. In all the newspapers there is a gradual fall in the shape of the curve as it goes down from Congress (I) to Communists. So far as the Indian papers

are concerned, however, there is only a slight variation; while the curve of *Indian Express* continues to fall from SJP to Communists, the one representing *The Hindustan Times* is almost constant at both the points. In the British newspapers, there is hardly any mention of the actors/sources belonging to SJP and Communists, whereas NF/JD sources are referred to only 3 times in *The Times*.

Why the British newspapers mainly referred to the Congress (I) could be due to the reason that Congress, due to its role in the movement to free India from the British rule, and later for dominating the political scene for most of the period since independence, is "the largest, most successful, and most durable political party in India" (Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993), and, perhaps, the only well known party in Britain. Secondly, after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, there were more references to the Congress (I), which went into deep crisis in search of a new leader. Thirdly, Congress (I) was especially in the news, after the death of its leader, when certain members announced, without her consent, Sonia Gandhi, the widow of Rajiv Gandhi, as the President of Congress (I). Sonia Gandhi, however, declined but there was a sort of drama enacted by a few members of the Congress (I) who with an eye on immediate political gains, wanted Sonia to lead the party. This is why, perhaps, Congress (I) sources/actors found more mention in the British newspapers. These factors might have had as well an effect on the coverage of the party in the Indian newspapers.

In all the newspapers, the second most frequently mentioned actor/source was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP, formed in April 1980, has its roots in the Jana Sangh (founded in 1951 and drawing inspiration from the Hindu communal orientation of the pre-independence Hindu Mahasabha and its organisational strength from the paramilitary Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The party has been much in news in the recent past with its controversial stand on the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue in Ayodhya. The issue has been responsible for wide spread communal violence,

and a cause of hatred among the Hindus and the largest minority, the Muslims. There is an identical trend in *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express*. Individually, both the Indian newspapers have referred to this party exactly in the same percentage of counts.

Although relatively a new party on the political scene in India, the BJP has gained remarkably in the last two general elections, and has been able to form governments in some states. Beginning with a meagre two seats in the Parliament in 1984 (it fought for 229 seats), BJP raised its strength to 85 with 11.4 per cent of votes in 1989. In the 1991 elections it again dramatically enhanced its seats to 119 with 21 per cent votes. It has, in fact, been the great gainer of the electoral success in 1991 (see, for instance, Press Trust of India, 1991; Brass, 1993;). BJP is the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha now.

The third most frequently appeared actor, again in all the newspapers (with a very slight variation in *The Times*), was Janata Dal-led National Front, an alliance of several parties. Janata Dal was the ruling party with V.P. Singh as the Prime Minister until the BJP withdrew its support towards the end of 1990 on the issue of the arrest of its leader on his way to Ayodhya. Consequently, V.P. Singh had to resign (Chapter 2). In the 1991 elections the party was the "worst loser". It lost 87 seats in 1991 as its seat share dropped to 56 from 143 won in 1989 with 17.66 per cent popular support (Press Trust of India, 1991).

The fourth and fifth position in the case of actors referred to in all the items went respectively to SJP and Communist parties (with an exception of *The Guardian* in which it was the other way round, but without any noticeable difference). SJP, it may be recalled, was the party in power with the support of Congress (I), until the latter pulled the support paving the way for fresh elections in 1991. In fact, Chandra Shekhar became the prime minister with just 58 members of his party, named after the split

from the Janata Dal, Samajwadi Janata Dal. The party could gain only five seats in the Lok Sabha formed as a result of the 1991 polls. The Communist parties won together 49 seats in this election.

The examination of the figures in Table 5.11 further reveals that with just one exception, all the newspapers referred to the parties as actors/sources in their coverage in the same order as the parties won the electoral battle in 1991. The Cong(I), BJP and JD got first, second and third position in the Parliament; and so were they referred to as actors in all the newspapers. Does it mean that the newspapers refer to the parties as sources/actors according to their anticipated performance in the elections? Though it is far too simple to conclude that, it is a fact that the reporters, with or without intention, report and quote the sources/actors belonging to the major parties who have better chances of winning at the hustings. However, only a constituency wise analysis of the coverage of candidates/parties could shed some light on the pattern, if any.

It is obvious from Table 5.11 that both the Indian newspapers followed the same trend, percentage-wise, though *The Hindustan Times* had more coverage of the actors/sources, frequency-wise. But notwithstanding that, however, there is a point to be noted. Within the newspaper, *Indian Express* gave a little more coverage to the actors/sources belonging to Janata Dal (12 per cent) and SJP (5 per cent) than *The Hindustan Times* (11 and 4 per cent respectively) gave. At the same time it, in comparison with *The Hindustan Times*, mentioned Congress (I) in fewer percentage of items. The evidence, albeit not too explicit, from these observations suggests that *Indian Express* seems to have a pro-Opposition stance.

## 5.2.3 ASPIRANTS FOR PRIME MINISTERSHIP

The second macro level actor/source was the leaders who were aspiring to become the prime minister of India in the event of their party mustering the majority of the seats in the parliament. Generally, each major political party, which has any chances of securing the majority of MPs on its own, or with the outside help of other allies, had, albeit unofficially, chosen a leader who would be the prime minister if their party came to power. In the 1991 election there were four contenders for the top position: Rajiv Gandhi (Congress (I)), V.P. Singh (JD), Atal Bihari Vajpayee (BJP), and the caretaker prime minister, Chandra Shekhar (SJP). All the competitors were the star campaigners for their respective parties. In the case of BJP, however, L.K. Advani was the major force behind the party's campaign, but he had said that in the case of his party winning the majority seats, A.B. Vajpayee will be the prime minister (*India Today*, 15 April 1991). All the named aspirants, but one, have been the prime ministers of India in the very recent past.

Table 5.12

Frequencies of Main Aspirants After Prime Ministership

|  | Rajiv Gandhi | V.P. Singh | Chandra Shekhar | A.B. Vajpayee |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hindustan Times | 449 (9) | 137 (3) | 133 (3) | 90 (2) |
| Indian Express | 343 (9) | 160 (4) | 127 (3) | 103 (3) |
| The Times | 36 (19) | 4 (2) | 4 (2) | 1 (<1) |
| The Guardian | 33 (18) | 4 (2) | 4 (2) | 2 (1) |

Table shows how the four leaders (the main aspirants for becoming the prime minister) were referred to; the figures in parentheses show the percentages of counts *within* the newspaper; the percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

It is clear from Table 5.12 that Rajiv Gandhi was the most frequently mentioned leader among the four VIP leaders each one of whom was bidding to be the next premier of India, should his party be able to form the government. Like the political parties referred to in all the newspapers, the figures in Table 5.12 also present a similar trend insofar as referring to the leaders in the four newspapers is concerned. Not only was Rajiv Gandhi the most mentioned leader in all the newspapers, all the other aspirants for prime ministership too were referred to in the same order.

There is another marked similarity between the two Indian newspapers in that both offered almost the same percentage of counts respectively to all the four leaders. V.P. Singh, a former prime minister of India, was the second most frequently mentioned leader, while Chandra Shekhar and A.B. Vajpayee got third and fourth position, in that order. Why did Rajiv Gandhi get a tumultuous response from all the newspapers could be explained in three ways. First, Rajiv Gandhi, a product of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, had held the prime minister's position longest among the three contesting prime ministers and was said to have developed a good relationship with the press. Second, he had had the privilege of heading the largest, oldest, and longest-in-power political party, that is, Congress (I), which, as we have seen in Table 5.11, was the most frequently mentioned party in all the newspapers. Third, and seemingly perhaps the most important factor, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated during the campaign, which shifted the focus of the media from the campaign to his killing. There was a sudden halt to all other election related reporting and the press concentrated on the intricacies, and the likely consequences, of his murder (Chapter 7).

All the other three leaders received, by and large, the same treatment from the Indian newspapers. A close examination of the figures in Table 5.12 reveals that within the newspaper, *Indian Express* referred to V.P. Singh more (4 per cent) than what *The Hindustan Times* did (3 per cent). There is a slight indication that *Indian Express*

concentrated a little more on V.P. Singh. Compare it with the results of Table 5.11. Therein too *Indian Express* referred to, percentage-wise, NF/JD party, of which V.P.Singh is the leader, more within its pages than *The Hindustan Times*. Similarly, *Indian Express* again referred to A.B. Vajpayee, the leader of the BJP, at present the main opposition party to the ruling Congress (I) in the parliament, more (3 per cent) than its Indian counterpart (2 per cent).

A striking fact emerging out of the results presented in Table 5.12 is how the British newspapers referred to Rajiv Gandhi in comparison with all other aspirants for the top position. Both *The Times* and *The Guardian* referred to Rajiv Gandhi nearly nine times more than the leaders at number two and three[7]. Is it that the British newspapers had more penchant for Rajiv Gandhi than other important leaders, two of whom also have been the prime ministers of India, including the one who still was, at the time of election, the care-taker prime minister? It can be argued that the British newspapers found more news in Rajiv Gandhi's murder, and the consequences thereof, and referred to him much more than any other leader (Chapter 7). This also indicates that the known personalities are relatively more newsworthy for the journalists. Rajiv Gandhi, due to the reasons discussed earlier, was a better known leader in the UK, and referring to him would make more sense for the British readership than other leaders, who were still to create any impact on the political scene at the national as well as the international level.

## 5.2.4 OFFICIAL SOURCES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The third most frequently mentioned macro level actor in the newspapers was the national level official sources. People holding important offices are often in high demand by the media persons for the "official version" of the story. It is quite so that

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[7]Rajiv Gandhi is quoted here in all - irrespective of when he was alive or after he was killed. The analysis and discussion for the two stages separately are given in Chapter 6.

the higher the office one is holding the higher is the importance attached to that, though it also depends upon the access the journalists have to the sources. It is also, at times, circumstantial that a particular institution becomes an important source/actor according to the situation prevailing at the time.

The contents of Table 5.13 show that in this category, the election commission was referred to the most. With regard to the Indian newspapers, there is again an explicitly identical pattern in the sources/actors referred to at the micro level. Indian Election Commission, as discussed early on in this chapter, is one of the very important institutions, especially during the elections. Since all official information related to electoral registration of voters, to polling and to the declaration of results comes from the office of the election commission, it is not surprising that it was the most frequently mentioned micro level official actor/source. Besides, the office of the election commission has never been in as much controversy as during this election. It was accused of taking sides, and was blamed for taking arbitrary decisions in relation to countermanding of elections, repoll orders, renewing polling dates after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, and later postponing, at the eleventh hour, elections in Punjab (see for instance, *India Today* 30 June and 15 July 1991). This could be, therefore, one more reason why election commission was mentioned as many times as it was.

Table 5.13
Frequencies of Official Actors/Sources at the National Level

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Election Commission | 305 (6) | 220 (6) | 3 (2) | 5 (3) |
| Military/Police | 106 (2) | 69 (2) | 7 (4) | 2 (1) |
| Union Ministers | 93 (2) | 62 (2) | 4 (2) | 2 (1) |
| President of India | 66 (1) | 55 (1) | 2 (1) | 3 (2) |
| Bureaucrats | 8 (.1) | 8 (.2) | - | - |
| MPs | 5 (.1) | - | - | - |

Table shows how the official sources at the national level were referred to; figures in parentheses show the percentages of total counts *within* the newspapers; percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

There has been unrest for quite some time in certain parts of India, especially Punjab, Assam, and Jammu & Kashmir. In fact, polling in Punjab and Assam, according to the original schedule, were to take place at a later date after it was complete elsewhere in the country, so that more security forces could be deployed in these states for a smooth poll process. However, elections were postponed in Punjab just 12 hours before polling was to begin. There was no election at all in Jammu & Kashmir where there has been turmoil for the past several years. In all these troubled states and at certain other "sensitive" constituencies, the police force was there to ensure law and order (for information on these issues, see, for instance, *The Hindustan Times*, *Indian Express*, *India Today* during the campaign period). This is why a large number of sources/actors were referred to from the military and police forces. Under this category, *The Times* referred to military/police officials the most.

The cabinet ministers and the India's President were the next mentioned actors/sources in the press. It can be seen from Table 5.13 that the civil servants/bureaucrats and MPs did not find much mention in the press. As explained above, apart from the election commission, other government departments do not draw much attention from the journalists during the campaign period, for it is by all means, as proved earlier, predominantly a political show where the sources/actors belong to the parties. For a similar reason, since the parliament had already been dissolved (though the same incumbent was asked to be the care-taker PM), the members of parliament did not have much significance and, therefore, were not mentioned much of the time.

## 5.2.5 OFFICIAL SOURCES/ACTORS AT THE STATE LEVEL

India is the conglomeration of 25 states which are governed by the local governments on a similar pattern as at the Centre.[1] The constitutional head of the state is called the

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[1]Recently New Delhi, the capital of India, earlier a union territory, has been given the status of a state.

Governor, while the head of the state government is elected through the same process as the prime minister, and is called chief minister. The chief minister has his own team of ministers and junior ministers. Likewise, the state government has its own departments served by the bureaucrats drawn from the civil services. Information related to many issues directly concerned with the state, is obtained from the state level sources. The data presented in Table 5.14 show how the official actors at the micro level were referred to at the state level.

The data in Table 5.14 leave us in no doubt that actors/sources at the state level do not have much significance for the press covering the electoral campaigns. Only two and three per cent counts related to chief ministers were found respectively in *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express*, while the rest of the three micro level actors did not receive much attention on the part of the press.

Table 5.14

Frequencies of Official Actors at the State Level

|  | Chief Minister | Governor | State Minister | Civil Servants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hindustan Times | 156 (3) | 29 (.6) | 6 (.1) | 8 (.1) |
| Indian Express | 88 (2) | 20 (.5) | 1 | 16 (.4) |
| The Times | 1 (.6) | - | - | - |
| The Guardian | - | - | - | - |

Table shows the state level actors/sources as referred to in the four newspapers; the figures in parentheses represent percentages of counts *within* the paper; percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

It does not need much explanation as to why this macro level actor/source was referred to so little in the press, for the elections to the lower house of Parliament, called Lok Sabha, are basically a national event. Although elections were held simultaneously for the state Vidhan Sabhas (Legislative Assembly) in some of the states, but that was not

the focus of the study, and the officials at the state level were referred to only where relevant to the parliamentary elections. It can, therefore, be concluded that state level official sources have but very little importance in the coverage of the national elections.

## 5.2.6 EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS

The unrest in some parts of India, which has been written about earlier in this chapter, can be associated with the on-going struggle there, carried on by some of the known militant organisations. However, there are a number of different outfits working in the states of Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir and elsewhere. That is why that the ones operating in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir were considered under one umbrella, namely, Punjab extremists and Kashmir extremists. The LTTE, operating mainly in Sri Lanka has its base also in Tamil Nadu, a southern Indian state. Likewise, Shiv Sena and Vishwa Hindu Prishad draw their support from the more militant Hindus (see, for instance, Brass, 1993; Hardgrave Jr., 1993; Ahuja and Paul, 1992) and the BJP too counts on that strength.

The data in Table 5.15 show that LTTE (Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam), was the most frequently mentioned micro level actor in the press as such. It is so because the LTTE is said to have been responsible for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi (for details, see, for instance, Hardgrave Jr., 1993; *India Today* 15 June, 15 July 1991). Obviously, therefore, the organisation was referred to more than any other micro level actor under this category.

Table 5.15

Frequencies of Extremist Organisations

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| LTTE | 54 (1) | 38 (1) | 5 (3) | 6 (3) |
| Punjab Extremists | 36 (.7) | 37 (.9) | 4 (2) | 1 (.5) |
| VHP | 32 (.7) | 35 (.9) | 1 | 2 (1) |
| Shiv Sena | 17 (.3) | 39 (1) | 0 | 0 |
| Kashmir Extremists | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 |

Table shows how the extremist organisations were referred to as actors; figures in parentheses represent percentages of counts *within* the papers; percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

Punjab extremists had boycotted the elections in Punjab and were behind the killings of 24 Legislative Assembly election candidates; also they were said to be responsible for an attack on the Union minister of state for home, Subodh Kant Sahay (*India Today*, 15 July 1991: 52-53). Punjab extremists were the second most mentioned actor (with a very slight variation in *Indian Express* and *The Guardian*), followed by VHP and Shiv Sena. Kashmir extremists were mentioned the least. This, arguably, was so because no elections were to take place in the state of Jammu & Kashmir, and, therefore, there was hardly any reference to the extremists operating there vis-à-vis elections.

## 5.2.7 REGIONAL PARTIES

Some states have been ruled by the state level political parties, often called regional parties. Certain political parties, like DMK and AI-ADMK, Akali Dal, and National Conference have been dominating the political scene in their respective states, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir. Of late, Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh and Asom Gana Prishad in Assam have formed their governments.

Table 5.16

Frequencies of Regional Parties

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DMK | 39 (.8) | 31 (.8) | - | 2 (1) |
| AIADMK | 31 (.6) | 32 (.8) | - | 1 (.5) |
| Akali Dal | 26 (.5) | 16 (.4) | - | - |
| TDP | 17 (.3) | 17 (.4) | 1 (.6) | - |
| AGP | 20 (.4) | 14 (.4) | - | - |
| JMM | 15 (.3) | 10 (.2) | - | - |

Table shows how the regional parties were referred to in the press.

A simple look at the data in Table 5.16 reveals that the regional parties were referred to in the press, but relatively much less frequently. No newspaper (with just one exception of *The Guardian*) gave any of the six regional parties, for which the items were coded, even one per cent of the total frequencies in the study. Even *The Guardian* referred to the DMK barely in two items.

The results can be interpreted with simple explanation: the regional parties did not fight the elections on their own. All, but Akali Dal in Punjab, where elections were to be held separately, but were procrastinated just a few hours before polling, regional parties joined hands with one or the other alliance forged by the major political parties in the country. Consequently, AIADMK joined Congress (I), while TDP, AGP, JMM and DMK allied with the JD-led National Front alliance. Apparently, the regional parties lost their identities and became part of the main alliances. Further, as has been discussed before, the regional parties mostly confine to the politics at the state level, and do not participate, generally, in the national elections on their own. The clear conclusion, therefore, is that the regional parties do not stand much more chance of being referred to in the coverage of the Parliament elections.

## 5.2.8 INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

After the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi on 21 May, there was virtually chaos in the Congress (I) party, mainly because of the critical timing - two rounds of polling were yet to be completed. There was a lot of infighting among Congress (I) men for becoming the leader of the party. It was not merely the party post leaders were vying with each other for, it was more than that. Normally, the chief of the party becomes the prime minister if the party wins the majority of seats. There was a group of inside leaders, owing their allegiance to the departed leader, who were bent upon making the widow of Rajiv Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi the leader of the Congress, so that, according to them, the party could win sympathy vote in the remaining two days of polling. However, Sonia Gandhi turned down the offer (for details, see, for example, *Indian Express* and *The Hindustan Times* from 23 to 30 May 1991, and virtually any other publication worth the name).

The picture emerging from the data in Table 5.17 is quite clear. Sonia Gandhi was the most frequently mentioned person followed by P.V. Narasimha Rao in all the four newspapers. Sonia Gandhi was referred to in the press for two reasons in the main. First, being the widow of the assassinated leader, she was the senior most person in the Nehru-Gandhi family. Second, every effort was being put in by the senior members of Congress (I) to elevate her to the presidentship of the party.

Table 5.17

Frequencies of Aspirants for the Congress Leadership

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sonia Gandhi | 56 (1) | 52 (1) | 16 (9) | 13 (7) |
| Narasimha Rao | 14 (.3) | 33 (.8) | 7 (4) | 9 (5) |
| N.D. Tiwari | 3 | 5 (.1) | - | 1 |
| Sharad Pawar | 1 | 4 (.1) | 2 (1) | - |
| Arjun Singh | 3 | 1 | - | 1 |
| Pranab Mukherjee | 1 | - | 2 (1) | - |

Table shows how the aspirants, after the death of Rajiv Gandhi were referred to;
figures in parentheses show percentages, where not given, means it is less significant;
percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

The second most frequently mentioned leader was P.V. Narasimha Rao, who later became the leader of Congress (I) as well as the prime minister of India. It can be argued that media persons could sense the on-going fighting within the party and were able to take the stock of the situation. It appears the press knew that after Sonia Gandhi refused to accept the offer, it had to be the septuagenarian P.V. Narasimha Rao. The rest of the leaders did not find any respectable mention of their names in the selected newspapers.

One particular picture emerging from the figures of Table 5.17 is the way the British newspapers referred to Sonia Gandhi. She received in *The Times* and *The Guardian* nine and seven per cent of the total counts coded in respect of all the actors. The news criterion, that the more important and known the personality the more he/she would be referred to, seemed to be working in the case of the British newspapers. Except for the political parties (Table 5.11) and Rajiv Gandhi (Table 5.12), Sonia Gandhi was the third most frequently mentioned actor in both the British newspapers.

## 5.2.9 INDIA'S NEIGHBOUR COUNTRIES

Three micro level actors/sources were combined to form this category at the macro level. It appears from the contents of Table 5.18 below that neither of the three micro level sources/actors got even one per cent of the total counts in the Indian newspapers.

Table 5.18

Frequencies of Neighbour Countries

|  | Neighbour Countries | Neigh. Countries' Officials | Neighbour Countries' Media |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hindustan Times | 38 (.8) | 1 | 3 |
| Indian Express | 25 (.6) | 3 | 1 |
| The Times | 4 (2) | - | - |
| The Guardian | 2 (1) | - | - |

Table shows how neighbour countries were referred to; figures in parentheses show percentages; where not given, it means it is less than one per cent.

It is therefore obvious that neither the leaders, nor the officials, nor the media of the neighbour countries was referred to with any noticeable frequency in the Indian newspapers. It is argued that there is no significant importance attached to the neighbour countries during the coverage of the elections being held within the country. The British newspapers, however, referred to the neighbour countries/leaders thereof respectively in four (*The Times*) and two (*The Guardian*) items.

## 5.2.10 WORLD LEADERS AND MEDIA

The Indian newspapers did not quote the world leaders or the four International news agencies in many items. While *The Hindustan Times* referred to the leaders at the International level in 26 (.5 per cent) items in all, its other counterpart, *Indian Express*,

did so in 12 (.3 per cent) in all. Table 5.19 shows that the number of items in which the four International news agencies were referred to was even less: five in the case of *The Hindustan Times* and six in *Indian Express*. The international leaders and news agencies, even when referred to, were either about the Rajiv Gandhi murder or when an Indian leader said something from abroad. Being an internal affair, there was, apparently, no need to depend upon the sources outside the country. However, out of the total frequencies, the world leaders occupied 1.6 per cent of them each in *The Times* and *The Guardian*.

Table 5.19

Frequencies of World Leaders and World News Agencies

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| World Leaders | 26 (.5) | 12 (.3) | 3 (1.6) | 3 (1.6) |
| World News Agencies | 5 (.1) | 6 (.2) | - | - |

Table shows how the World leaders and the four International news agencies were quoted; figures in parentheses represent percentages.

## 5.2.11 OTHERS/MISCELLANEOUS

Despite an extensive coding schedule, there were some actors which were not included. At the time of coding, therefore, such sources were coded under 'others'. All the remaining micro level actors subsumed under this macro level actor/source are those which received very scanty mention in the Indian newspapers.

Table 5.20

Frequencies of Others/Miscellaneous Actors

| | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Independents | 21 (.4) | 16 (.4) | - | - |
| Psephologists | 6 (.1) | 9 (.2) | 3 (2) | 2 (1) |
| Experts | 5 (.1) | 10 (.3) | - | 2 (1) |
| Diplomats | 8 (.1) | 5 (.1) | 1 (.6) | 3 (2) |
| Civil Liberties Org. | 5 (.1) | 3 | 2 (1) | - |
| Indian Media | - | - | 5 (3) | 4 (2) |
| Others | 257 (5) | 136 (3) | 7 (4) | 4 (2) |

Table shows how actors under the macro level 'others/miscellaneous' were referred to; figures in parentheses represent percentages, which have been rounded up to the nearest point.

The contents of Table 5.20 show that a large number of actors/sources belong to others in all the four newspapers. It is so because there were sources/actors which were not included in the coding schedule but references were made to them in the items. It should be noted here that these sources/actors appeared only occasionally. The rest of the micro level sources/actors, as described in Table 5.20, were mentioned in even less than a single per cent of the items in the Indian newspapers. Results emanating from the above table indicate that independent candidates do not get referred to so often despite the fact that there were 5230 of them in the fray. It is so, as explained earlier on in this chapter, because very few of them are the serious candidates, and still fewer succeed.

The British newspapers outnumbered their Indian counterparts so far as the sources/actors belonging to opinion poll organisations, experts (in *The Guardian*), civil liberties organisations (in *The Times*), and Indian diplomats are concerned. Psephology

has not taken off in India as in the western countries. This is why, it can be argued, the Indian newspapers shy away from quoting the opinion poll organisations and other psephologists. It is not to suggest that there are no opinion polls conducted or that they are devoid of accuracy. In fact, certain of them are making very precise predictions, and the serious political news magazines like *India Today*, *Imprint* etc. publish exclusive reports about these polls. *The Times* and *The Guardian*, however, surpassed the Indian newspapers in quoting opinion poll organisations thus suggesting that they attach more importance to them.

One particular actor/source where the British newspapers again had a lead is in respect of referring to the Indian news agencies, journalists and other media. Both *The Times* and *The Guardian* offered 3 per cent and 2 per cent of the total counts respectively to these actors. Why so? Clearly, the British newspapers do depend upon the news agencies/media of the country, that is India' for more information than what they can obtain directly, what the Indian papers hardly do within their own country.

## 5.3 REGROUPING OF THEMES/ISSUES INTO MACRO LEVEL THEMES/ISSUES

How all the 61 themes/issues given in the coding schedule were mentioned in entirety has already been shown earlier (see Table 5.9). In this section of the chapter, all the themes/issues will be regrouped, on the basis of their similarity to one another, into 11 macro level themes. The regrouping will facilitate the understanding of the coverage in the press of the issues, as the individual newspapers reported them. Following is the list of 11 macro level issues under which various micro level issues have been subsumed.

1. CAMPAIGNING
- Elections
- Political Alliance
- Defection (Changing Parties)
- Manifestos
- Countermanding Elections
- Withdrawal/Retire
- Campaigning/Convassing
- Rigging/Booth Capturing
- Poll Predictions/Analysis
- Resignation
- Voting/polling
- Repoll
- Poll Violence

2. RAJIV GANDHI MURDER
- Rajiv Gandhi Assassination/Last Rites/Immersion of Ashes
- Dynasty
- Succession to Rajiv Gandhi
- Sympathy Wave

3. VIOLENCE, TERRORISM AND LAW AND ORDER
- Terrorism/Violence/Separatism
- Kashmir Problem
- Punjab Problem
- Assam Problem
- Sri Lanka/Tamil Problem
- Law and Order Problem/Unrest/Demonstrations/Strikes/Dharnas/Bandhs
- Political Murders/Killing of a Candidate etc.

4. RELIGION & CASTE AND COMMUNALISM
- Casteism
- Religion
- Communalism
- Secularism
- National Unity and Integrity

## 5. MIXED AND OTHERS
- Politics
- Prime Minister's Office
- Centre-State Relations
- Civil Liberties/Democratic Rights/Social Justice
- Judiciary/Law/Courts
- President's Rule
- Women
- Constitution
- Division of Waters
- Media Autonomy
- Military/Defence
- Environment
- Others

## 6. RAM JANAMBHOOMI/BABRI MASJID/AYODHYA/TEMPLE

## 7. MANDAL COMMISSION REPORT/RESERVATIONS

## 8. STABILITY

## 9. BASIC ISSUES
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Rising Prices
- Corruption/Malpractices/Embezzlements

## 10. DEVELOPMENT ISSUES
- Civic Problems
- Science and Technology
- Education
- Economic Issues
- Agriculture
- Commerce/Industry/Import-Export
- Communications (Telephones, Roads etc.)
- Health/Welfare
- Family Planning/Population Control

- Rural Development

11. FOREIGN POLICY
- Indian Borders/Relations With Neighbour Countries
- Foreign Policy

The following Table 5.21 gives an idea how all the regrouped themes were mentioned in the press in totality.

Table 5.21

Frequencies and Percentages of Macro Themes

|  | Macro Theme/Issue | Sum of N | %age of frequencies |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Campaigning | 2466 | 41 |
| 2 | Rajiv Gandhi Murder | 867 | 14 |
| 3 | Violence, Terrorism and Law & Order | 777 | 13 |
| 4 | Religion & Caste and Communalism | 487 | 8 |
| 5 | Mixed and Others | 355 | 6 |
| 6 | Ram Janambhoomi/Babri Masjid/Ayodhya | 314 | 5 |
| 7 | Mandal Commission Report/Reservations | 202 | 3 |
| 8 | Stability | 200 | 3 |
| 9 | Basic Issues | 198 | 3 |
| 10 | Development Issues | 135 | 2 |
| 11 | Foreign Policy | 18 | <1 |

Table shows the total frequencies of the macro themes in all the items; percentages
have been rounded up to the nearest point.

Figure 5.6

Frequencies of Macro Themes in the Press
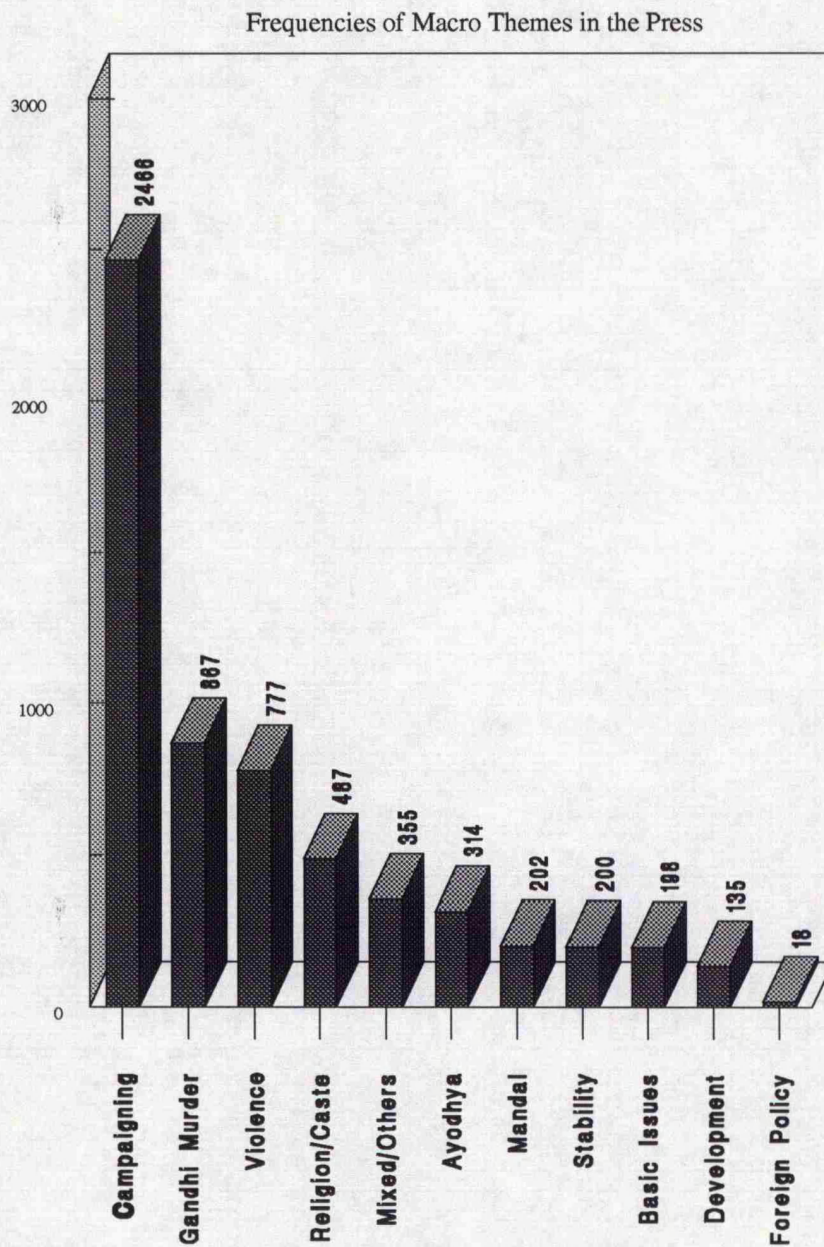


As the data presented in Table 5.21 are in the descending order, it is clearly noticeable which theme was the most popular and which one was the least popular in the press. The issue of 'campaigning', under which several micro level themes have been subsumed, was the most frequently mentioned, while the 'foreign policy' theme did not

get any significant response. Over four counts out of every ten, to be precise 42 per cent, revolved around the issue of elections and campaigns, leaving all other party-oriented or any other public-oriented themes far behind. Even the second most important theme was mentioned nearly one third the frequency of the first one. It appears that 'Rajiv Gandhi's murder' became the hottest issue after the 'campaign' issue (Chapter 6), followed by 'violence and law and order'.

Among the three main issues on which the three major political parties fought the elections, the one belonging to the BJP got a lead, followed by, almost equally, that of JD/NF and the Congress (I). The 'basic issues' like 'poverty', 'rising prices', 'unemployment' etc., and 'development issues' did not find favour with the press. Another thing coming out very clearly from Table 5.21 is that the issue of 'foreign policy' was hardly mentioned in the selected newspapers.

## 5.3.1 THE COVERAGE OF MACRO THEMES IN THE FOUR NEWSPAPERS

The data in Table 5.21 give us a rough idea as to how much stress was laid on the macro themes by all the newspapers put together. While it does speak about the importance attached to macro themes by the press in general, it does not lead us any where so far as the variation in putting stress on the part of the individual newspapers is concerned. This study, as explained in Chapter 4, is focusing on the coverage of the elections at two levels. First, the comparative coverage of elections in the two newspapers in India, said to be of a different political shade (but without any empirical proof). Second, how the British newspapers covered this event which not only had the significance of being the largest electoral activity in the world, but also because Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated amid these very elections. The following line graph will give an image of how the four newspapers covered the macro themes.

Figure 5.7

Macro Themes in Papers
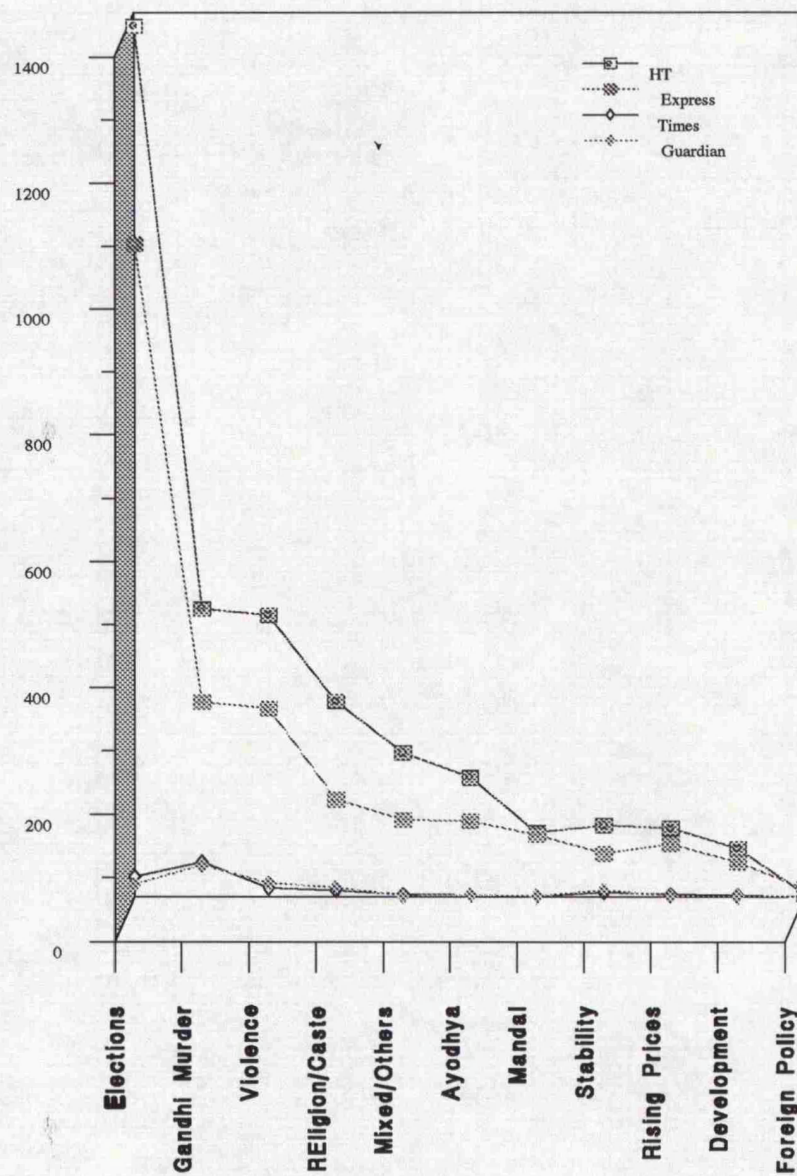


The curves in the graph above give a clear picture about how the newspapers covered the macro themes. The line representing *The Hindustan Times* is above all other three lines over all the macro themes, thus showing that *The Hindustan Times* gave the largest coverage to all the macro themes so far as the quoting of these themes is concerned. There is only one exception. *Indian Express* curve is slightly above the mark of *The Hindustan Times* representing the issue of 'foreign policy', while it is very

close to that of *The Hindustan Times* in the matter of the Mandal Commission report. The lines representing *The Times* and *The Guardian*, as is evident from the graph, barely get off the base line giving the impression that these macro themes were not mentioned too often. However, the case is different where issue/theme is related to 'campaigning', 'Rajiv Gandhi Murder' and 'violence'. On the basis of the lines in this figure it can be argued that newspapers in general give more coverage to the sudden death (especially if it is a political murder) of a leader, who is known within the country and beyond. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi had all the requisite stuff needed for an event to become a news. Having said that, however, it is also important here to note the importance attached to the theme of 'violence' nearly in all the newspapers, albeit little more in the case of *The Guardian* than the others.

## 5.3.2 CAMPAIGNING AND NEWSPAPERS

The figures in Table 5.21 indicate that 'campaigning', among others, was the most frequently observed macro theme in the press in totality. What the data fail to indicate, however, is the way the different newspapers covered this theme. To have an idea about that, let us consider the following table.

The first macro theme, that is 'campaigning', was the combination of 13 similar micro themes, as shown in Table 5.22. When looked at as a macro theme, 'campaigning' was the most popular among all the newspapers. In most of the items coded, irrespective of the newspaper, the macro theme was closely related to 'elections' (micro theme), followed by 'convassing'. In India most of the contestants rely on public meetings and political rallies organised in various parts of their constituencies where they address the constituents directly. Largely, their focus is on why the elections are being held, who should they vote for and why etc.

Table 5.22

Frequencies of Micro Themes Under the Macro Theme 'Campaigning'

| | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elections | 678 (20) | 411 (17) | 10 (8) | 10 (8) |
| Convassing | 225 (7) | 212 (9) | 4 (3) | 3 (2) |
| Poll Predictions | 47 (1) | 103 (4) | 4 (3) | 3 (2) |
| Voting/Polling | 71 (2) | 56 (2) | 4 (3) | 2 (2) |
| Countermanding | 72 (2) | 48 (2) | - | - |
| Rigging | 54 (2) | 59 (3) | 3 (2) | 2 (2) |
| Alliance | 54 (2) | 47 (2) | - | - |
| Poll Violence | 62 (2) | 31 (1) | 6 (5) | - |
| Manifesto | 35 (1) | 25 (1) | 1 | - |
| Repoll | 27 (.8) | 15 (.6) | (.8) | - |
| Withdrawal | 28 (.8) | 11 (.5) | - | - |
| Defection | 17 (.5) | 12 (.5) | - | - |
| Resignation | 10 (.3) | 4 (.2) | - | - |
| Total | 1380 (40) | 1034 (44) | 32 (24) | 20 (16) |

Table shows coverage of micro themes under macro theme 'campaigning' in four newspapers; figures in parentheses represent percentages of counts *within* the newspaper; percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

Between the Indian newspapers, *The Hindustan Times* published more items related to the macro theme 'campaigning'. However, a close examination of the figures would reveal that within its pages, *Indian Express* published more percentage (44 per cent) of stories on the macro theme than *The Hindustan Times* (40 per cent). Likewise, *Indian Express* covered the micro theme of predictions (fourth row in Table 5.22) four times more than what *The Hindustan Times* did (1 per cent).

One thing more emerging from the table is that *The Times* published by far the largest percentage of items within its pages than any other newspaper about the theme 'poll violence'. While even the Indian newspapers gave two per cent (*The Hindustan Times*) and one per cent (*Indian Express*) respectively to this issue, *The Times* gave as much as five per cent of the total frequencies to 'poll violence'. Although it is difficult to say for sure if *The Times* purposely picked up this micro theme, yet because, in comparison

with other newspapers, it mentioned poll violence more, it nevertheless indicates that Western newspapers emphasise, even if not intentionally, the negative aspect of what happens in the Third World countries.

## 5.3.3 RAJIV GANDHI MURDER

This macro theme got the maximum response in the press, after the theme 'campaigning'. The coverage of Rajiv Gandhi's murder, important as it was, needs to be discussed in detail to understand more fully as to how the press treated this particular incident. A separate Chapter (No. 6) exclusively deals with the murder. To avoid any repetition, therefore, it is not being interpreted here.

## 5.3.4 VIOLENCE, TERRORISM AND LAW & ORDER

This macro theme was the third most discussed in the selected newspapers. If we leave aside the Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the violence, apparently associated with terrorist activities in the country and other trouble making groups, occupied a great deal of press attention during the period of the study. It was the most violent election in the country. Five parliamentary and 21 assembly (state level elections) candidates were killed, while another 350 died in the election related violence. Hundreds of others were injured (see Press Trust of India, 1991; Ahuja and Paul, 1992; Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993). Seven micro themes, stratified under this macro theme, are discussed in more detail in Table 5.23.

The micro themes, as given in Table 5.23, are intertwined in such a way that the occurrence of each one of them manifests, implicitly or explicitly, in the unrest in the country further creating law and order problems. While in some items it was terrorism/violence in general, in some others it specifically mentioned the nature of the

problem like Punjab, Kashmir, Assam etc. *The Hindustan Times*, as the total shows in Table 5.23, leads the rest of the newspapers in mentioning the macro theme 'violence, terrorism and law & order', with the maximum number of items (445) related to this issue. *Indian Express*, though with fewer items (297), gave this macro theme, within itself, the same percentage of counts as its Indian counterpart, that is, 13 per cent. While referring to the micro themes under this classification, both the Indian newspapers offered, more or less, the same percentages of counts.

Table 5.23

Frequencies of Macro Theme Violence, 'Terrorism and Law & Order'

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Law & Order/Unrest | 136 (4) | 87 (4) | - | - |
| Terrorism/violence | 104 (3) | 86 (4) | 10 (8) | 17 (14) |
| Punjab Problem | 98 (3) | 53 (2) | 1 (.8) | - |
| Political Murders | 49 (1) | 27 (1) | 2 (2) | 3 (2) |
| Kashmir Problem | 31 (.9) | 29 (1) | 1 (.8) | - |
| Assam Problem | 26 (.8) | 12 (.5) | - | - |
| Sri Lanka/Tamil Problem | 1 | 3 (.1) | - | 1 (.8) |
| Total | 445 (13) | 297 (13) | 14 (11) | 21 (17) |

Figures in parentheses show percentages of counts within the newspaper; percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

Earlier Rubinoff (1993) has argued, albeit theoretically, that the international media focused on the violence during the campaign of 1991 election. The empirical evidence emerging from the data in this study also points in this direction, partly if not wholly. A closer look at the contents of Table 5.23 reveals that *The Guardian* had 17 per cent of the counts devoted to the macro theme 'terrorism, violence and law & order', whereas the corresponding figure for each of the Indian newspapers stands at 13 per cent. In fact within the pages of *The Guardian*, this theme is the second most referred to, after 'Rajiv Gandhi murder'. Also, the micro theme 'terrorism/violence' (Table 5.23) has been referred to over three times in *The Guardian* (14 per cent) and two times in *The Times*

(8 per cent) than their Indian counterparts (4 per cent). Furthermore, when the results of Table 5.23 are read in conjunction with those found out in Table 5.22, in which *The Times* referred to the micro theme 'poll violence' more than the Indian newspapers, there appears to be some indication that the British newspapers put more stress on violence during the coverage of the 1991 election in India.

One could argue that because there was a lot of disturbance during the election campaign that is why it manifested itself in the coverage of the newspapers, particularly the British. One could also argue that *The Times* referred to the macro theme 'violence, terrorism and law & order' in fewer percentage of items than the Indian newspapers. Whilst there is no dispute over these facts, it is the critical scrutiny of the data, both at the macro and the micro level, and the contrast between the emphasis on issues/themes of the two countries' newspapers, which distinguishes the British press from its Indian counterpart. For example, there is a total absence in *The Guardian* (and only two items in all in *The Times*) of the micro themes related to the 'Punjab problem', 'Kashmir problem' and 'Assam problem', which were very crucial for the Indian people in general, and those belonging to the three states in particular. The number of items depicting these issues in the Indian newspapers is relatively quite high.

## 5.3.5 RELIGION AND CASTE, AND COMMUNALISM

The fourth most popular macro theme with the press was 'religion and caste, and communalism', which occupied a total of eight per cent of counts in all the newspapers taken together. Religion and caste play an important role in the political process of India. In fact, religious considerations are sometimes more vital than economic factors in shaping electoral politics (Ahuja and Paul, 1992), and 'even in a more open stratification system, caste remains a potent factor in Indian political life' (Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993: 188). The political parties play the caste and religion card to

secure votes. Bhambri (1991) argues that political parties, instead of selling their programmes and policies try to measure the constituency in terms of religious or caste arithmetic and search for candidates who qualify in that arithmetic (Bhambri, 1991: 96). However, both these factors have often orchestrated communal violence.

Table 5.24

Frequencies of Macro Theme 'Religion and Caste, and Communalism'

|                  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Religion         | 117 (3)         | 30 (1)         | 5 (4)     | 2 (2)        |
| Communalism      | 65 (2)          | 38 (2)         | 0         | 4 (3)        |
| Casteism         | 52 (2)          | 32 (1)         | 4 (3)     | 3 (2)        |
| Secularism       | 44 (1)          | 22 (.9)        | 1 (.8)    | 4 (3)        |
| Unity & Integrity| 30 (.9)         | 32 (1)         | 0         | 2 (2)        |
| Total            | 308 (9)         | 154 (7)        | 10 (8)    | 15 (12)      |

Table shows the coverage of macro theme, caste and religion and communalism in the press; figures in parentheses represent percentages of counts within the newspaper; percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

The largest number of items concentrating on the macro theme, 'caste & religion and ' were reported in *The Hindustan Times* (308). Percentage wise, however, *The Guardian* takes the lead in offering as many as 12 per cent of the counts to this macro theme in comparison with eight per cent in *The Times*. On the whole, there is an indication that a country like India where caste and religion are so intertwined in the life of the people as well as in its polity, press, indigenous or foreign, cannot ignore the issues thus emerging.

## 5.3.6 MIXED AND OTHERS

Although this theme takes fifth position overall, most of the micro themes of which this macro theme is the conglomeration, received even less than one per cent of the total counts. That was, in fact, the main reason for grouping these themes together. Out of the 13 micro themes, there are just two exceptions: 'politics' and 'others'. *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* had respectively two per cent and one per cent counts devoted to 'politics'. In the case of 'others', *The Hindustan Times*, *The Times* and *The Guardian* each covered two per cent of the counts, while *Indian Express* had less than one per cent (see the table in Appendix K).

It is worthwhile to note here that this macro theme should not be taken as more important than the ones which follow it, for there were a large number of micro themes subsumed under this category individually which did not matter much in either of the newspapers. The conclusion, which can be drawn from the coverage of the micro themes (to see what micro themes were included in this macro theme, see section 5.3 earlier in this chapter) in this group, is that there is so much indifference on the part of both the candidates and the media to highlight some very significant issues concerning a vast majority in the Indian society. It is more bewildering, as, invariably, all the major political parties in the fray had included in their respective manifestos the issues relevant to women, environment, defence, civil liberties etc., but there was no significant mention of them in the coverage. It is difficult to know whether or not the leaders spoke about these issues during their public meetings because there is no record of the speeches made by the contestants. It cannot be said for sure whether the media ignored these issues or not.

## 5.3.7 TEMPLE, MANDAL AND STABILITY

The macro themes at the sixth, seventh and eighth place are those which were the main plank of the three major political parties. The three parties, Congress (I), BJP and JD, fought the tenth Indian general election on these three issues each going to the electorate with a particular appeal on the issue of 'stability', 'temple' and 'mandal' respectively (see Chapter 2 for more details). These three themes, important and central as they were to the campaign, are being discussed in this section together. It is hoped that discussing them together will determine the strength of each issue as demonstrated by the newspapers.

Table 5.25

Frequencies of 'Temple, Mandal and Stability'

|  | Temple/Ayodhya | Mandal/Reservation | Stability |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Hindustan Times | 188 (6) | 102 (3) | 113 (3) |
| Indian Express | 120 (5) | 98 (4) | 69 (3) |
| The Times | 3 (2) | 1 (.8) | 7 (5) |
| The Guardian | 3 (2) | 1 (.8) | 11 (9) |

Table shows the coverage of three major party themes overall; figures in parentheses show percentages within the newspaper; percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

Overall, *The Hindustan Times* offered more number of items containing the three themes of 'temple', 'mandal' and 'stability' than any other newspaper. A further scrutiny of the figures in Table 5.25 brings home the point that *Indian Express*, within its pages, rather gave more coverage (4 per cent) to the theme 'mandal' than *The Hindustan Times* (3 per cent). There also seems to be some relationship between the figures in Table 5.25 and Table 5.11. For example, *Indian Express* not only mentioned 'mandal' theme in more percentage of items but also it referred to the NF/JD party (which was

directly associated with this theme) in more percentage (12) of items than *The Hindustan Times* (11). If these results are any indication, it can be argued that *Indian Express* gave more stress on referring to the NF/JD party sources/actors as well as the issue on which the party fought the elections. In addition, it does not seem to be a mere coincidence that *Indian Express* even referred to V.P. Singh, the leader of JD, more, within its pages, than what *The Hindustan Times* did.

One more revealing fact emerging from the contents of Table 5.25 is the coverage in the British newspapers of the theme 'stability', the main contesting weapon of Congress (I), *The Times* and *The Guardian* offered five per cent and nine per cent of the total counts respectively to this theme. These percentages are much higher than those in the Indian newspapers, three per cent in each. At the same time both the British newspapers gave lower percentage of counts to the other two main issues put forward by BJP and JD. It should be recalled here that both *The Times* and *The Guardian* referred to Congress (I) party as source/actors much more than other parties (Table 5.11). Similarly, both the theme ('Mandal') and the party projecting it, were mentioned much less in the British newspapers (cf. Table 5.25 and Table 5.11). It suggests that since the Congress (I), due, perhaps, to the reasons stated early on in this chapter, appeared as an actor/source relatively more in the British newspapers, so did the party's main electioneering slogan of 'stability'.

Figure 5.8

**Coverage of Major Parties' Themes**
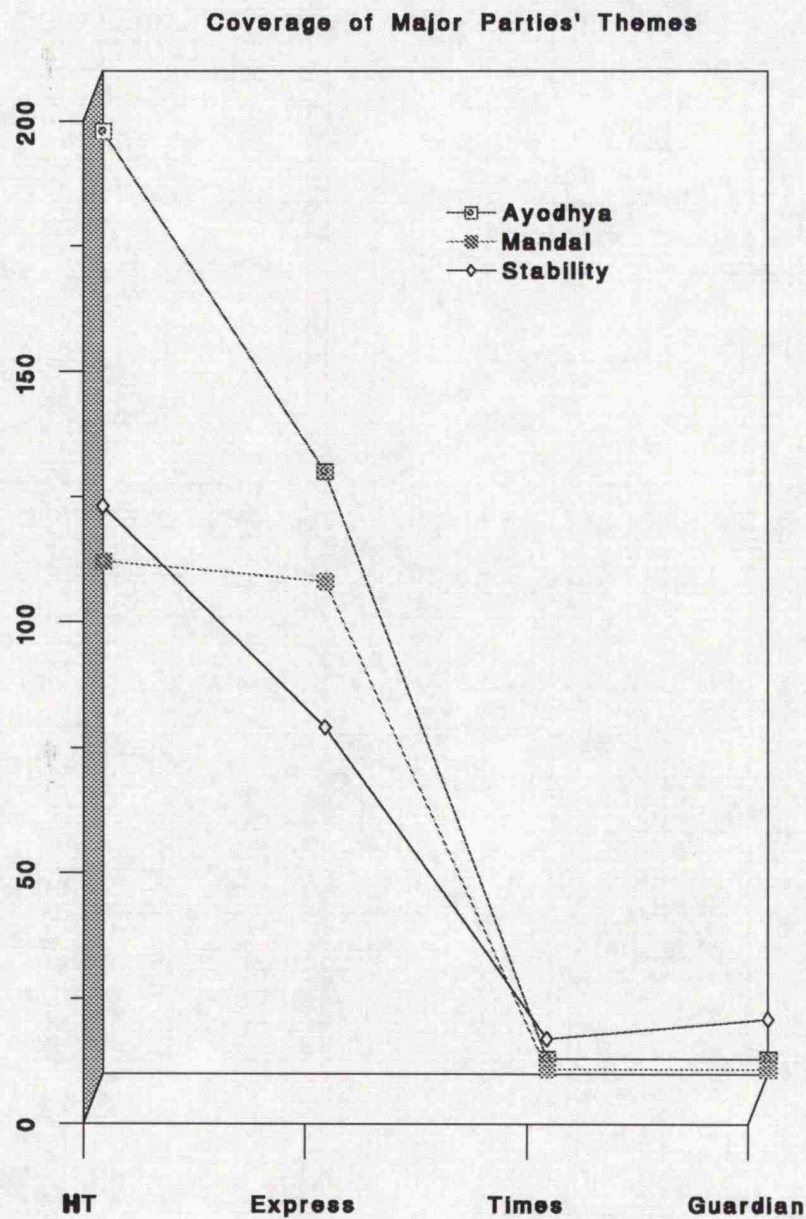


It has been outlined in Chapter 3 that newspapers give preference to certain actors/sources, and may have an inclination for a particular political party or a leader, thus setting the priorities for the public. But, if the coverage of the themes (election slogans) of the parties is any indication, there does not seem to be any correlation in the statement. The contents of Table 5.25 clearly suggest that even though the main

plank of the BJP, which was to construct a temple at the disputed place in Ayodhya, was observed in the maximum number of times in the selected newspapers, the party failed to win the elections. However, it has been variously argued by the journalists (Chapter 7) that had there been no sympathy factor in favour of Congress (I) after the killing of Rajiv Gandhi, BJP might have won power (see, for instance, Brown, 1992: 21). Above all, more coverage of the 'temple' issue was not, it appears, as much because of the popularity of the subject, as due to the controversy it generated in the media in particular, and among the public in general.

There has been a wide spread agreement among scholars about what were the most important issues on which the election strategies were drawn by the three major political parties. Invariably, these are said to be 'stability' in the government (Congress), the construction of 'temple' at the Ramjanambhoomi-masjid site (BJP), and the implementation of the 'Mandal' Commission report, also known as reservation policy, (NF/JD) (for instance, Ganguly, 1993; Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993; Rubinoff, 1993; Ahuja and Paul, 1992; Press Trust of India, 1991). The press, however, does not seem to have given these themes as much importance, for there were the issues like violence, Rajiv Gandhi's murder, religion and caste etc. which drew more attention than what the three parties brought forward as their own issues.

Not only were these three themes not accorded much coverage in the selected newspaper (with the exception of the British newspapers), but also they did not find significant favour among the public at large. The opinion poll conducted by *India Today*- MARG (Marketing and research Group) at the national level showed little interest among the people about the three themes (The *India Today*-MARG opinion polls are credited to be very accurate; their predictions since 1984 poll have been nearly precise). According to the survey, conducted at 400 locations, and among 20,312 voters, only 16 per cent of the people interviewed said 'stability' was the

important issue, followed by 15 per cent of those who thought Ayodhya (Temple) was their main election issue. The third theme of reservations was said to be affecting only 10 per cent of the people surveyed (*India Today*, May 31, 1991). It is clear from the survey that these issues were not very popular with the voters. It can be argued that the priorities, in terms of themes and issues, set by the press become the priorities with the public. So, it is bolstered by the fact that only what the press thinks is important is important for the public agenda. In other words, the press plays an important role in agenda-setting.

## 5.3.8 BASIC ISSUES

India is a country of teeming millions (843 million population in 1991 census) with a large percentage of masses still struggling for their subsistence on day-to-day basis. Come elections and the political parties come up with new strategies enveloped in fresh vote-catching slogans. It appears as if the political parties are more interested in mustering support among people rather than chalking out a solid programme to ameliorate the conditions of an illiterate and poor population. It is, therefore, not surprising that with each election the slogans of the parties change (see, for instance, issues of *India Today*; Ahuja and Paul, 1992).

To see how much prominence was given to the 'basic issues', concerning most people, like poverty, rising prices of daily necessities of life, unemployment etc., the macro theme of 'basic issues' was constructed by combining the four micro themes. Table 5.26 shows how these issues were covered in the four newspapers.

Table 5.26

Frequencies of Macro Theme 'Basic Issues'

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rising Prices | 40 (1) | 29 (1) | 1 (.8) | - |
| Corruption | 44 (1) | 21 (.9) | 1 (.8) | 1 (.8) |
| Unemployment | 18 (.5) | 22 (.9) | - | - |
| Poverty | 7 (.2) | 12 (.5) | 2 (2) | - |
| Total | 109 (3) | 84 (4) | 4 (3) | 1 (.8) |

Table shows the coverage of 'basic issues'; the figures in parentheses show percentages within the newspaper; percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

That the macro theme 'basic issues' got ninth place among all other themes is an indicator of the little importance attached to this by the newspapers. Overall, both the Indian newspapers and *The Times* gave, by and large, the same coverage to this macro theme whereas *The Guardian* mentioned this issue in just one item in all.

It is intriguing that these issues which are basic to the big majority of people in India, were not covered widely. In fact, corruption, which was one of the main issues in the ninth general elections in India (Brass, 1993) was covered but very little. A report prepared by the Press Trust of India argues that the perennial themes of corruption and poverty took a back seat in the tenth election (Press Trust of India, 1991). There appears a dichotomy in what the press thinks is the important issue of the election. In the survey, as many people as 47 per cent were reported to have said that rising prices would affect them more than any other issue (*India Today*, 31 May 1991). But the coverage of this micro issue was just about one per cent in each of the Indian newspapers. However, invariably all the political parties included this issue in their written manifestos. Why then is such an issue, which does not find place on the agenda of the press, still an important one with the people at large? It can be argued that some issues are at such a low threshold that they will be known to the public, even if the

press ignores them (cf., Lang and Lang, 1981). In the process, therefore, one does not necessarily need to have read in a newspaper that there is a wide-spread unemployment, or that there is recession, or that the prices of the daily household necessities are soaring, because most people are directly affected by them.

## 5.3.9 DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

India is a developing country. Its mainstay, however, still remains predominantly agriculture on which 67 per cent of its population depends. Nearly three-fourths of its population resides in the country side, and, as Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek (1993) argue that in terms of levels of urbanisation, industrialisation, secularisation, education, media consumption, and welfare, India appears to be almost a stereotype of a less developed country and has few of the alleged socio-economic requisites of democracy. Given the situation India is in, one would assume the 'development issues' to take a lead role in the election, and, of course, ever thereafter. Table 5.27 below gives an impression how the various micro level development themes were covered in the press.

Table 5.27
Frequencies of Macro Theme 'Development Issues'

|  | The Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Economic | 30 (.9) | 8 (.3) | 1 (.8) | - |
| Civic Problems | 15 (.4) | 15 (.6) | 1 (.8) | - |
| Education | 9 (.3) | 14 (.6) | - | - |
| Rural Development | 12 (.4) | 2 (<.1) | - | 1 (.8) |
| Commerce | 3 (<.1) | 6 (.3) | - | - |
| Agriculture | 5 (.1) | 3 (.1) | - | - |
| Science/Technology | 3 (<.1) | 3 (.1) | - | - |
| Communications | - | 2 (<.1) | - | - |
| Health Welfare | - | 2 (<.1) | - | - |
| Family Planning | - | - | - | - |

Table shows the coverage of 'development issues'; figures in parentheses represent percentages.

Even a cursory look at the contents of Table 5.27 will leave one in no doubt about the state of affairs in relation to the coverage of micro and macro level development themes. This macro theme was accorded the second lowest position. Not even a single micro theme under this macro category was coded for one per cent of the counts in any of the newspapers. For instance, one would expect education to be accorded some weight by the leaders/media, given the fact that hundreds of millions of the population cannot write or read. Similarly, the Indian economy is basically agrarian, and one might think that the issues related to agriculture vis-à-vis rural development in general would be raised by the political parties and therefore would find a place on the agenda of the newspapers. But, the data in Table 5.27 present a very dismal picture.

The finding emanating from the results shown in Table 5.27 is in agreement with what Wallace (1993) argues, 'leaving party manifestos aside, not all major problems were addressed in the elections. Economic issues which became prominent immediately after the new Congress (I) government took office were particularly neglected' (Wallace, 1993: 418). Heavy population of India is one of the most hazardous problems to harness, but family planning/population control, as an issue, did not occupy even a single item. One is tempted to draw a conclusion from the contents of the data in Table 5.27 that the press paid no heed to 'development issues' during the whole period of six weeks. It appears that while the Indian press, especially the English language, is known to be obsessed with politics in general (Drieberg, 1973; Haque, 1986), the British newspapers, according to their news-value preferences, are likely to show little interest in the 'development issues', any way. Secondly, the press during the coverage of an election campaign is more occupied with the campaign issues themselves (Tables 21 and 22), thus leaving little scope for the rest.

## 5.3.10 FOREIGN POLICY

'Foreign policy' as an issue remained at its lowest ebb in the tenth general elections in India. A mere 18 items mentioned this subject in the Indian newspapers, while the British newspapers literally had a black out. Many political scientists agree that 'foreign policy' issues do not occupy any significant place in India, especially during the electoral campaigns (Ganguly, 1993; Tharoor, 1982 and Hardgrave Jr., 1988, both quoted in Ganguly, 1993).

Ganguly analyses the theories put forward by Tharoor (1982) and Hardgrave (1988) and bolsters their arguments that "foreign policy' issues remain an elite concern' (Ganguly, 1993: 215). Due to these reasons, it appears, neither the political parties nor the media are interested in raising such issues. On their part, the voters, mostly ruralite and illiterate, do not seem to be very enthusiastic about 'high threshold' issues like 'foreign policy', for they 'see few links between their everyday concerns and India's external relations' (Ibid.: 216).

## 5.4 CONTRIBUTION OF PARTIES/CANDIDATES AND JOURNALISTS

### 5.4.1 POLITICAL PARTIES OR THE PRESS?

One of the research questions (Chapter 4) in this study was to know the extent of the influence the political parties, and/or the candidates and leaders had in the formation of the campaign agenda as reflected in its coverage in the press. All the items but visuals were coded on the basis of the initiation of the main subject therein; while some items were initiated by the parties and their candidates, others were the result of the main efforts on the part of the journalists, while some still had the input of 'others', which included minor political parties, independent candidates, government officials, Indian Election Commission, other media etc. The story was termed as party- or candidate-initiated if its predominant subject stemmed from politicians' planned speeches or statements made during their addresses in the public rallies. If the major subject of the story originated from the journalists' questions to politicians, investigative stories, analysis reports etc., then the item was coded as media-initiated. But if instead it was the leaders of the minor political parties, or other experts, the story was categorised as others-initiated (for details, see Chapter 4).

Taking all the items in all the newspapers together, it has been found that press contributed more to the coverage of the campaign than the parties and the leaders thereof, and others. A total of 1189 items (40.2 per cent) were coded as media-initiated against 814 items, that is 27.5 per cent, initiated by the parties or the candidates. In fact, there was a great scope on the part of 'others' to influence the coverage of the campaign overall.

Table 5.28

Initiation of the Main Subject of the Items

|  | Party-initiated | Media-initiated | Others-initiated | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hindustan Times | 459 (27.6) | 620 (37.3) | 583 (35.1) | 1662 (56.2) |
| Indian Express | 350 (29.1) | 503 (41.9) | 348 (29.0) | 1201 (40.6) |
| The Times | 5 (10.9) | 27 (58.7) | 14 (30.4) | 46 (1.6) |
| The Guardian | - | 39 (81.3) | 9 (18.8) | 48 (1.6) |
| Total | 814 (27.5) | 1189 (40.2) | 954 (32.3) | 2957 (100.0) |

Table shows the initiation of items in the press; figures in parentheses represent percentages.

Emanating from the figures in Table 5.28 is evidence which though, on the basis of absolute number of items, puts *The Hindustan Times* in the lead of all the newspapers in all three categories of initiation of stories, yet, seen more minutely, it is revealed that within the newspaper, *Indian Express* had more party- and press-initiated stories (29.1 per cent and 41.9 per cent) than *The Hindustan Times* wherein the corresponding figures are 27.6 per cent and 37.3 per cent. Furthermore, the difference in the figures in both the Indian newspapers is more pronounced in the case of media-initiated than the party-initiated. Thus, *Indian Express* has a clear edge over its counterpart in initiating the stories. It means that *Indian Express* is likely to present election campaign related stories more on its own than *The Hindustan Times* is likely to do. Implicit in this is also the assertion that *Indian Express*, as compared with *The Hindustan Times*, is likely to have more freedom to form the coverage of the election campaign (see also Chapter 7). However, there is more scope, as the figures in Table 5.28 indicate, for others-initiated stories in *The Hindustan Times* than *Indian Express*.

With regard to the British newspapers, both had a very large number of media-initiated items, more in the case of *The Guardian* than *The Times*, in relation to the Indian

newspapers. While *The Times* had 10.9 per cent party-initiated stories, *The Guardian* had none; the latter, in fact, had as many as over four-fifths of the stories initiated by its own corespondents. The only plausible reason for this finding seems to be that the British newspapers keep aloof from the political parties and the candidates while writing their stories and give more analysis type items. It is not surprising, therefore, that since both the British newspapers, particularly *The Guardian*, had a far greater proportion of items under analysis (see Table 5.4), which were coded as media-initiated, than their Indian counterparts, there was, on the whole, more stress on media-initiated stories rather than party- or others-initiated ones.

This also indicates that British journalists are less likely to attend the daily party press conferences and less likely to focus on what the political parties and candidates have got to offer. Integrated in this, however, is one more, and important, fact which indicates that both the British newspapers concentrated more on the stories related to 'Rajiv Gandhi Murder' than on the campaign itself. Hence, there was less probability of quoting political parties and candidates. The majority of the items in both the newspapers, therefore, were media-initiated. It should not be out of context here to note that by heavily concentrating on the media-initiated stories vis-à-vis the coverage of India's elections, the British newspapers have belied the convention of the sacerdotal role which they are found to have been playing in the coverage of their own elections (cf. Semetko *et al*, 1991). This role of theirs is associated with their deep belief in the party system and giving more straight news which emanates from the parties and candidates rather than focusing on their own assertions and judgements, a pragmatic role which is imbedded more in the US press. It seems that the British newspapers do not give the same treatment while covering the elections taking place in a Third World country, as when reporting their own election campaigns.

## 5.4.2 INFLUENCE OF THE PARTIES?

While it is clear from Table 5.28 that the newspapers and their journalists play a more influential role in the coverage of the campaign than the political parties are capable of doing, not all the major political parties in India are able to have the same potential of getting their messages across to the audience. It is, therefore, worthwhile here to know which political party is better placed than the others insofar as their efforts in initiating the stories are concerned.

The contents of Table 5.29 give a clear picture that overall the BJP has been more successful than the other contending parties in influencing the campaign agenda in the press. Though the absolute difference between the BJP and the nearest party Congress (I) is not very great, it is certainly, as the figures suggest, chiefly because of the BJP's success in initiating a larger proportion of items in *Indian Express*.

Table 5.29

Initiation of Main Subject of the Item by the Political Parties

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Congress | 153 (33.3) | 87 (24.9) | 5 (100.0) | 245 (30.1) |
| BJP | 134 (29.2) | 123 (35.1) | - | 257 (31.6) |
| JD/NF | 83 (18.1) | 73 (20.9) | - | 156 (19.2) |
| CPI/CPM | 36 (7.8) | 16 (4.6) | - | 52 (6.4) |
| SJP | 53 (11.5) | 51 (14.6) | - | 104 (12.8) |

Table shows the role of major political parties in initiating the stories; figures in parentheses represent percentages within the newspapers.

A further closer look at the above figures indicates how five major political parties were able to creep in as initiator of the stories in different newspapers. So far as the

Indian newspapers are concerned, Congress (I) was able to initiate the main subjects of the largest percentage of stories published in *The Hindustan Times*, whereas it was the BJP which initiated more stories than rival parties in the *Indian Express*. So, what can be read into the data presented in Table 5.29? There is an explicit indication that Congress (I) was more successful in having its imprint in *The Hindustan Times* than it could do in *Indian Express*. The corollary of this statement is that the former newspaper gave more room to the Congress, insofar as the initiation of the main themes of the stories, than other political parties, while *Indian Express* in this respect provided more opportunities to the BJP.

Implicitly, therefore, it is clear that *The Hindustan Times* is more likely to accept Congress (I) party (and/or its leaders) as initiator of the stories than any other party thus showing its inclination for the party which has been in power for most of the time since India's independence. On the other hand, there is much scope for the non-Congress (I) parties (sans Communist parties) to have their share in the initiation of the electoral campaign stories covered in *Indian Express*. It appears that *Indian Express*, therefore, is the paper of the opposition; it emanates from the fact that excepting the CPI/CPM, all other major non-Congress (I) political parties, as the Table 5.29 elicits, had initiated larger percentage of stories in *Indian Express* than in *The Hindustan Times*.

It is also expressly clear from the data that while none of the contending parties was able to initiate any story in *The Guardian*, Congress (I) was the only party which was able to initiate five stories in *The Times*. While general explanation to this effect has been offered earlier, it leaves one in no doubt that Congress (I) is the sole political outfit which could influence some stories in the British newspaper. Alternatively it appears that the foreign press, if it is likely to provide any opportunity to the Indian parties to initiate a subject in their stories, would prefer no party but Congress. It

further suggests how effective Congress, the oldest political party in India, is in influencing the coverage of even a foreign newspaper.

## 5.5 VISUALS

Visuals, especially photographs, are an integral part of the newspaper coverage of any event, electoral campaigns being no exception. There were a total of 504 visuals including 476 photographs and 28 cartoons in all the newspapers put together. All the photographs and cartoons were coded to see who - the press or the parties/candidates - was more influential in initiating the visuals. As has been shown in an earlier section of this chapter (see Tables 5.4 and 5.5), all visuals, irrespective of whether they were complete items in themselves or accompanied the story, were coded for this purpose.

The photographs depicting a leader while he/she is addressing a rally, arriving, presenting something, or engaged in a planned public appearance were coded as candidate-initiated. Since only the very important candidates were taken, relatively lesser known leaders were instead coded as the political party they represented. Again, only the major political parties were considered for this purpose. If the photographs showed some unexpected events, demonstrators, hecklers, mistakes and private glimpses of the leaders, they were considered as media-initiated. There was still another classification according to which photographs which could not be fitted into the above categories were considered as having been initiated by others. The mug shots were taken as party-initiated while the cartoons were coded as media-initiated. The photographs in which the candidates were shown as smiling or receiving applause from the audience were coded as favourable or positive. On the other hand, a photograph was treated as unfavourable or negative if it depicted small gatherings, hecklers, or leaders' gaffes. Those cases in which the photographs could not be coded as either positive or negative were kept in the third category of neutral.

## 5.5.1 INFLUENCE OF PARTY AND THE PRESS VIS-À-VIS PHOTOGRAPHS

An interesting fact emerging from the figures in Table 5.30 is that while the press plays a relatively greater role in initiating the stories in general (see Table 5.28), in the case of visuals it is the other way round; the bulk of the visuals is initiated by the parties and/or the candidates thereof. It is not only the overall effect of all the newspapers put together, but also the individual newspapers, except *The Guardian*, which had more visuals initiated by the parties/candidates. It should be added here that photographs which depicted Rajiv Gandhi posthumously were coded as media-initiated. It seems therefore that despite that, the parties and the candidates were very successful in having their photographs published and in the way they themselves posed for. This finding is more in consonance with the way the British quality newspapers portray the British parties and candidates - which are more party-initiated than media-initiated - while covering the British elections (Semetko *et al*, 1991).

Table 5.30

Initiation of the Photographs

|  | Candidate/Party-initiated | Media-initiated | Others-initiated |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Hindustan Times | 88 (39.1) | 58 (25.8) | 79 (35.1) |
| Indian Express | 105 (44.9) | 84 (35.9) | 45 (19.2) |
| The Times | 9 (32.1) | 3 (10.7) | 16 (57.1) |
| The Guardian | 3 (17.6) | 6 (35.3) | 8 (47.1) |
| Total | 205 (40.7) | 151 (30.0) | 148 (29.4) |

Table shows the number and percentages of the photographs initiated by candidates/parties, media and others.

The reason why quite a large number of visuals were initiated by others lies in the fact that there are far more minor political parties contesting the elections. Secondly, there were also many candidates in the fray fighting as independents (those who are fighting the election without any political party's symbol; they are issued a separate poll symbol), and such photographs were classified under the category of others. Similarly the visuals published in the wake of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination were more often treated as initiated by others, for no political party or the candidate could be associated with their initiation.

Within the newspapers, as the figures in Table 5.30 indicate, *Indian Express* had a greater number, as well as percentages, of both the party- and media-initiated visuals than in *The Hindustan Times*. That the former paper had more media-initiated visuals than the latter (despite more number of cartoons in the latter which were coded as media-initiated) further shows its concern for more liberty to click a photograph from its own perspective. Analysing the contents of two tables (Tables 5.28 and 5.30) together, it appears that *Indian Express* is more likely than *The Hindustan Times* to initiate not only the main subject of the stories but also the photographs (despite the fact that *Indian Express* had 58 mug shots as compared with 33 in *The Hindustan Times*; the mug shot was counted as party-candidate-initiated). These findings somewhat suggest that *Indian Express* has the inclination of playing a more pragmatic role than its counterpart.

## 5.5.2 WHO IS THERE IN THE PICTURE?

While the discussion above sheds light about the influence of the parties and the press in the coverage of visuals, it does not tell who the visuals are all about. To undertake this exercise, all the visuals were analysed on the basis of the VIP candidates they portrayed. To put more meaning to the analysis, the visuals were coded, where VIP

leaders were not pictured, according to the party the person(s) in the photograph belonged. It was done so as to know which party was more successful in having their photographs published in the newspapers. Put in other words, which newspaper gave more emphasis on the photographs of which party.

Table 5.31

Frequencies of Appearance of Parties/Leaders in Visuals

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Congress (I)[2] | 40 (17.8) | 50 (21.4) | 3 (10.7) | 1 (5.9) | 94 (18.7) |
| BJP | 17 (7.6) | 18 (7.7) | - | - | 35 (6.9) |
| JD/NF | 10 (4.4) | 11 (4.7) | - | - | 21 (4.2) |
| CPI/CPM | 1 (.4) | 1 (.4) | - | - | 2 (.4) |
| SJP | 10 (4.4) | 6 (2.6) | - | - | 16 (3.2) |
| Rajiv Gandhi | 33 (14.7) | 38 (16.2) | 7 (25.0) | 4 (23.5) | 82 (16.3) |
| L.K. Advani | 2 (.9) | 10 (4.3) | 1 (3.6) | 1 (5.9) | 14 (2.8) |
| V.P. Singh | 1 (.40 | 2 (.9) | 1 (3.6) | 1 (5.9) | 5 (1.0) |
| Chandra Shekhar | 5 (2.2) | 4 (1.7) | - | - | 9 (1.8) |
| A.B. Vajpayee | 3 (1.3) | 2 (.9) | - | - | 5 (1.8) |
| Others | 103 (45.8) | 92 (39.3) | 16 (57.1) | 10 (58.8) | 221 (43.8) |

Table shows frequencies with which parties and leaders appeared in the visuals; figures in parentheses represent percentages.

It is clear from Table 5.31 that Congress (I) candidates, minus Rajiv Gandhi (because he was coded separately), got the maximum publicity, except the category 'others', in press photographs. That over 43 per cent of the visuals were coded under the classification 'others' means that there were so many candidates representing the minor political parties, and also the different organisations like election commission, poll officials, security officials etc. It is further revealed from the table that both the Indian

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[2]Thousands of candidates, representing several parties, were contesting this election. It was, therefore, not possible to code each individual leader, for it would not produce any meaningful analysis. This is why that only a few of the very important leaders were coded in the visuals. The rest of the relatively lesser known candidates in the pictures were coded according to the political parties they belonged to. It would provide an overall image as to the candidates of which party were more/less pictured.

newspapers have, by and large, the same trend in presenting parties and leaders in the visuals. This sort of nearly even distribution of visuals indicates that all the major political parties and leaders are equally represented in the coverage of the photographs during the election campaign.

The order of the coverage of the major political parties in photographs (Table 5.31) and as sources/actors (Table 5.11), in all the newspapers taken together, is remarkably the same. It suggests that the parties got the same kind of importance, literally and visually. Among the individual leaders, Rajiv Gandhi distinctly got a clear edge over all the other VIP leaders as far as the visuals are concerned. It has already been shown that Rajiv Gandhi was the most prominently mentioned actor/source in the press (see Table 5.12), thus meaning that the press attached more importance to the personality of the man. Here, his having been shown in the largest number of visuals at the individual level confirms the finding in Table 5.12.

Another revealing fact emanating from the contents of Table 5.31 is that *Indian Express* showed L.K. Advani, the top leader of the BJP, in nearly five times more visuals than what *The Hindustan Times* did. This again confirms the finding in Table 5.29 that the BJP was more successful in initiating the stories in *Indian Express* than in *The Hindustan Times*, which had more stories initiated by Congress. There is, therefore, an indication of the newspapers' obvious inclination towards opposition political parties.

The British newspapers, it seems, conform to the same trend found earlier in this chapter. Even the figures in Table 5.31 clearly show that they gave much more importance to the Congress (I) party and Rajiv Gandhi as far as their appearance in visuals is concerned. No doubt, both the newspapers did feature one photograph each of L.K. Advani and V.P. Singh, yet it is nowhere near the share Rajiv Gandhi received.

### 5.5.3 FAVOURABLE/UNFAVOURABLE?

Table 5.32

Frequencies of the Tone of the Visuals

|                      | Favourable | Unfavourable | Neutral     |
|----------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| The Hindustan Times  | 63 (28.0)  | 4 (1.8)      | 158 (70.2)  |
| Indian Express       | 74 (31.8)  | 5 (2.1)      | 154 (66.1)  |
| The Times            | 5 (17.9)   | 1 (3.6)      | 22 (78.6)   |
| The Guardian         | 1 (5.9)    | -            | 16 (94.1)   |
| Total                | 143 (28.4) | 10 (2.0)     | 350 (69.6)  |

Table shows the tone of the visuals; figures in parentheses represent percentages.

The analysis of the visuals shows that the press is not particularly unfavourable in presenting the parties and the candidates. Table 5.32 reveals that only two per cent of the visuals were coded as negative or unfavourable to parties/candidates. Nearly seven out of ten pictures were just neutral in nature; there was neither anything favourable nor unfavourable. Over 28 per cent of the visuals were found to be favourable in which the candidates were shown with smiling faces and receiving applause from the audience. When compared with the unfavourable poses, it appears that candidates are quite successful in having their photographs published in more favourable way. The figures in the individual newspapers are quite near to the average results, thus showing that the press treats the parties and the candidates almost similarly.

### 5.6 CONCLUSION

The content analysis findings indicate that the India's tenth general election was covered very extensively, especially by the Indian newspapers. A total of 3219 items were coded in 164 issues of the four newspapers, spread over 41 days. Compared with

the Semetko *et al*'s study of British newspapers' coverage of the 1983-British election and American newspapers' coverage of the 1984 US Presidential election, the Indian newspapers gave more coverage to the Indian election (Semetko *et al*, 1991). The study, as explained in Chapters 3 and 4, was undertaken mainly at two levels: first, to see the trend of election coverage in the newspapers of two different countries, namely, India and Britain; and to see if the newspapers within the countries differed in their coverage. While the Indian newspapers covered the campaign widely, the British newspapers gave only little coverage - nearly 97 per cent of the total items appeared in the Indian papers. Within the newspapers, *The Hindustan Times* gave the maximum number of items.

The majority of the items (72.3 per cent) were news. Both the Indian newspapers had almost the same percentage of news, and so was the case with the British newspapers. A particular type of item under the category 'analysis' was observed more in the British newspapers, while *The Hindustan Times* had nearly double such items than *Indian Express*. While the percentage of 'letters-to-editor' item in both *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* was almost the same, no such item was coded in *The Times; The Guardian* had two such items. *Indian Express* published far greater number of advertisements and photographs than *The Hindustan Times*. *The Times* and *The Guardian* each had 28 and 14 photographs, respectively.

The maximum number of items in *The Hindustan Times* (43 per cent) and *Indian Express* (39 per cent) was authored by their own correspondents. Between the two Indian news agencies (English language), the PTI service was used more than the UNI, whereas there were only .4 per cent of the items sent by the four International news agencies. It was also seen that most of the coverage was done by the generalists rather than any special correspondents. Again the maximum number of items originated from the big urban centres. However, *The Hindustan Times* also received double the amount

of items than *Indian Express* from common places in the country, showing that the coverage in the former was more wide spread.

The foregoing analysis has shown that political parties, at macro level, were the most frequently mentioned actor in all the newspapers together. It is, therefore, clear that an election campaign is predominantly a political activity in which the actors/sources tend to be the political parties, occupying over half of the total counts. It is also clear that important leaders, especially those who are the potential candidates for the top position, figure in the coverage more than any other individual or organisation. It means that VIP leaders have an easy access to the press. The findings of the study further bolster the fact that journalists often use official sources, mainly, perhaps, because both have, by virtue of their respective positions, mutual access to each other. However, the power of the official sources, as has been found in the study, seems to be somewhat diluted when the elections are around, for more information comes from the open political rallies in the field, rather than the closed in-door meetings of the bureaucrats.

It has been seen that the regional (state level) parties have much less importance in the national level elections, in which the national parties dominate. With the same logic, India's neighbour countries and the World leaders and International news agencies are not mentioned much of the time. It has been revealed that at the micro level Congress (I) was the most frequently mentioned political party, followed by the BJP and the JD/NF. This finding can be extended to the conclusion that the more the press refers to a party, the more importance it attaches to it, the more chances that party has of coming out victorious in the elections. Rajiv Gandhi was the most mentioned micro-level actor/source in the press, showing that important and powerful people (being the leader of the largest and the most powerful political party, and a former prime minister) have greater chances of being in the news.

The content analysis has confirmed that the press concentrates more on the campaign issues themselves during the coverage of an election than the other political issues. However, it could alter when something sudden, unexpected, and of great consequences occurs. Rajiv Gandhi's murder during the campaign has proved that when it happened, it dominated as an issue sidelining others for much of the remainder period of the campaign. The study shows that the contemporary topical issues (for example, law-and-order, terrorism, violence in many shapes) of the day are likely to be referred to more than any other basic issues (like rising prices, unemployment etc.). While religion and caste, as a macro theme, received 8 per cent of the counts in the press coverage, 'development issues', which got only two per cent share, were relegated to the back. Similarly 'foreign policy' remains a very low priority issue with the press. Revealed in the study is also the fact that despite their being projected by the three major political parties' respectively (Ayodhya, 'mandal' and 'stability'), these issues were given a low rating in the coverage, insofar as referring to them. However, all the newspapers together mentioned the BJP's 'temple' issue more than the other two.

A remarkable similarity has been found in the way in which all individual newspapers referred to, at least, the first three macro actors. However, there is a big difference between the Indian and the British newspapers when considered on the individual level. The British newspapers have given much importance to the Congress (I) party, as well to Rajiv Gandhi than their nearest rivals. This shows that the more known party and the leader in Britain are referred to more than the rest. On the similar basis, Sonia Gandhi, the widow of the slain leader Rajiv Gandhi, has been referred to much more in the British papers than their Indian counterparts.

The evidence emerging from the content analysis of this study suggests that the campaign agenda in the press is more likely to be the creation of the press itself, rather

that the major political parties or/and their leaders contending the elections. Between the Indian newspapers, *Indian Express* is likely to have better chances than *The Hindustan Times* to form the campaign agenda on its pages. The sacerdotal role the British press is known to have played while covering the British elections does not appear to be true in the case of their coverage of the Indian elections; far greater proportion of the media-initiated stories, than the party-initiated, in *The Times* and *The Guardian* is a pointer to that direction.

The BJP has an edge over other major political parties in influencing the campaign agenda in the press. A closer link between the newspaper and the political parties was found to be at work: *The Hindustan Times* used more items initiated by the Congress (I) party than the rest, whereas the BJP was more successful to have initiated more percentage of stories in *Indian Express* than in the other newspaper. On the whole, while *The Hindustan Times* appears to be having an inclination for the Congress (I), *India Express*, on the other side, seems to be a paper of the opposition. Together the British newspapers are likely to use the stories initiated by the Congress (I) than any other political party in India.

Contrary to the above finding, the political parties and the leaders thereof are more successful in initiating the visuals than the stories. The analysis of the visuals indicate that among the major political parties, Congress (I) leaders were pictured the most. Rajiv Gandhi was the most photographed individual leader in the press overall. The British newspapers gave more visuals related to the Congress (I) party and Rajiv Gandhi. Visuals, in general, were neutral in nature, that is, neither favourable or otherwise.

# Chapter 6

CHAPTER 6

RAJIV GANDHI'S ASSASSINATION - HOW IT WAS
COVERED IN THE PRESS

The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, a former Indian prime minister, on the evening of
21 May, gave an unprecedented jolt to the on-going election campaign. While many
feared it may manifest itself in the holocaust that followed his mother's assassination in
1984, the situation was kept under control and the electoral process was accomplished,
albeit later than scheduled. Rajiv Gandhi was not only just a leader but *the* leader of the
largest political party in India which has had its imprint on the political scene of India
ever since she won her independence in 1947. If it were not to be that way, Rajiv
Gandhi would perhaps be the most prospective candidate to occupy the office of prime
minister of India, as a result of the 1991 election.[1]

As explained in the previous chapters, India was divided into three regions, each going
to polls on 20, 23 and 26 May respectively. The first leg of polling was completed as
scheduled on 20 May, while last minute convassing through electoral mass rallies and
face to face meetings was still in progress for the remaining two days of polling in over
300 constituencies of the country. It was one of such rallies in Tamilnadu at
Sriperumbudar near Madras that Rajiv Gandhi was about to address on 21 May when a
bomb explosion at about 10.20 p.m. killed him, among others, instantaneously,
plunging India, once more, into another apocalyptic situation. The murder of Rajiv
Gandhi was important from many aspects, including the one described as:

> The crutches of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty on which this country has
> hobbled from decade to decade during the last forty years have suddenly

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[1]Congress was predicted, before his death, to come up as the single largest party with 233 seats; the
forecast was that it will form government with the support of the Left, or breaking away certain
groups from the Janata Dal (for details, see for instance, *India Today*, 31 May 1991).

been removed. It was the single most important prop that had served as a national symbol - whether to rally around or to oppose. It was the reference point for India's political existence. It was also the Congress Party's security blanket. Rajiv may not have been an extraordinary leader capable of grappling with India's multitudinous problems. But there is little doubt that he was the glue that held the Congress (I) together.

(*India Today*, 15 June 1991)

Rajiv Gandhi's was the latest prominent death in the series of political murders that have taken place in the beleaguered nations of South Asia in the past four decades or so. India had barely started enjoying the fruits of an independent country than Mahatma Gandhi, a key figure in the freedom struggle, was killed on 30 January 1948. Pakistan's first prime minister Liaquat Ali Khan was murdered three years later by an exiled Afghan at a rally in Rawalpindi. On 25 September 1959, the Sri Lankan prime minister, Solomon Bandaranaike was assassinated by a Buddhist monk. Similarly, Bangladesh has witnessed two of its leaders falling to the assassins bullets in its short existence as an independent country. The first President of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibir Rehman was killed on 15 August 1975 by military officers in Dacca, while General Zia-ur-Rehman, then army chief, who later took over as President was also gunned down on 30 May 1981 in a coup attempt.

In the last decade, two more leaders, one each of India and Pakistan were wiped off from the political scene. While Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India was assassinated at her residence on 31 October 1984, the aftermath of which saw a wide spread violence, killing two thousand Sikhs (Rudolph, 1993), General Zia-ul-Haq was killed on 17 August 1988 in a plan crash 'widely believed to be an act of sabotage, though an official inquiry reached no definite conclusions' (Kumar, 1991: 27).

How was Rajiv Gandhi's assassination perceived? While avoiding any detailed and documentary explanations, it can be understood in a brief account, provided by Lloyd Rudolph. He argues, "'Dhanu", a Sri Lankan Tamil and a nominal "Hindu", was seen as

a foreigner, an operative for the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), the militant group seeking a separate state for Sri Lankan Tamils in the north and east regions of the island. Then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had sent Indian military force, the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force), to Sri Lanka to disarm the LTTE. A bloody war followed. . . . the assassination was not perceived as communally motivated. Instead it was read as the work of foreign conspirators seeking revenge for the killing of LTTE "freedom fighters" by India's "peace keeping" force in Sri Lanka. Because the assassination came from outside, it didn't threaten or divide the country' (Rudolph, 1993: 437).

Though the situation in the immediate post assassination period, unlike that following Indira Gandhi's, was kept under control, there remained a serious question of conducting the remaining rounds of polling slated for 23 and 26 May. Within the Congress (I) party, the sudden disappearance of its leader made the things even more difficult, for the party leaders not only had to cope with the extended campaign, but also they had to find a person to fill in the post of party president. Since there was no sufficient time left, the Chief Election Commissioner, T.N. Seshan, rescheduled the polls and fixed them for 12 and 15 June, thus still taking another controversial decision at which all of the political parties showed their dissatisfaction (see, for instance, *India Today*, 15 June 1991). It, and some others, was the decision of the Indian Election Commission which kept it in the news, and as a consequence of which it was referred to in the press much more than many other actors (Chapter 5).

The assassination attracted extensive coverage from the media the world over. As would be demonstrated later in this chapter, Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, particularly his funeral, which was personally witnessed by hundreds of international dignitaries, turned from a news-event into a media-event.[2] Despite the fact that Rajiv Gandhi was

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[2]Although Dayan and Katz (1992) have used the term media event in the context of broadcasting, it may not be wholly unrealistic to extend it to the print medium. They argue, 'the most obvious difference between media events and other formulas or genres of broadcasting is that they are, by

killed in the blast that took place past the time when most of the newspapers in India had already gone to press, there was a good deal of coverage of the incident available to the readers the following morning. Both the Indian newspapers front paged the murder story with banner headlines in bold. While *The Hindustan Times* wrote, 'RAJIV ASSASSINATED', the lead in *Indian Express* read, 'Rajiv killed in bomb blast'. Both the newspapers also gave their editorial comments prominently displayed on the front pages in boxes. *The Hindustan Times* editorial entitled 'Rajiv Gandhi' was a signed one, whereas the other in *Indian Express* read 'Blood-stained politics'. Both the newspapers published a large number of photographs of Rajiv Gandhi and other family members.

The front pages of the Indian newspapers, in fact, contained nothing but news related to Rajiv Gandhi and his murder. That it was a shocking news reflects from the fact that both *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* put all the stories on their respective front pages in black borders, a sign of sorrow and mourning. *Indian Express* went one step further and gave an exclusive page for photographs related to Rajiv Gandhi under the banner headline, 'The life and times of Rajiv Gandhi' (*Indian Express*, 22 May 1991: 7). Likewise, *The Hindustan Times* devoted an exclusive page to Rajiv Gandhi along with five relevant photographs (*The Hindustan Times*, 22 May 1991: 10).

In Britain, *The Times* and *The Guardian* widely reported the killing of Rajiv Gandhi. Both the newspapers gave lead stories in their issues of 22 May, the day after the assassination took place. *The Guardian* under a banner headline, 'Gandhi blown to pieces', filled the whole of the front page with the stories concerning the murder. Alongside, it gave a very large photograph of the deceased, captioned, 'Troubled campaign . . . former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi casts his vote in Delhi two days ago in elections already marred by violence'. Incidentally, this was the largest photograph any newspaper had printed, including the Indian ones; it measured 572 square

definition, not routine. In fact, they are *interruptions* of routine; they intervene in the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives . . . regular broadcasting is suspended and preempted . . . all channels switch away from their regularly scheduled programming in order to turn to the great event . . .' (p. 5).

centimetres, covering over one third of the total printed area (excluding the title) of the front page.

*The Times*, for its part too, offered the lead story to the 'Rajiv Gandhi murder', accompanied by a photograph of the former prime minister, though not as large as that in its British counterpart. The lead story was headlined: 'Rajiv Gandhi assassinated in bomb blast'. This was, it should be added here, for the first time ever since the British newspapers started reporting the Indian election campaign that they placed an item about India not only on the front page but also gave it the lead. It is, however, not to suggest that the occasion did not demand the display it was offered. *The Guardian* seemed to have reached a saturation point when on 23 May it, in addition to another front page lead, gave two exclusive pages under the title, 'INDIA AFTER RAJIV', to the news and comments on the issue.

Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in the late hours of evening on 21 May, a day after he himself had used his franchise in a Delhi poll station. His death added altogether a new dimension to the remaining two laps of polling. The vote-catching strategies of the political parties, as will be discussed later in this chapter, changed with the dramatic turn of the events in the country. But what was still of more propriety was the fact that the Congress (I) party suddenly found itself in the whirlpool with no charismatic personality around to take it out to safety. The party was leaderless. Not because that there were no potential leaders of stature, but because both Mrs. Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi ensured that no leader emerged on an all-India level (*India Today*, 15 June 1991).

How orphaned the party became in the death of Rajiv Gandhi can be adjudged from what *India Today* commented, 'so overwhelming was the confusion that for over a week these leaders were incapable of devising a new election strategy for the second phase of the polls. There was no central direction and no Congress (I) leader emerged

to inspire confidence' (*India Today*, 15 June 1991: 105). The party looked forward to the widow of Rajiv Gandhi accepting the leadership of the party, but she politely refused. It is another matter that the party did win sympathy of the voters and increased its tally of seats in the second and third round of electioneering (see later in this chapter), conducted after the bomb blast in Sriperumbudar.

As would be expected, there was an abrupt halt to the election oriented stories in all the selected newspapers. Instead, there was a maddening rush of coverage of the assassination and there was a deluge of the news related, directly or indirectly, to Rajiv Gandhi. The theme of most of the items changed from anything else to that concerning the murder. To see what impact the murder did have on the coverage of themes of the items, the entire period of sampling was divided into three phases. The first phase was the one before 22 May 1991, that is before the news started pouring in about the assassination. The second phase was constructed from 22 May until 29 May, when the last rites of Rajiv Gandhi were performed.[3] The third phase was after 29 May until the end of the sampling, that is 15 June, when, presumably, reference to themes related to Rajiv Gandhi's murder had subsided.

The highest quoted macro theme/issue, as has been explained in Chapter 5, during the entire coverage of the election was 'campaigning' - it received almost three times more responses than its second nearest theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder'. It was, therefore, decided to compare the macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' with the one having obtained the highest score of responses. It would enable us to see the relative importance attached to the themes in the four newspapers. The total number of responses were also taken.

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[3]Actually the ashes of Rajiv Gandhi were merged, the last ritual, at the confluence at Allahabad and later spread over Himalayas by air on 28 may. But the ceremonies, obviously, were reported on 29 May. This is why the second phase was constructed until 29 May.

Figure 6.1

## Coverage of Themes in Three Phases
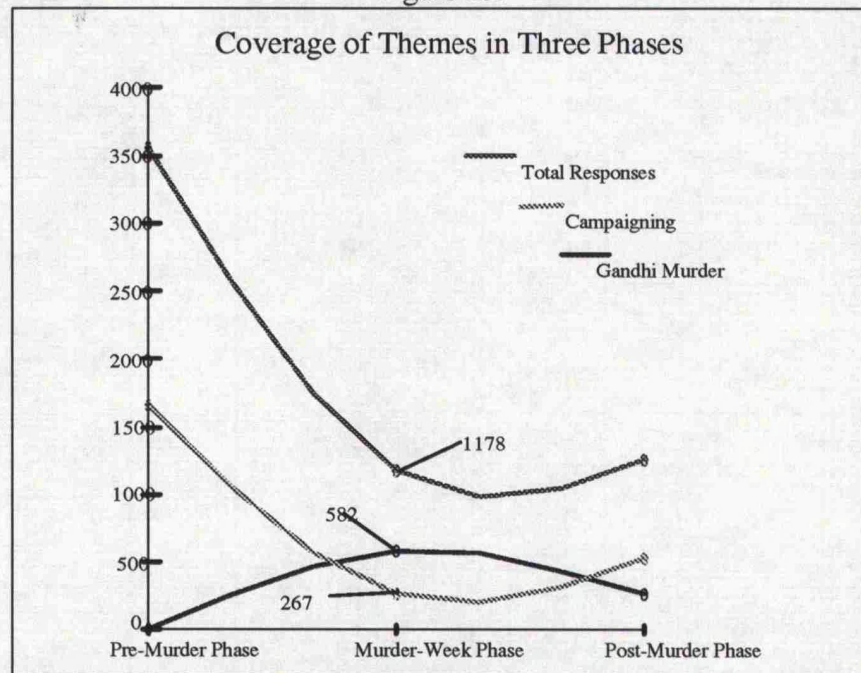


It is worthwhile looking at the Figure 6.1 which shows the coverage of the three themes spread over three periods of the entire campaign. The top curve represents the total responses of all the themes in all the newspapers taken together. The one starting at the scale (1657) refers to the most quoted macro theme, that is, 'campaigning'. The third curve emerging from the base of the horizontal line, of course, represents the macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder'. The main purpose of this figure here is to demonstrate the sudden fall in the election related coverage, replaced by a quick rise in the murder related news.

It is sufficiently clear from the figure that in the first phase of coverage, 'campaigning' as macro theme was all pervasive; it occupied nearly half of the total responses. However, in the second phase it plummeted to a low of 267 responses, and gradually recovered in the third phase to a high of 542. A point to be noted is that the macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' overwhelmed the coverage in the second phase when it rose to a high of 582 responses, one half of the total responses covered during this period, and more than double the 'campaigning' theme.

An inevitable conclusion from what the curves show in Figure 6.1 is that as soon as the assassination took place there was a quick and prolific rise in the coverage of the macro theme related to Rajiv Gandhi's murder. Given the short phase of just seven days, it is evident that the newspapers attached a great deal of importance to this macro theme.[4] Furthermore, if both the second and third phases are combined, it becomes clear that this theme (862) outnumbered the responses received by the 'campaigning' theme (809) even throughout the remaining period of the coverage.

Why the macro theme concerning Rajiv Gandhi's murder pervaded the coverage of the press can be explained in two ways. First, Rajiv Gandhi was an important leader for reasons already explained in this and the previous chapters, and his sudden elimination from the political scene provided a deep concern at all levels, the press being no exception. Since he was also the President of the Congress (I) party, there was all the more interest on the part of the newspapers as to what impact his murder would have on the party organisation. It is argued that Rajiv Gandhi fulfilled the basic news-value that the personalities make news; the more a personality is important and known, the more its chances of being carried in the news.

Second, and equally important, with the assassination of the former prime minister, the remaining two parts of polling were postponed for about three weeks which created a piqued situation for all the contesting parties and leaders. This was particularly so because the parties had already exhausted most of their energies and funds. This culminated in a half-hearted and lacklustre campaign in the post-assassination round, as it was argued that 'even with more than 300 Lok Sabha seats up for grabs in the last lap of polling, the fire had gone out of electioneering. Rajiv's assassination dampened not only the spirits of the Congress (I) but also the enthusiasm of other parties in the

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[4]Although from 22 May until 29 May it makes eight days of the second phase, there were seven newspapers which were coded, for there was one Sunday, and, as explained in Chapter 4, the Sunday newspapers were not included in the study.

contest. And as leaders criss-crossed the country, they found the electorate dulled, numbed and enervated. A crowd of even 5,000, in places where a turnout of 20,000 at an election rally used to be the norm, was billed as "impressive" (*India Today*, 30 June 1991). Obviously, there was less to cover in the newspapers about elections, while enquiries and commissions were being set up to investigate the murder and therefore whetting the quest of the press to disseminate more and more information regarding the assassination, the likely perpetrators and their motives behind it, and the perceivable consequences thereof, especially in terms of the election results. Let us have a look at the pie chart (Figure 6.2) that follows.

Figure 6.2

## Rajiv Gandhi Referred to as Actor/Source in Three Phases

Post-Murder Phase
161 / 19%

Pre-Murder Phase
225 / 26%

Murder-Week Phase
475 / 55%
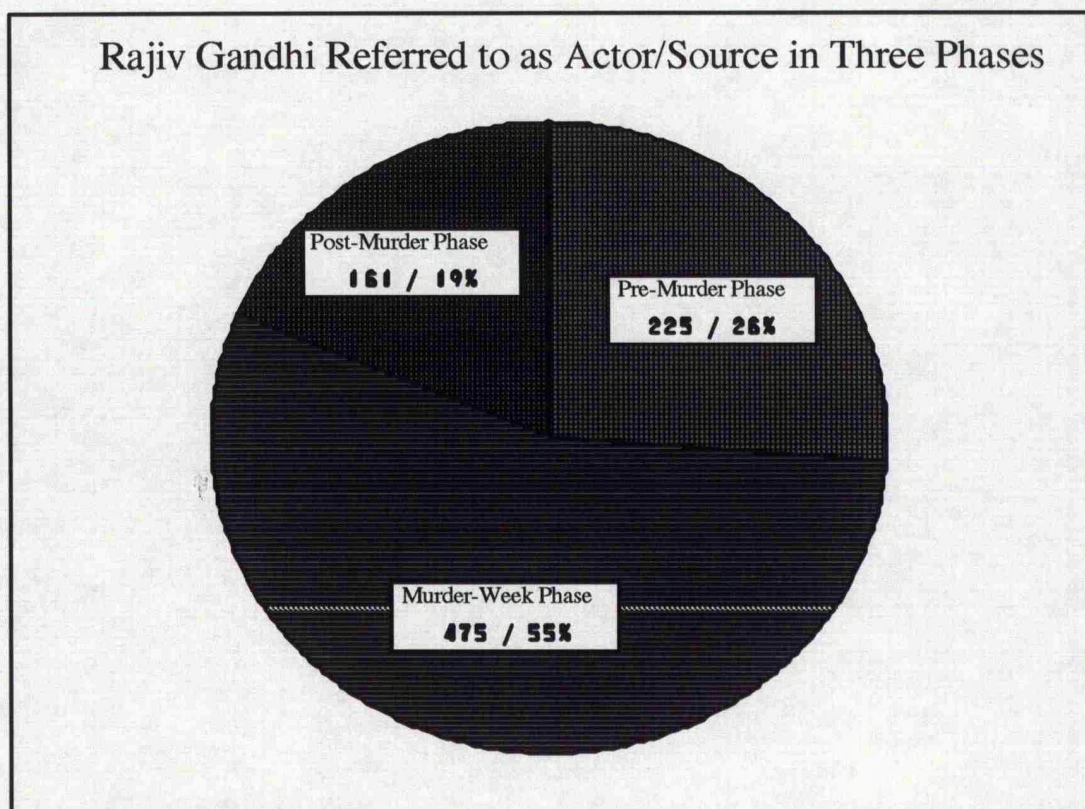
In the same vein as discussed just above, the pie chart cements the observation that as well as the macro theme, Rajiv Gandhi was the most quoted actor during the second phase. In the first phase, as is reflected in the chart above, Rajiv Gandhi was quoted

225 times (26 per cent) in all the newspapers taken together. With his murder in the second phase, there was an increase of over 200 per cent when he received 475 responses, which again fell down to 161 responses in the third phase. The simple interpretation of these figures is that in the first phase Rajiv Gandhi had to compete with many other sources to get into the press, whereas due to his assassination, he became central to the issue and subsequently was referred to much more than both the pre- and post-murder phases.

## 6.1 COVERAGE IN DIFFERENT NEWSPAPERS

It is beyond doubt by now that there was enormous coverage of Rajiv Gandhi as an actor/source and of the macro theme associated with his murder, particularly in the second phase of seven days newspapers. Having said that, however, what is not plausibly clear from the charts illustrated above is what treatment the whole affair was meted out in the four newspapers individually in particular, and the Indian and the British newspapers put together in general. The exercise is specifically important to know how different newspapers covered the Rajiv Gandhi's assassination vis-à-vis other ubiquitous themes, especially 'campaigning', in the three constructed periods, as explained earlier on in this chapter. The figures in the following Tables (6.1 to 6.3) speak for themselves.

Table 6.1. [Phase 1 (Pre-Murder)]

|  | Total Responses | 'Campaigning' | 'Gandhi Murder' |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hindustan Times | 2043 | 945 (46) | - |
| Indian Express | 1459 | 683 (47) | - |
| The Times | 44 | 19 (43) | - |
| The Guardian | 24 | 10 (42) | - |

Table 6.2. [Phase 2 (Murder-Week)]

|  | Total Responses | 'Campaigning' | 'Gandhi Murder' |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hindustan Times | 578 | 134 (23) | 279 (48) |
| Indian Express | 463 | 123 (27) | 214 (46) |
| The Times | 60 | 4 (7) | 44 (73) |
| The Guardian | 77 | 6 (8) | 45 (58) |

Table 6.3 [Phase 3 (Post-Murder)]

|  | Total Responses | 'Campaigning' | 'Gandhi Murder' |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hindustan Times | 788 | 301 (38) | 174 (22) |
| Indian Express | 431 | 228 (53) | 91 (21) |
| The Times | 28 | 9 (32) | 10 (36) |
| The Guardian | 24 | 4 (17) | 5 (21) |

Tables show the coverage of two most mentioned themes in the four newspapers in three different phases; figures in parentheses show the percentages within the papers.

The contents of the three tables are quite simple and self explanatory, yet how the individual newspapers covered the incident can be better understood from the following mixed charts.

Figure 6.3



Coverage of Three Phases in The Hindustan Times

Figure 6.4



Coverage of Three Phases in Indian Express
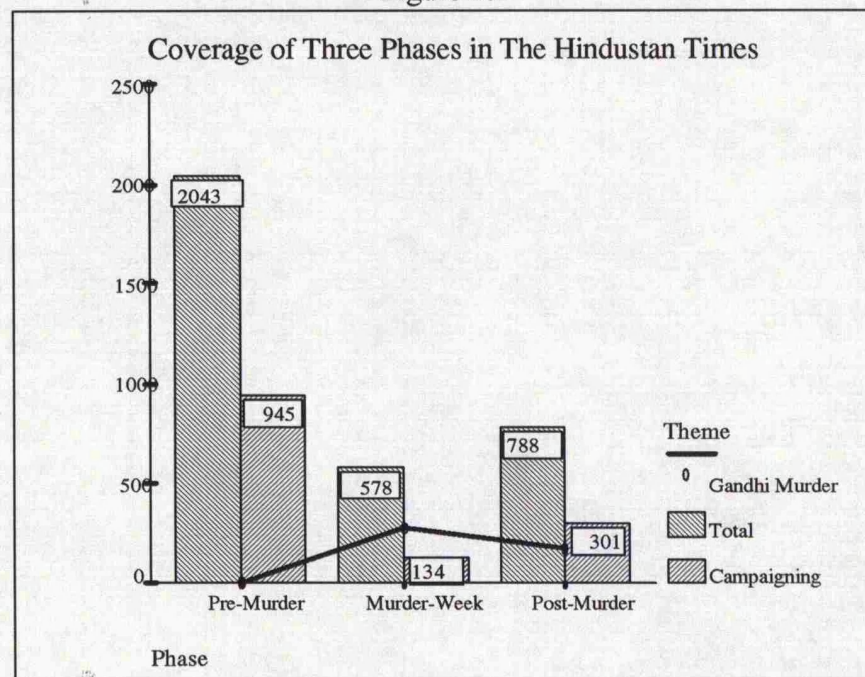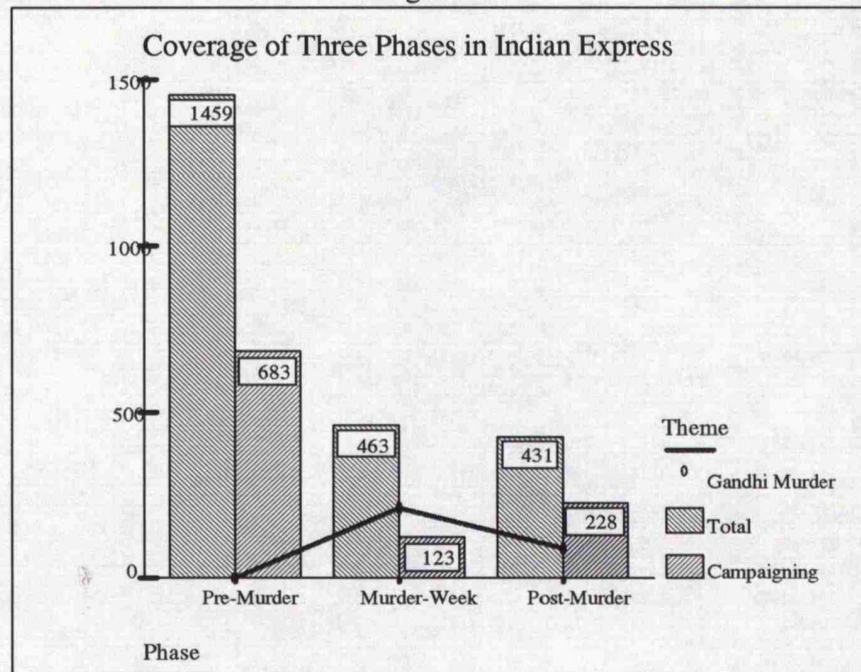
The above two (mixed) charts show how the macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder', as compared with the macro theme 'campaigning', was covered in the two Indian newspapers. While the bars in both the figures represent total themes and 'campaigning' (macro theme) respectively, the line represents the macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' in three different stages. It is clear from Figure 6.3 (*The Hindustan Times*) that in the second phase the theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' dominated over nearly half of the total responses; the curve is at double the height of the bar representing the most quoted macro theme 'campaigning'. In the third phase the curve gradually falls down to 174 responses. However, the curve in the post-murder period is much lower than the bar representing 'campaigning'. It shows that in the third phase the main macro theme again catches up leaving behind the 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' issue, which is nearly half of what it was in the second phase.

A somewhat similar picture emerges from Figure 6.4 which depicts the coverage of three phases in *Indian Express*. Of course, in the second stage the theme about 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' dominated the scene but, unlike in *The Hindustan Times*, the curve's

height is not more than double than that of the bar representing the macro theme 'campaigning'. In addition, again unlike *The Hindustan Times*, the curve in the third phase meets the bar of 'campaigning' at lower than its middle. It can, therefore, be argued that *The Hindustan Times* gave much importance to the macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder', even in the third phase, in relation to the most popular macro theme 'campaigning', whereas the same pattern was not witnessed in the coverage of *Indian Express*.

## 6.2 BRITISH NEWSPAPERS

How did the British newspapers cover the two overall most popular themes in the three periods, that is, before Rajiv Gandhi was killed in the bomb blast; during the week in which Rajiv Gandhi, as an actor and theme, was galore, and after all the ritual ceremonies in connection with the murder were over. Corresponding to the charts drawn for the Indian newspapers (Figures 6.3 and 6.4), a similar exercise was undertaken for the British newspapers which would, expectedly, delineate the issue at hand more clearly. For a better and easy understanding, the following figures should be seen in conjunction with the three Tables (6.1 to 6.3) given in the previous pages of this chapter.

Figure 6.5



Coverage of Three Phases in The Times
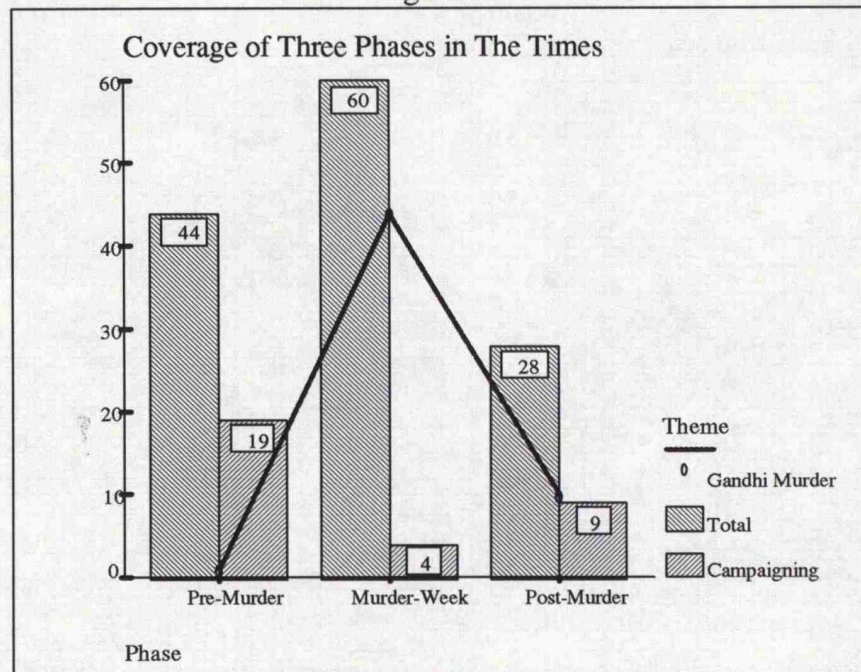
From a distance, the bars and the curves in both the Figures (6.5 and 6.6) seem to give a similar impression as available from the Figures 6.3 and 6.4. However, a closer examination will tell the difference. Of course, the trend is, by and large, the same. But there are subtle variations. No doubt, the curves in both *The Times* and *The Guardian*, as in the case of *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express*, show a quick rise in the second phase and then recede in the third phase, yet their relationship with the bars representing the most common macro theme is at discernible variance when looked at in relation to the Indian newspapers.

Figure 6.6



Coverage of Three Phases in The Guardian
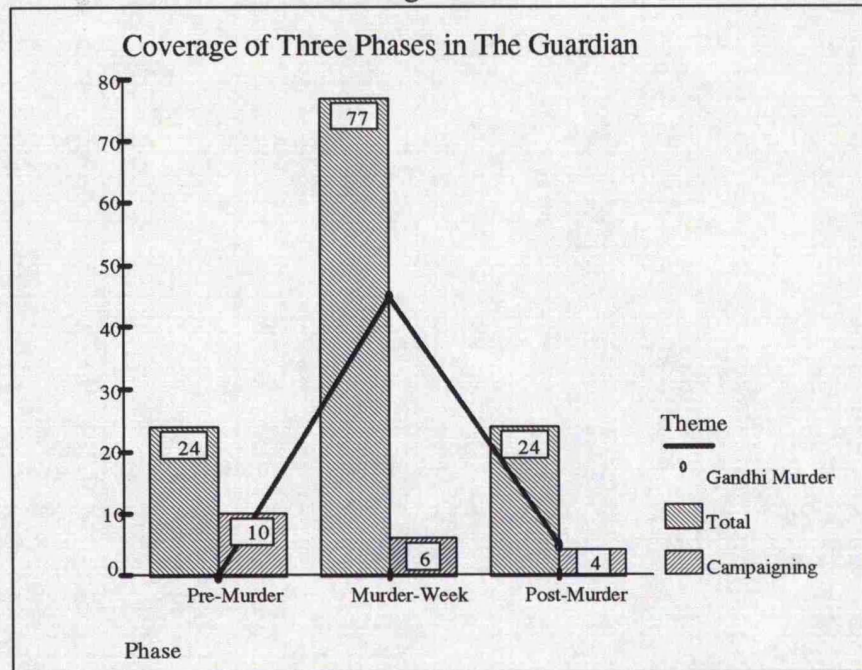
For example, let us posit this case at three levels. First, consider the responses offered to the macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' in the second phase, in both *The Times* and *The Guardian*. In *The Times*, as many as 73 per cent of the total responses in the second phase belonged to the 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' macro theme. *The Guardian* too gave an exuberant, though less than its British counterpart, 58 per cent of the total theme responses to the theme in discussion. The figures in both the British newspapers are much above the average of 49 per cent of the total theme responses concerning this theme in the second phase. Compared with the Indian newspapers, the British newspapers quoted the theme more liberally, within the newspapers, thus giving an indication that they provided, probably more than the share, a particularly high percentage of the total responses to the theme associated with the crisis situation - assassination.

Now consider it at the second level. The curve impersonating the assassination macro theme meets the bar (Figure 6.5) representing the total themes nearly at its top quarter, and it is a staggering eleven times higher at the scale (44) than the bar for the

otherwise most popular macro theme 'campaigning' (4). The highest margin in the Indian newspapers was just over double in the case of *The Hindustan Times* (Figure 6.2). In the case of *The Guardian*, the assassination-curve occupies well over half of the total responses in the second phase. Like its other British counterpart, the curve is at over seven times the height on the scale (45) than what the bar depicting the 'campaigning' macro theme is at (6).

Thirdly, despite the fact that the curves representing the macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' have steep falls in both the cases of *The Times* and *The Guardian* in the third phase, they terminate still over and above the bars showing the macro theme 'campaigning'. This stands in total contradiction with what the Indian newspapers had. Both *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* had many more responses in the post-murder phase related to general theme of 'campaigning' than the one concerning the 'Rajiv Gandhi murder', the latter newspaper even having double the responses for 'campaigning' than the murder.

What does this continuity, in the British newspapers, of quoting the macro theme associated with the assassination indicate? On the basis of the interpretation of the results presented in the tables and charts in this chapter, it can be argued that the British newspapers laid much more stress on a particular macro theme, than any other macro theme, right from the happening of the incident until the end of the campaign over four weeks later. This, important though it is, is beside the point that it was a major event and therefore needed to be given due coverage. What is relevant here is why the British newspapers focused on an issue/theme that has a connotation of a 'crisis' and continued to give it high priority well beyond the time the event had happened. The coverage of this theme in the Indian newspapers portrays a different picture.

It is a proof enough, and need not be overemphasised, that the assassination of an important political figure amid the election campaign indeed carried weight insofar as its likely political consequences, as discussed later on in this chapter. The copious coverage of this macro theme in the Indian newspapers vindicates that point. But what is of pertinent concern here is that while the Indian newspapers - which would be arguably more concerned with the aftermath of the assassination vis-à-vis its long term effects on the political scene - after their initial voluminous coverage did have a respite in the third phase as far as the quoting of this macro theme is in question, the British newspapers not only gave extraordinary coverage to this theme, but also maintained the pace until the very end, in relation to the coverage of other themes.

One more thing: *The Guardian* did not write a single editorial on any election issue, even of its own choice, throughout the campaign period. However, the same newspaper wrote two editorials immediately after the killing of Rajiv Gandhi. On 22 May, an editorial entitled, 'Now India stares into a void' appeared, while the following day another editorial was written on 'Dynasties can't deliver the future'. Also, there were many more articles and comments in the second phase of the coverage. It is bewildering to reach a conclusion as to why two editorials in a row and several items on analysis/comment etc. appeared in the second phase lasting just for a week, while there was no editorial and very few other analytical items in the whole of three weeks time prior to the assassination (cf., Singh, 1993). This can be explained in two ways. First, it is argued, that it shows the priority of the newspapers, for an editorial will be written on an event which the editor thinks is of extraordinary importance. The decision to select such a topic is exclusively that of the editor, or the management he works under. Second, an event like that of Gandhi's assassination has more human-interest news value which makes it more probable for its coverage.

*The Times* too wrote two editorials in the second phase. The one appearing on 22 May read, 'END OF A DYNASTY', while the one three days later was entitled, 'SONIA

GANDHI'S GOOD SENSE'. *The Times*, however, unlike its British counterpart, did write one editorial in the first phase on 11 May as well. It is significant to add here that Sonia Gandhi, the widow of Rajiv Gandhi was the second most quoted actor, after Rajiv Gandhi, in both the British newspapers (Chapter 5). She was referred to in nine per cent of the items in *The Times* and seven per cent of the items in *The Guardian* as compared with just one per cent in each of the Indian newspapers. It seems that the newspapers identified more comfortably with Italian born Sonia Gandhi than any other Indian leader.

## 6.3 SUCCESSION, DYNASTY AND SYMPATHY WAVE

Perhaps the killing of no other leader in India would have created such complexities, within and outside the party, as Rajiv Gandhi's. It is, however, not to suggest that no other leader is, or was, to match the political strength and sagacity that Rajiv Gandhi was said to have possessed, but due to the fact that he was also holding the presidency of the Congress (I) party and had been named as the would-be prime minister, if his party succeeded in the elections, and as an editorial in *Indian Express* argued, 'there is no doubt that Rajiv Gandhi's death has altered the configuration of Indian politics more decisively than even Mrs. Gandhi's. Indian politics has been thrown into a melting pot as never before' (*Indian Express*, 23 May, 1991: 8). His sudden death definitely posed a very big problem for the party insofar as a new leader was to be sought. The party was in such a floundering state that it could not name the successor to the departed leader for one week.

More obfuscating and embarrassing was the drama enacted after the death of Rajiv Gandhi. The day after he was killed, the spokesman for the Congress (I) party declared in the press conference that Sonia Gandhi had been unanimously elected the leader of the party (see, for instance, *Indian Express*, 23 May 1991). Later on, however, it emerged, to the consternation of many in the party, that Sonia Gandhi was never taken

into confidence before she was named as the new president of the party. The next day the newspapers reported that Sonia Gandhi had declined the Congress (I) chief post (see, for instance, *The Hindustan Times*, 24 May 1991).

All the newspapers provided this and later events in connection with the succession to the assassinated leader a wide coverage. There were two aspects of the taking over of the leadership of Congress (I) party. One was that a group of Congress (I) men was bent upon making Sonia Gandhi the President of the party, though there was another advantage they saw in her leadership, and this was to win the sympathy of the electorate to better the electoral prospects (see, for instance, *India Today*, 15 June, 1991: 105), as happened in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination, when Rajiv Gandhi became the prime minister with a big majority. However, as Lloyd Rudolph argues, 'any prospects of a politically relevant sympathy factor affecting voting in the subsequent two rounds was aborted the day after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination when Sonia Gandhi, unlike Rajiv on the day of his mother's death, turned down an instant offer by a rump of the Congress Working Committee to lead the party by succeeding Rajiv as party president' (Rudolph, 1993: 438-9). A lot more leaders came into the fray to claim their right to lead the party after Sonia Gandhi's refusal, but the act finally came to an end on 29 May, when P.V. Narasimha Rao was named as the president of Congress (I).

The second aspect of filling the vacancy of party post was directly linked with the continuity of dynasty. As discussed above, there was a political motive behind asking Sonia Gandhi to succeed her late husband. It was an attempt to pass over to another member of the Gandhi family the legacy left behind by the man, who 'represented the Nehru-Gandhis, the modern Mughals. And in a largely feudal society, where dynasties do matter, Rajiv's death is not an ordinary event. It sends signals of insecurity to the common man who largely reacts on emotions rather than on logic' (*India Today*, 15 June, 1991: 110). It was precisely this reason why in a mood of undue alacrity Sonia

Gandhi was declared the new incumbent for the party post, even when the body of her slain husband was still lying in state.

To give an account how these micro themes were covered in the four newspapers, let us have a look at the following table.

Table 6.4
Frequencies of Micro Themes under 'Rajiv Gandhi Murder'

|  | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sympathy Factor | 71 (2) | 32 (1) | 8 (6) | 8 (6) |
| Dynasty | 4 (<1) | 7 (<1) | 5 (4) | 5 (4) |
| Succession | 19 (<1) | 31 (1) | 15 (11) | 12 (9) |

The Table shows the coverage of micro themes in four newspapers; figures in parentheses represent percentages within the paper; percentages have been rounded up to the nearest point.

The contents of Table 6.4 show that the British newspapers were way ahead their Indian counterparts so far as the coverage of three micro themes is concerned. No doubt the succession to Rajiv Gandhi was a crucial matter, yet the magnitude of responses it received in both *The Times* and *The Guardian* goes beyond the simple explanation that it was an important issue for them. While *The Times* quoted this micro theme in as many as 11 per cent of the items, *The Guardian* did not lag far behind with nine per cent of responses devoted to the micro theme of succession. Compared with these figures, the Indian newspapers look dwarfed in respect of the coverage of this micro theme (one per cent in *Indian Express*, and less than one per cent in *The Hindustan Times*).

Similarly, the issue of sympathy wave was referred to in six per cent of the items in each of the British newspapers in relation to two per cent and one per cent in *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* respectively. The micro theme 'dynasty' was

again a favourite one with both *The Times* (four per cent) and *The Guardian* (four per cent). The corresponding figures for both *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* fell short of even one per cent. There was a marked difference in the coverage of the third micro theme 'succession' in the Indian and the British newspapers. As is exhibited in Table 6.4, *The Times* took the lead with 11 per cent followed by *The Guardian* with 9 per cent of the cases in which this micro theme was referred. Conversely, in the Indian newspapers there was very little (one and less than one per cent in *Indian Express* and *The Hindustan Times* respectively) mention of the theme related to succession. Obviously then, the British newspapers showed more concern in the micro themes associated with Rajiv Gandhi's murder. This apparently is testament to the importance a VIP like Gandhi, well known at the international level, attracts from the foreign press.

Since the issue of sympathy factor played an important role in the final outcome of the election in India, we can do, perhaps, a little more with this subject. Why there was so much hue and cry about Congress (I) party's likely gains in the second and third rounds of polling in the advent of the assassination of its leader has its roots in the 1984 elections. It may be recalled that within hours of the killing of Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India, on 31 October 1984, her son Rajiv Gandhi was sworn in as prime minister, who announced, after the last rites of his mother were completed, that parliamentary elections would be held on December 24 (see, for instance, Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993: 261). Rajiv Gandhi won a massive electoral victory with 48.1 per cent of the vote - the highest ever for the Congress (I) - and 77 per cent of the seats contested (ibid.). The great Congress (I) landslide victory was 'largely a product of the famous "sympathy wave" for Rajiv Gandhi' (Brass, 1993: 273). There are, however, varying views about whether the sympathy factor played any significant role in the victory of Congress (I) in the 1991 election, though it still remained a few seats short of a majority.

Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in the late hours of 21 May when he was still on his election campaign tour for the remaining two laps of polling meant for 23 and 26 May. His death gave a new turn to the political strategies of not only his party but also the other major political parties vying with one another for wooing the voters. Under the changed circumstances the poll was rescheduled for 12 and 15 June. Congress (I) party as expected, put all its resources in the single factor of winning the 'sympathy' vote. This, as explained previously, was why the party turned in unison to Sonia Gandhi to make the most out of the 'sympathy' factor.

There was a visible shift in the poll modus operandi of the BJP. The party decided 'to delete all references to Rajiv Gandhi and his alleged misdeeds from election propaganda' and project senior party leader Atal Behari Vajpayee 'as the Muslim vote man . . . to directly sweet-talk the Muslim electorate' (*India Today*, 15 June, 1991: 116). In addition, the party strategy was not to mention the killing of Rajiv Gandhi. It was, the party bosses thought, best to ignore the sympathy factor in a bid to counter it. Instead, they decided to 'play the patriotic card' and project itself as 'the saviour of the nation, the sole guarantor of its stability and unity, in front of an electorate, disturbed and sickened by the violence of the assassination' (*India Today*, 30 June, 1991).[5]

So was the case with the other major parties like Janata Dal and SJP. The JD's new tactic was to stop harping on the Mandal issue and instead give stress to the Congress (I)'s inability to select a leader. The party also decided 'to train its guns on the BJP' (for details, see for instance, ibid.). The SJP saw a new strategy in the prospects of forging a post-poll alliance with the Congress (I), while keeping the Left and the BJP at a distance (ibid.). The parties, therefore, came up with renewed poll promises and slogans in a bid to counter the newly emerged electoral picture. It is clear that while

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[5]As is a well known fact that stability was the main plank of Congress before the assassination of its leader, but in the second round of electioneering, the BJP's changed strategy included stability as the new addition to their poll promises. The Congress leaders accused the latter of snatching the stability theme from it (see for instance, *Indian Express*, 28 May 1991)

the Congress (I) opposition parties' best efforts were to negate the sympathy factor, the Congress (I) itself sat smugly on the hope of milking the maximum out of the consolation as a result of the killing of its stalwart, as it happened in 1984.

Was the sympathy factor, if it was there, translated into more seats for the Congress (I)? There are, as stated early on, conflicting views on the presence of a sympathy wave in the wake of the murder of Rajiv Gandhi. While some political scientists and psephologists agree to the presence of such a wave (for instance, Prannoy Roy-*India Today* combine, 1991; Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek, 1993), others (notably, Rudolph, 1993) take the opposite view and explain the situation in a different way. Still there are some others (for instance, Brass, 1993: Gould and Ganguly, 1993) who take a middle line.

Prannoy Roy, while analysing the results of the 1991 election in *India Today*, argues that 'the assassination was definitely a factor in increasing the Congress's vote percentage'. He offers an explanation for that: 'voters who may have been leaning towards the party but may not have been motivated enough or too apathetic to vote eventually, were jolted by the tragedy into coming out in large numbers to vote for the party during the second phase of polling' (*India Today*, 15 July 1991: 40-42). Similar views come from Hardgrave Jr. and Kochanek (1993) who posit that, 'the assassination had a dramatic effect on the election results. The first round, before the assassination, had reflected a shift away from the Congress. In the second and third rounds that followed the assassination, however, there was a swing of sympathy votes in favour of the Congress'.

In contrast to the above opinion, Lloyd Rudolph does not seem to subscribe to the idea of a sympathy wave. In fact, he argues that the gain of Congress (I) in terms of number of seats in the second phase of polling was not because there was a sympathy vote but because of the absence of Rajiv Gandhi. According to him, 'after May 21, with the

disappearance of the principal source of anti-Congressism, national politics quickly adjusted, moving during Phase 2 toward a realignment that restored Congress's classic centrist position. The restoration of Congress centrism and moderation offered a way out of the polarising politics of mandir and mandal that threatened to divide the country by religion or by caste and class' (Rudolph, 1993: 436-454).

Rudolph's thesis, therefore, is that people voted for Congress (I) because there was no dynasty-centred Congressism which, according to him, people did not like. So, since there was no dynasty-centred person at the helm of the affairs, voters' earlier stance did not have any relevance, and thus the swing in favour of Congress (I). The sort of sympathy wave witnessed in the 1984 election after the assassination of Indira Gandhi was clearly not there. However, there is still another view according to which the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi may not have had the impact his mother's had, yet there was a change in the tone of the campaign as a result of which the Congress (I) might have won a few more seats (for instance, Gould and Ganguly, 1993: 221-224; Brass, 1993: 255-279). The Congress (I) in the 1984-elections, which followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi, won the highest percentage of seats (76.7). That is why the analysts believe that Rajiv Gandhi's murder could not get the sort of sympathy vote which his mother's death generated.

6.4 ADVERTISEMENTS

Between the period from 22 until 29 May, that is, the constructed second phase, both the Indian newspapers carried some advertisements on their pages, mostly in connection with the Rajiv Gandhi's murder, as a homage to the departed leader. A brief account of these advertisements in the Indian newspapers is given here. As described in Chapter 5, there was no advertisement in the British newspapers, either before, during or after the assassination.

On 22 May, when the first news about the assassination was published in the newspapers everywhere, *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* carried one advertisement each, respectively on page 17 and page 5. The advertisement in both the newspapers was the same, issued by the General Secretary, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (I), Bangalore.[6] The advertisement entitled, "In India we have tasted the fruits of Secularism and Stability", however, was not in connection with the murder that happened the previous day. Obviously, the advertisement had already been issued to the newspapers and, therefore, was carried as planned.

In the whole period of seven days, *Indian Express* carried four advertisements, the one, as stated above, on 22 May, and one each on the following day, 25 May and 29 May. The advertisement published on 23 May was entitled, HOMAGE, and was released by a private entrepreneur, M/S Sharma Transports of Bangalore. On 25 May an insertion was given through which a condolence meeting was called by Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, of which Rajiv Gandhi was the Chairman. On 29 May another small advertisement was published on behalf of a Christian organisation, Church of South India.

In comparison with *Indian Express*, *The Hindustan Times* printed as many as ten advertisements, including the one on 22 May, as described above. The rest of the nine advertisements were printed on 24 May (four), 25 May (two) and 28 may (three). Out of the four insertions on 24 May, three were given by private parties, including a business group, while one was issued by the Chairman and Members of the Board of Trustees, Indian Institute of Ecology and Environment. All advertisements each carried a photograph of Rajiv Gandhi. On 25 may there were two advertisements. One was the same as was published in *Indian Express* (see above), and the other was given by a

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[6]According to the original schedule of polling, seven states in the country were to have two-day poll. The state of Karnataka were to go to polls on 23 May, for 10 seats, and on 26 May, for rest of the 18 seats. This advertisement, therefore, was issued to the newspapers meant to be printed on 22 May, in view of attracting the voters for the polls yet to be held the following day and on 26 May.

private business group. Similarly, out of the three insertions appearing on 28 May, two were again printed on behalf of private people, whereas one was by the Indian Commercial Pilots' Association, of which Rajiv Gandhi had been a member.

There could be two explanations for more advertisements in *The Hindustan Times* (10) than in *Indian Express* (4). One, *The Hindustan Times* has much larger circulation in Delhi and around than its counterpart, as a result of which the advertisers would like to advertise in it. It is difficult to say, but the second reason could be associated with *The Hindustan Times'* inclination for the party Rajiv Gandhi was leader of. However, in no way could this explanation be carried too far to jump to any conclusions of the paper's bias for Congress (I).

## 6.5 JOURNALISTS' VIEW

The journalists who were interviewed during the field visit (Chapter 7) were also asked to give their opinion about the impact the Rajiv Gandhi's assassination had on the electoral outcome. By and large, all journalists were of the view that Congress (I) won more seats in the wake of the assassination. They believed that Rajiv Gandhi's assassination had spread some sort of sympathy wave which translated into some more seats. Many also held the view that Congress (I)'s win was at the cost of the BJP, which was upcoming very fast (for instance, Ghose, *IE*, 1991; Rajagopalan, *HT*, 1991).

Since it happened when first round of polling was already completed the day before, the assassination certainly would not have had as big impact on the outcome as it did after the Indira Gandhi's killing. However, the journalists argue that still the Congress (I) reaped the benefit of sympathy vote in the second and the third rounds of voting. According to one view, before the elections there was the general feeling that the BJP may win the majority seats and thus may come to power, if not on its own, with support from some other parties. This was possible because the BJP had been able to

make some inroads in the South, until now a strong bastion of Congress (I). So, after the assassination it was clear that whatever the advantage the BJP had got before the election slipped from under its feet, and in the post assassination period the Congress (I) received more seats at the cost of the BJP (Vasudevan, *HT*, 1991).

However, the above assessment is refuted by one of the foreign correspondents interviewed for the purpose. Christopher Thomas therefore argues that Rajiv Gandhi's assassination certainly got a sympathy wave in Tamilnadu, whereas overall in the North the sympathy wave was marginal or non-existent. He further believes that Rajiv Gandhi was heading for victory and, therefore, voting after his assassination made, if at all, only a marginal difference. (Thomas, *The Times*, 1991).

It is opined that if the assassination took place before polling started, the Congress (I) might have gained many more seats (Benedict, *IE*, 1991), and if the assassination did not happen at all, there would have been a hung- parliament (Singh, *IE*, 1991). Ghosh, on the other hand, argues that 'it (assassination) had tremendous impact and one thing is definite that if entire election had finished before Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the Congress (I) might not have had such a telling impact in the second half and it wouldn't have got so many seats in the South because the sympathy factor did make a lasting impression' (Ghosh, *HT*, 1991).

The sympathy vote came from the areas where the Congress (I) was otherwise expecting to get some seats anyway, but in the states where it was not expected to do very well, it did not. The special correspondent of *Indian Express* argues that it was difficult to make out whether the assassination had changed anything at all. In Uttar Pradesh it didn't. But in areas like Andhra Pradesh where the party was going to get some votes, there the voter turned completely in favour of Congress (I). It made a difference of 50 to 70 seats, in which the BJP was the loser (Chaudhary, *IE*, 1991). The executive editor of *Indian Express* thinks that Congress (I) did better in Andhra

Pradesh and the entire South because Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated there. Therefore, the people who were partially going to vote for the opposition did so for the Congress. In North-India, however, it did have the impact in terms of votes, not seats. So, Rajiv Gandhi's killing had got in more votes than the party would have got otherwise. (Chawla, *IE*, 1991).

Another view from the foreign correspondent of *The Guardian* corroborates what some Indian journalists have offered that, had the assassination not taken place, the Congress (I) might not have been able to form the government and instead it would have been the BJP. Derek Brown argues:

> In the immediate aftermath of the second and third rounds of balloting, it seemed to me that the assassination had had very little effect on the overall result. But when the final figures were available, it became apparent that there had been a distinct, though vary variable, sympathy factor. It was much more apparent in the south where the Congress had been wiped out in the first round in Andhra Pradesh, for example, but bounced back to win nearly all the subsequent contests. In the north there was also a sympathy wave, but much less strong; not enough to counter the tidal wave of BJP support in Uttar Pradesh, for instance. We will never know for certain, of course, but it seems reasonable to speculate that had Rajiv survived, India might now have a BJP-led minority government.
>
> (Brown, *The Guardian*, 1991)

The actual results indicate that even though the Congress (I) won the highest number of seats in the elections, its vote percentage went down from 39.5 in the previous elections to 37.6 per cent in the present. On the other hand, the BJP not only increased its strength in the Parliament from 85 to 119, its vote share also went up from 11.4 to 21 per cent. The fact that BJP's candidates came second in as many as 130 constituencies shows that the party may have been able to win many more seats had Rajiv Gandhi not been assassinated, which won sympathy from the electorate.

## 6.6 CONCLUSION

It is abundantly clear that the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi invoked wide spread coverage not only in the Indian newspapers, but also in their British counterparts. All newspapers projected the incident on their front pages, the day after the bomb blast killed Rajiv Gandhi and others. All the newspapers concentrated on the macro theme concerning Rajiv Gandhi's assassination for at least one week until his last rites were completed. The foregoing analysis shows that in the three constructed phases, while the first phase was full of the most quoted macro theme 'campaigning', the second phase contained nearly half of the total responses concerning the macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder'. This is double the responses offered to 'campaigning' in the second phase.

Even the second and the third phases considered together show that the macro theme on Rajiv Gandhi's murder received more coverage than the otherwise most quoted theme 'campaigning'. The results, therefore, indicate that the newspapers found more news value in the personality of Rajiv Gandhi than any other factor at the time. Not only the theme but also Rajiv Gandhi as an actor was referred to the most in the second phase, lasting just for a week. It can be argued that the event made Rajiv Gandhi a very important actor, and particularly in the second phase he did not have to compete with other actors to get into the news.

The newspaper-wise analysis shows that all the four newspapers gave very extensive coverage to the macro theme on Gandhi's assassination. However, between the Indian newspapers, *The Hindustan Times* gave more coverage to this theme than *Indian Express*. While *Indian Express* gave far less than half the responses, in relation to 'campaigning', to the murder issue in the third phase, *The Hindustan Times* had more than half such responses. *The Hindustan Times* also published more advertisements in the second phase than its counterpart. The conclusion may be stretched to the point

that perhaps *The Hindustan Times* was more inclined, in comparison with *Indian Express*, towards the coverage of Rajiv Gandhi.

Both British newspapers gave extraordinarily high coverage to the macro theme about Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. *The Times* had on its pages nearly three-fourths of the total responses in the second phase devoted to this macro theme, while *The Guardian* too offered 58 per cent of the responses to this theme. The figures were 11 times and seven times higher respectively in the British newspapers in respect of this macro theme than the otherwise most quoted theme 'campaigning', which are apparently very high when compared with the Indian newspapers. It is further found that while *The Guardian* did not write a single editorial on any issue in the whole of the campaign period, it published two editorials in just one week following the killing of Rajiv Gandhi. *The Times* also wrote two editorials during this period.

These findings appear to indicate that while the newspapers in both the countries concentrated, particularly in the second constructed phase, on the coverage of the themes linked with Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the British newspapers continued to stress these themes vis-à-vis the other major theme 'campaigning', even in the third phase. Conversely, the Indian newspapers switched back to the main theme 'campaigning' and put less emphasis on the Rajiv Gandhi murder issues. Evidently, the priorities of the press in two different settings are different. While the Indian press was showing its concern for the post-murder campaign, its British counterpart, seemingly, found more news values in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination and the themes associated with that, well after the event had passed.

There were a great many speculations about the sympathy wave in the wake of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination. The journalists interviewed are almost unanimous in their opinion that his murder did tilt the scales in the favour of Congress (I), in the second and third rounds of voting. They believe that Congress (I) was able to translate the

sympathy vote into seats and raise its tally in the House. Many journalists also agree that the Congress (I)'s win was at the cost of BJP, which came second in as many as 130 constituencies.

# Chapter 7

CHAPTER 7

JOURNALISTS' PERSPECTIVE

Newspaper production is the result of a combined effort of many people entrusted with different responsibilities. Journalists, however, hold the key to what a reader can expect to read in a newspaper, though there is, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, a very little direct contact between both the parties. The process of prioritising the issues on any given day in general, but during the election campaigns in particular, rests, implicitly, if not explicitly, with the journalists, as already discussed in Chapter 3.

Apart from what is finally printed in a newspaper, journalists seem to have their own view points about the events they report. The literature is not wanting on the issue of what is involved when a journalist, even if he is unmindful, weaves his story around the information he has collected, for his working is affected by the 'news culture' he operates in, or the 'cultural symbols' he uses, or the ownership and control of the organisation he is employed in (see, for instance, Nasser, 1985; Hartmann and Husband, 1974; Curran, 1991). Whether their personal opinion is reflected in their reportage is, however, very difficult to measure, for most of them will stick, as shown later in this chapter, to the view that they only report the facts. To widen the scope of this study, as mentioned in Chapter 4, 16 journalists were interviewed to know their perspective about their profession as such, but especially in relation to India's 1991 elections.

Their views will throw some light on what conditions they have to work under when elections are around; what, according to them, are the news values on the basis of which they select/reject the daily quota; what were the issues/themes central to the election; and what degree of freedom they enjoyed at work. Their views on journalist-audience and journalist-source relationships will also be explored. Many scholars and

journalists have researched these points through empirical data, a relevant portion of which has already been discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

## 7.1 METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

As mentioned earlier, the term journalist is used in a wider sense to include reporters/correspondents, sub-editors, news editors and editors. This particularly so because it is their collective activity which brings out the newspaper, though the degree of responsibility within the newspaper may vary according to individual's position. It was, therefore, necessary to interview all those involved in the process. Consequently, to have a balance, seven journalists were selected from each Indian newspaper, namely, *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express*.

The seven journalists form each newspaper included: the executive editor, news editor, two chief sub-editors, two special correspondents and one generalist (for details, see Appendix F). Since the study includes two British newspapers, therefore, their foreign reporters based in Delhi were also subjected to interviews. It was thought important to know what kind of perception they held about their reporting a Third World country. Since most of the news stories appearing about India in *The Times* and *The Guardian* are sent by their own correspondents, it was deemed two interviews would suffice.

With this aim, a semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to administer to the seleceted journalists. Before this interview schedule could be put to practice, however, it was pre-tested by interviewing Indian journalists, who had covered the 1991 election in India. In the light of that the interview schedule was amended accordingly. Special care was taken to select only those journalists for interview who were actually involved in the coverage of the election campaign in 1991 with the assumption that they would be in a better position to comment on the issues involved.

All journalists were interviewed during the period ranging from April to early June 1992. There is an important point to be made in relation to the time when the journalists were interviewed. It should be recalled that the coverage of the election campaign took place from the last day of April until 15 June 1991. It is, therefore, clear that the interviews were held nearly a year after the event had been reported by these journalists. Since one year is a substantial gap, there is a possibility that the journalists may not have been able to recollect very precisely what had happened a year ago. Although no journalist admitted in clear terms that they did not remember what exactly had taken place during the elections they themselves covered a year before, some variation in their views and what exactly it was like should not be ruled out.

It is not that I was totally ignorant about this sort of possibility. In fact there were impelling reasons to go ahead with it. One, there was the practical constraint related to the conception of the subject for study. It took sometime to prepare the theoretical layout of the proposed research because of which it was not possible to contact the journalists immediately after the coverage of elections. Second, a formal approval was necessary from the sponsors of the programme, which again was not within my own reach. Third, and perhaps more important, it was assumed that since a large chunk of the questions to be put to the journalists were, by and large, of a general nature, the time gap may not have serious implication on what they would say.

All 16 interviews with these journalists were conducted in Delhi. All those journalists approached heeded to my request of being interviewed, with alacrity. All interviews were recorded with their prior permission. As stated above, the questions were constructed in such a way as to allow the journalist the scope of giving his/her thoughts in more detail, if and when necessary. All but one journalists were male. The interviews lasted from half an hour to one-and-a-half hours. Since there were various categories of journalists selected for interviews, with different responsibilities, some

additional questions were asked to particular type of them. The recorded interviews were then transcribed for the analysis.

## 7.2 JOURNALIST-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

If, on the one hand, it is a journalist who occupies a strategic position in the whole gamut of news production, on the other hand, it is the audience that has immense importance on the receiving end. Both are complementary to each other, though there is a very little direct contact with one another of these two groups. However invisible their relationship, it is important, indeed. It is not only the theory that ascribes to such views, but also most of the journalists interviewed themselves attach great importance, as shown in the ensuing pages, to their readers.

The audience of newspapers occupies an exalted position vis-à-vis journalists. It has been referred to from 'back bone' (Chawla, *IE*, 1992) of any newspaper to 'supreme' (Ghose, *HT*, 1992), and in the ladder of importance it occupies the 'uppermost' (Tripathi, *IE*, 1992) rung and a reader is the 'main focus' (Rajagopalan, *HT*, 1992). It is not only that the reporter-journalists whose onus it is to gather information, who show such concern about the readers, but also the people who manage the desk and are responsible for bringing out the actual copy of an issue.

Although a journalist working in the field may appear to having a better rapport with his readers, it is not the fact, according to a chief sub-editor. Rather he says, 'being a desk man, we have to take care of the reader. Reporters may be ignorant about the readers but we can't afford to be. We have to look into all aspects of reader's interests, what he expects from our newspaper. We also go for making the sentences very clear for him' (Singh, *HT*, 1992). However, one of his peers has more analytical thought about his readership. Ashok Sahay divides his readers into three categories of 'semi-literate', 'curious-half-educated' and 'intelligent and sensible' (Sahay, *HT*, 1992). He

candidly admits that he has a penchant for the last group, though he has to cater to all the categories.

Does a special correspondent view his audience from a different angle? Not really, but he thinks that he owes more to his readers than merely reporting the event. He infers that the relationship between journalist and reader is of 'extreme importance because unless you understand your reader - what kind of audience you are catering to - you will be failing in your duty to report events. Because as a special correspondent my job is just not to report facts but to interpret for the readers as well' (Singh, *IE*, 1992).

Although most working journalists attach so much significance to their readers and go to the extent of saying that 'informing them is not just my top priority; it is my only priority' (Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992), yet do they live up to the expectations of the readers? The answer to this question has mixed responses. Not many journalists say an emphatic yes, though, Prabhu Chawla, the executive editor of *Indian Express* insists 'yes we have been because we are the only paper which presents some kind of a freedom of press. But for us, freedom of press would not have been there in this country; because readers are interested in free information without fear and favour' (Chawla, *IE*, 1992).

Some of the Indian journalists seem quite modest when they say that 'we do try' (Singh, *HT*, 1992) 'to a large extent' (Tripathi, *IE*, 1992) to come up to the expectations of the readers, but most admit that there is always a scope for improvement, for they have their handicap in 'severe time constraint' (Rajagopalan, *HT*, 1992) and 'lack of space' (Chawla, *IE*, 1992). There is also another limitation of feedback from the audience. A view from a special correspondent will help understand the matter more clearly:

> With political writing, it is more different; you get far less of feedback and
> you are much more of part of the political process. For instance, a
> politician will make a particular statement through me for his rival or the
> party - instead of saying it directly to the PM or somebody else in the party
> or to the opposition. So the media are, at least in India, very much part of
> this political process. So the feedback from the readers is much less,
> though the interest in politics is extremely intensive . . .
>
> (Chaudhary, *IE*, 1992)

Another interviewee corroborates the above view and says, 'what you perceive they (readers) want and what you are able to do, that's all to it. This is great drawback in our system' (Rajagopalan, *HT*, 1992). One of the journalists from India, however, admits that he does 'not' justify the expectations of the readers. He offers an explanation, 'People buy *The Hindustan Times* mainly because of ads and because it carries the largest number of news. And those who buy because of ads are usually trade people . . . I am not going to cater to their taste' (Sahay, *HT*, 1992). Nevertheless, however, he too 'wants to attempt to give the truth in short and simple form' (ibid.).

Despite the journalists' value laden adjectives used for their readers, a sort of gap, it seems, remains between what the former think is important and what the latter have. In the absence of a direct link with and due to lack of feedback from the audience, it will not be possible to know the minds of the readers as to whether what they are fed is what they were looking for. There is, almost in all newspapers, a provision of reserving some space wherein the readers can give vent to their feelings but, as can be experienced, there is a very limited scope for the vast array of readers to have their letters published and the final control of publishing or rejecting a reader's point of view rests with the newspaper.[1] In the process, thus, it is the journalist who will give what

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[1]There are not many studies available on the subject of letter-to-editor. The one, however, is quite comprehensive and useful in which respondents were asked to give their opinion about the letter-to-editor columns. Questions were also asked to the editors (particularly letters editor) as to what criteria did he apply to select or reject a letter etc. For details, see, Ericson *et al*, 1989.

*he* thinks is important for the readers, but in reality which may not be what the latter really want to have.

To the question 'how did your newspaper fare in the coverage of elections vis-à-vis other newspapers and broadcast media', almost all journalists said that they fared well. No journalist from *The Hindustan Times* ever named *Indian Express* during their conversations; no journalist from *Indian Express* ever mentioned *The Hindustan Times* for comparisons. However, at least two journalists, one each from *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* did express that the coverage of elections in *The Times of India* (another respectable newspaper from Delhi) was very good (Chaudhary, *IE*; Singh, *HT*, 1992). One of the journalists from *The Hindustan Times* admitted that 'we were not very bad . . . may be in some cases, like *The Times of India* - they used to come out very early with the reports. . . but we used to follow their reports (Singh, *HT*, 1992).

The electronic media in India are controlled and run by one of the government ministries, where 'politicians and civil servants make all editorial and programming decisions' (Pink, 1989). Many a time they have been accused of taking explicit lines in favour of the government (see, for instance, ibid.). This is why their use in the dissemination of political information has not been very popular. On the other hand, the press, as described in Chapter 2, is privately owned without any direct pressures from the government. It is not to suggest, however, that all newspapers steer clear of any political preferences or inclinations. The press in particular became the target of coercion during the 1975-77 emergency. So while comparing the coverage in the newspapers with that of broadcast media it is not very surprising to know from all Indian journalists who shared the opinion that broadcast media were under the control of the government and therefore 'they had their own compulsions' (Vasudevan, *HT*, 1992), though 'in (declaring) results they were faster' (Singh, *HT*, 1992) than the press.

How the elections were covered by the journalists can be understood in a young reporter's words:

> Speaking for my newspaper generally the coverage was quite good. Although it is considered, may be right-of-centre, but considerations apart, the coverage was pretty straight. We covered large number of areas - in fact the maximum number of constituencies possible - and the reportage was quite straight without any slant given. Our editor had already given us directions before not to give any slant because people have realised by now, especially editors, that these things really don't matter in the larger interests and may be political parties also realise that too. And by and large was quite good.
>
> (Ghosh, *HT*, 1992)

## 7.3 SOURCE-JOURNALIST RELATIONSHIP

A journalist, in most cases, has to deal with sources who feed him with information necessary for juxtaposing a news story because 'political news is the joint creation of the journalists who assemble and report events and other political communicators - politicians, professionals, and spokespersons - who promote them' (Nimmo, 1978: 193). It is well known, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, that sources occupying higher positions - by virtue of the offices they hold, or sheer political power they possess - are in greater demand. (this relationship, as presented in Chapter 3, has been studied by many researchers - for instance, Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Ericson *et al*, 1989; Sigal, 1973). The place of the 'accredited sources', who become the 'primary definers' (Hall *et al*, 1978), however strategic and important it may be, is far from having the 'sole authority' (cf. Schlesinger, 1991). But at the same time it is an accepted norm that in political matters, 'the more authoritative the source the greater the access to the press' (Nimmo, 1978: 197).

The journalists were asked to give their views about the relationship they enjoyed with their sources and the regulation of the flow of information, if any, from the side of the sources.[2] All of the journalists, who actually reported on India's 1991 election campaign, were unison in their belief that it is of utmost importance to have sources who provide you with basic information, though it is argued that the more economic or political power a source has, the more likely he or she is to influence news reports (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). All journalists said they had cordial relationship with their respective sources. Derek Brown, the foreign correspondent of *The Guardian* based at Delhi, suggests that relationship with sources is much more 'straightforward' and 'a source is any person or organisation which provides trustworthy or relevant information' (Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992). His colleague from *The Times* opines that 'sources are very easy to come by; everybody wants to talk' (Thomas, *The Times*, 1992). It may be easy for the foreign correspondents, but Neerja Chaudhary argues that,

> It is a very slow process. You get to know people and they have to trust you, particularly in India where people don't come out openly. Trust is built up over a period; there is no short-cut to that. There is another kind of source-building which is: when peace falls out, you get access. When someone has fallen out with someone and wants to make that information available, they would come out with information and that is where we get our scoops. . .
>
> (Chaudhary, *IE*, 1992)

There are seemingly two key words in journalist-source relationship which are accorded high priority. They are: credibility and confidentiality (cf. Ericson *et al*, 1989). Credibility in particular applies to both the journalists as well as sources, as a special correspondent argues that sources are sacred and if you can't keep this

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[2] It has been mentioned early on in this chapter that not all the journalists interviewed were the reporters/correspondents. In fact, there were chief sub-editors, news editors and executive editors. Since they, most of the time, work on the desk, they do not have to cultivate their regular sources as the reporters do, though it is not to say that these people do not have sources at all.

confidence (of protecting them) of your sources, they won't be able to feed you with news (Singh, *IE*, 1992). On similar lines, Arup Ghosh opines that 'any person who has the basic intelligence will always choose the kind of sources who will always stand by. . . who have credibility. . . if a journalist does not have credibility then the source will inevitably stop giving stories or dry up . . .' (Ghosh, *HT*, 1992).

A relevant and related question is that of too much dependence of journalists on sources which the latter may exploit to his advantage. There is this and another question that the sources may 'regulate' the information by being 'selective'. It is no secret that a source will not leak any information unless he (or whom he thinks) is going to use it for his intended purposes, whatever they are. The source might be having a lot of information with him but, in all probability, he would part with only what he is going to gain from.[3] This point has been beautifully summed up, among others, by D. Nimmo who argues, 'as with the conventions of journalism, news sources are well aware of newsgathering routines and exploit them for advantage. Because they know newsmen must have daily rations of information, . . . they realise journalists have deadlines to meet, sources time their announcements and speeches to capture the afternoon headlines or a few minutes on the evening TV news (Nimmo, 1978: 197-198). This is not, however, to completely rule out the possibility of a source giving information without any vested interest.

All journalists interviewed agreed, by and large, to this surmise, though all say that since they are conscious of this they take extra care to be vigilant against such exploitation. Ranjit Bhushan, for example, does not find any thing wrong with the sources being selective, as he puts it in this way, 'nobody is ever told the whole story, it is always part which they want published. It is only fair. Source has to decide how much he would like to reveal and how much he doesn't want to go public about it' (Bhushan, *IE*, 1992). While most of the journalists agree that the sources have a vested

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[3] In this respect, see also Ericson, 1989.

interest (else they will not give information) in feeding the journalists, normally they will not give false information. To this effect, Christopher Thomas argues that 'there are very few times I find when a person will risk lying to a journalist knowing that it is going to go in the paper. He may try to mislead you but it is unlikely that he will ever tell you a blatant lie knowing that it will come back to hound him' (Thomas, *The Times*, 1992).

To avoid the danger of a source trying to plant a story all journalists say that they cross-check and double-check and 'if you are conversant with the issues you cannot be taken in by them' (Ghose, *HT*, 1992). Similarly when a source is giving the information which only suits him, while withholding the rest of it, 'you have to off-set that by another source who might give you that withheld information' (Chaudhary, *IE*, 1992). Having stated how the journalists felt about this issue, the literature suggests that knowledge is policed. There are different strategies evolved by the sources to control the flow of the information. For example, as Ericson *et al* argue that "pushing' one topic is a means of having journalists ignore other topics that the source does not wish to have publicised', and 'sources learn to provide partial knowledge through the use of quotable quotes, . . .', and 'they also learn techniques of redundancy, limiting the public conversation to their point . . .' (Ericson *et al*, 1989: 383).

Although the journalists were not in particular asked how important their 'other' sources were with whose information they off-set the information provided by the first source, the question is of paramount importance, having been raised in academic circles before (cf. Schlesinger, 1991). Until recently the widely accepted model of source-journalist relationship has been that of the sources' role as all-pervasive (see for instance, Hall *et al*, 1978). This model draws from the structural approach and lends a great deal of credence to the official sources, who act as primary definers. According to this paradigm there is not much scope for the alternative sources, however defined. This, therefore, leaves a big gap as to whether any other type of sources, say unofficial,

could replace the 'accredited' ones. No doubt it is very difficult to say that any other type of sources would carry as much weight with the journalists, but it leads us to have some kind of alternative wherein there will be some sort of competition. To this effect, Schlesinger (1991) argues that

> Consequently, it is necessary that sources be conceived as occupying fields in which *competition for access* to the media takes place, but in which material and symbolic advantaged are unequally distributed. But the most advantaged do not secure a primary definition in virtue of their positions alone. Rather, if they do so, it is because of successful *strategic action* in an imperfectly competitive field.
>
> (Schlesinger, 1991: 77)

It is yet not clear, however, whether the journalists, moulded in the traditional working environment according to which they tend to go to the authoritative sources more often than to any other alternative sources, would embrace this premise of alternative or competitive sources with any enthusiasm and alacrity. Nevertheless, such a proposition is going to be a healthy one in which the power of the 'routine sources' is definitely going to get eroded and the scope for the inclusion of alternative sources is widened for a more balanced and fair view. No doubt the sources give information to their advantage (for instance, Nimmo, 1978), the story, however, should not be held even if in the process the source is likely to be favoured. The story, if a journalist thinks it is important, should not be compromised, for 'you go by your news instinct what constitutes a good news story' and because 'the final judgement is based on the newsworthiness of that particular story' (Rajagopalan, *HT*, 1992).

There is another problem with the sources: they may ditch the journalists after they have been quoted, thus imperilling the credibility of the journalist who wrote that story. Although only two journalists actually faced this problem, the rest were aware of it and will not rule it out (for instance, Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992). Why it does not happen too often is because 'sources who have really genuine classified information are not

going to be quoted. So there's really no question of not too much of a chance of denying what they have said' (Bhushan, *IE*, 1992).

What sort of sources do the journalists depend upon during the course of the coverage of election campaigns? All journalists unequivocally, but certainly intriguingly and rather paradoxically, said that their major sources while reporting on a campaign are common people - the electorate. Their explicit assertion like this belies both what the theory says and what the content analysis of this study itself offers. The research studies concentrating on what type of the sources/actors are most depended upon by the journalists; invariably but substantially, indicate that they are the official and powerful sources rather than any others (see, for instance, Sigal, 1973; Nimmo, 1978; Ericson *et al*, 1989). Even the content analysis presented in Chapter 5 clearly shows that the first three most quoted sources/actors in all the items, irrespective of the newspapers, in that order are the political parties, aspirants for prime ministership and official sources. The category 'miscellaneous' does include the voters/common men as actors, but it is the conglomeration of many more unspecified types of actors.

This seems very typical even in the answers provided by the journalists as Neerja Chaudhary argues, 'election campaign is not source-dependent . . . you go to people as a source and you observe yourself, you go with candidates and you find out how people are thinking, what is the complexion of a particular constituency, what are the different trends. It is much more reliance on people as a source, rather than any politician' (Chaudhary, *IE*, 1992). Dev Sagar Singh, the special correspondent with *Indian Express*, who covered Bihar state during the election, infers that, 'all kinds of information come to you; contradictory versions of the same event come to you. You really have to separate the grain from chaff and that takes little time. During election campaign, most of your assessment is determined by your visiting different areas, meeting different groups of people among the public, leaders and non-political people, the professionals . . . ' (Singh, *IE*, 1992). Despite their insistence that they contact the

common people, most of them still go with the candidates and observe the mood of the electorate. It can, however, be argued that they do talk to the common people during their touring of the constituencies, but since they report what they "gather" from talking to the electorate, the common man is not directly quoted as often as other actors, as demonstrated in Chapter 5. Secondly, the common man, even when quoted, finds a place at the bottom of the story.

While the journalists above reflect their own points of views vis-à-vis their sources, the content analysis findings (Chapter 5) amply suggest that it is the press, rather than the political parties and their candidates, which contributes more to the campaign coverage. It has been found that, overall, the major political parties initiated 27.5 per cent of the items as compared with 40.2 per cent items in which the main subject of the story was the result of the initiation of the journalists. It also indicates that journalists' dependence on routine sources (Chapter 3) appears to be receding during the coverage of an election campaign.

## 7.4 NEWS VALUES

One of the most debatable questions in the process of news production revolves around 'what makes news'. Several categories of news values, as discussed in Chapter 3, have been put forward by researchers though some journalists argue that it is sheer 'instinct' or 'professional judgement' which guides them in their work, while still others maintain that it is just 'automatic'. While Whale refers to it as 'random reactions to random events' (Whale, 1970), another journalist Alastair Hetherington criticises him but argues that, 'it is of course an artificial human construct, because there are no God-given, ultimate, objective means of measuring news priorities . . .' (Hetherington, 1985: 21). But there is more than that to the values on the basis of which events are selected and/or rejected, as has been shown in Chapter 3. Whatever the varying views on the

issue, below are those by the professionals whom I interviewed during the course of this study.

There is at least one news value most of the interviewed journalists vividly mentioned. And that is 'interest' or 'human interest'. Invariably all journalists agreed that any event will become newsworthy if it was interesting, or had some stuff of human interest. There comes an element of subjectivity when the journalists admit that they include what *they* think is important or interesting. One such very clear argument comes from the statement as follows.

> News is that which is important and/or interesting. News can be interesting, without being particularly important. . . . but news can never be important without being interesting. It would be utterly pointless to fill a newspaper with material which nobody wants to read. Of course journalists decide what is news. That's their job. . . . they look for material which is going to interest their editors, and their readers. Naturally most of us try to be objective in the process. But I readily admit that there is also a subjective element in the process. Some subjects interest me; others don't. . . . So I am imposing that judgement on the readers. . . . We can't ignore a huge flood in Bangladesh, or the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi . . . News happens first, and what we do happens second.
>
> (Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992)

The element of subjectivity on the part of the journalist, therefore, may actually be at the cost of the interest of the readers. They may have to content themselves with what they have for reading, even if they have no interest in that. As a matter of fact many news are included merely because they are important (because, perhaps, the reporting journalist thinks so), but would have not been considered otherwise on the basis of any other news criteria, as Golding and Elliott (1979) in their study of three countries argue that, 'items which may be boring, repetitive or non-visual must still be included despite *audience disinterest*' (emphasis added). The importance (or the perceived importance) of an event or a person does play a major role in deciding the

newsworthiness. Nevertheless, the degree of importance may not always be the same with different press systems; it may not even be the same with the journalists of the same press system. This point can be brought home from the content analysis findings available from Chapter 5. The enormous coverage of the Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in both the Indian and the British newspapers is suggestive of the importance the press gave to the event/personality. However, a marked difference can be noticed in the coverage of the post-assassination period in the newspapers of India and Britain. While, as shown in Chapter 6, the Indian newspapers decreased the coverage of the themes related to the Gandhi murder and instead picked up the election campaign coverage, the British newspapers continued the flow of news about the Rajiv Gandhi's murder, thus reflecting their importance. The British newspapers also attached more importance to Rajiv Gandhi, his widow Sonia, and the Congress (I) party by quoting them more than other individual leaders and parties.

In spite of the fact that most journalists argue that they select an event on the basis of reader's interest in it, it is never clear how they know the pulse of the readers with whom they come in contact with so little. In fact, this is one of the major drawbacks mentioned by Indian journalists. Whether an event has something interesting to offer to the readers is again the prerogative of the journalist, as Arup Ghosh argues, 'first of all it should interest the reporter concerned. Because if the reporter concerned feels that it is totally irrelevant and trivial, I think it is good enough. Why not?' (Ghosh, *HT*, 1992). However, to find a news story 'journalists must have a nose for news' (Singh, *IE*, 1992), though most news are 'event-based' (Chaudhary, *IE*; Singh, *HT*; Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992). So, this largely depends upon how an event unfolds. This implies that the more the event fits in the qualities of news dictated by the news values, the more it is likely to be included (see, for instance, Golding and Elliott, 1979), and also, as Galtung and Ruge (1970) argue, the more different news values a story has, the more likely would it be taken in.

Politics seems to be a favourite topic with the journalists. Most of the Indian journalists perceive that news is essentially revolving around politics. It may be a political activity, such as elections, or about a political personality, it is all the way 'politicking'. In fact the news editor of *The Hindustan Times* argues that Indian papers have more political news than any foreign paper (Vasudevan, *HT*, 1992). An election campaign is basically and predominantly a political event during the coverage of which most of the issues either originate from or end in the politics played by the contending parties and their leaders.

Proximity of an event was also quoted as an important news value which journalists keep in mind while deciding its newsworthiness (Tripathi, *IE*; Singh, *HT*; Benedict, *IE*, 1992). This is in consonance with what several researchers have discussed previously (see, for instance, Golding and Elliott, 1979; Galtung and Ruge, 1965). This seems to be the plausible reason as to why there was profuse coverage of the election campaign in the Indian press, whereas the British newspapers together constituted only 3.1 per cent of the total coverage a substantial part of which was devoted to the coverage associated with the killing of Rajiv Gandhi only. Some journalists said that violence, tragic events, mishaps etc. were the deciding factors for the inclusion of a news (for instance, Prabhu, *HT*; Ghosh, *HT*, 1992). But perhaps there is more to it than what meets the eye. It is not just the reporter or the correspondent who writes his news on the basis of the values described above or what he perceives as newsworthy, for whatever the way he decides it, its inclusion is still not certain as the special correspondent of *The Hindustan Times* argues that 'everyday you think in particular way; your editor will think in another way. Because when it concerns placing the story in its order of importance sometimes you feel you have brought a very good story. But your news editor may think it is not that important to be placed on front page' (Rajagopalan, *HT*, 1992), or any page, for that matter. This is where the role of sub-editors/chief sub-editors, news editors gains much importance.

It is also the newspaper policy/environment which may impinge on the factors of deciding the news. In the process, therefore, the working of a journalist may have been shaped by the ownership and control of the organisation. The special correspondent of *Indian Express* argues that 'a journalist is working in a frame work of a newspaper - what the newspaper thinks you should be doing and that's also determined by what your competitors are doing. It has a band wagon effect. If today a newspaper is writing what a VIP said, tomorrow five papers will be doing that' (Chaudhary, *IE*, 1992). This makes the process of selection of news even more complicated, where other factors come into the play rather than sheer the news values one may have thought of sticking to.

Would the news values which guide the journalistic perceptions about the importance of an event be the same with a foreign correspondent working in a Third World country? Though one of the two foreign journalists interviewed for the purpose, as quoted before, spoke about 'subjectivity', 'imposing the judgement on the readers' and not ignoring the 'assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and flood in Bangladesh', the other correspondent argues that, 'people want to read about the off-beat side of India . . . it's off-beat medicine, it's off-beat way of doing things . . . naked 'sadhus' . . . the differentness India is what people want to read about' (Thomas, *The Times*, 1992). It is, however, intriguing as to how the journalists know their readers want to read about this and that when in his own words he says that 'I can only work on the basis of what interests me' (ibid.). In response to another question that if he is justifying what his readers expects of him, he says that 'I have absolutely no idea' (ibid.), but at the same time he would insist on giving his readers the 'off-beat side' of India.

This dichotomous view is, perhaps, emanating from two points. One, as Jackson (1978) argues, is that the foreign correspondent takes it for granted that his readers are ignorant and they know nothing about the country he is reporting about/from. Therefore, he loads his story with all sorts of adjectives. Second, the image of the

Third World countries is so ingrained in the minds of the Western journalists - which is as such passed on to the readers for their second hand knowledge - that either they will play, as shown in Chapter 3, on the negative side of the poor countries, or will give the stories which portray these countries and their people as a matter for laughing stock.

Is the working of journalists any different during an election campaign than that between the elections? What news criteria do they apply? Most Indian journalists were unanimous in their opinion that it is the prominent candidates and key constituencies. This fact has been borne out by the content analysis findings (Chapter 5) which shows that priority is given only to the major political parties and prominent candidates. According to a chief sub-editor of *Indian Express*, 'we tend to give more coverage to the biggest party' (Benedict, *IE*, 1992). Another chief sub-editor of the other newspaper in India also agrees that the constituencies from where VIPs were not contesting did not get their due share in the coverage (Singh, *HT*, 1992). It comes out well from the interviews conducted with the Indian journalists that elections in India are really personality-based, not issue-based, though Dev Sagar Singh did mention that 'during elections we look for issues determining the voters' decision' (Singh, *IE*, 1992).

The working of a journalist during the election campaign is somewhat different than what it is in the normal times in the sense that there is more work load to carry. They have to trail, for example, a prominent candidate in a constituency and then his nearest rival to see the response of the electorate. They also have to be cautious not to get swayed by the mere number of people attending a particular rally, for 'it doesn't mean they are going to vote for the leader' (Chaudhary, *IE*). They have to go to the constituencies to 'feel the atmosphere' (Bhushan, *IE*). They have to be more analytical, as argues Dev Sagar Singh, 'wherever we go for election coverage, we try to find out which party has an edge over others and why? . . . If I have to cover 5-6 rallies in a particular day, I take some kind of a general tenor which keeps coming at every public meeting of a particular party and I make my own assessment: 'this is the underlying

idea behind which a political party is working. So that really gives you the lead . . .'
(Singh, *IE*, 1992).

In the case of the journalists working on the desk it is very hectic. All chief sub-editors and news editors I spoke to said there is a tremendous flow of news during the campaign, for there are so many constituencies, so many candidates. Vasudevan argues that 'we tend to cover the election more exhaustively; we send our correspondents to the major districts with the political leaders, cover the capital features, analyse the political trends . . . so election coverage is much more than normal times' (Vasudevan, *HT*, 1992). Responsibilities of the desk people, according to a chief sub-editor, increase manifold, for 'the desk is the fulcrum of the newspaper; the entire newspaper rests on the desk' (Narayanan, *IE*, 1992).

Contrary to what the Indian journalists perceive, the foreign correspondent thinks differently. While the foreign correspondent of *The Guardian* says that 'elections are exactly the same as any other story except that coverage is generally spread over a longer time' (Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992), his counterpart from *The Times* argues that,

> I don't get involved in personalities. Indian journalism tend to focus on political personalities; it doesn't discuss issues. I try to keep away from personalities, apart from the main contestants. I'm not particularly interested - wasn't in the last elections - in interviewing contestants . . . so I didn't even ask for interviews with some. You follow your instincts and move around the country without actually having a broad plan . . . There is no way of setting the agenda in advance; you really have to respond to events unfolding. And that's what I do.
>
> (Thomas, *The Times*, 1992)

## 7.5 ELECTION CAMPAIGN ISSUES

Whether elections in India are fought on issues or not, issues do get reported in the press, some more than others. What sort of issues and themes were given prominence in the coverage of the four newspapers has already been discussed in Chapter 5. In this section my endeavour is to see what the journalists, who were also partly responsible for giving priority to, or relegating, the issues, themselves think were the most important issues/themes which were central to the election campaign in question. All journalists were asked about their opinion.

India is a union of 25 states, which differ considerably from one another in matters of geography, language, caste, religion, culture, economy etc. It is, therefore, not surprising that states have different priorities insofar as the needs of the people of a particular state are concerned. During the election campaigns too, states have their own local issues which, at times, may override the national issues. It is obvious that political parties stress local issues, as much as the national ones, which would have a better appeal for the electorate of that state. This is visible from what the journalists have to offer.

By and large what emerged from the content analysis in Chapter 5 is reflected in the views of journalists on the important issues in the election. Nevertheless, there is one contradiction. Among the Indian journalists, at least four argued that rising prices/inflation was one of the main issues of the election (Narayanan, *IE*; Benedict, *IE*; Sahay, *HT*; Singh, *IE*, 1992). It is surprising that over one-fourth of the journalists put this issue as important whereas this particular issue got a very low priority in the coverage as such. There could be several arguments for this. First, inflation is such an important factor that it pinches virtually everybody, especially the salaried people and others, and therefore, always remains on the top of the individual's agenda. It is possible that the journalists who mentioned it as an important issue are the ones

affected by the rising prices, and therefore gave it top priority. Second, the issue of rising prices of daily necessities is a low threshold issue and therefore concerns everyone, even if it was not quoted in the newspapers. Third, all the four journalists are the chief sub-editors who nevertheless contributed to the coverage of the elections but did not report on any events as such from the field. It is possible that they spoke of these issues unmindful of the priorities lent to them during the coverage of 1991 elections. One more plausible reason for this variance, as explained in the beginning of this chapter, could be that the journalists were interviewed nearly one year after the event had taken place. There is, therefore, a slight possibility that the people on the desk, as they are, could not recollect exactly whether rising prices was covered with any vigour at the time of elections. There is also a possibility that they were overawed by the inflation in the recent past which manifested itself in their views.

However, in total contradiction with what has been said above, Prabhu Chawla, the executive editor of *Indian Express*, vociferously states that 'corruption and rising prices were not an issue; it was fought on mere religious and emotional issues rather than basic economics' (Chawla, *IE*, 1992). Two more journalists insist that corruption was not the issue (Ghose, *HT*; Thomas, *The Times*, 1992)

Most of the Indian journalists said that the three issues put forward by the three major political parties before the public as their own - stability of Congress (I), Ayodhya of the BJP and reservation/Mandal of JD - were the main issues on which parties went to the electorate, though, as stated above, there was some variance at the state level. For example, as Dev Sagar Singh argues, 'Ram Janam Bhoomi/Ayodhya issue became a very emotive issue politically in the western UP and large parts of other areas as well. It did play very major role for the electorate and to that extent, it influenced the voters. But barring UP, other states really took it in their stride' (Singh, *IE*, 1992).

On the contrary, 'Ayodhya was not a crucial issue in Bihar, whereas it was essentially the kind of tension between the backward and forward castes. Mandal/Reservation issue was the important issue there' (Bhushan, *IE*, 1992). Some journalists analyse the issues on the basis of two stages, pre- and post-Rajiv Gandhi assassination. The pre-assassination view is that people were tired of going to polls every two-three years, and they were unhappy with the non-Congress (I) parties for not completing full term. Therefore, when people went to polls as scheduled there was the general prediction that results will produce, as they did in 1989 election, a hung-parliament[4], with the Congress (I) having the largest number of seats (for instance, Rajagopalan, *HT*; Ghosh, *HT*, 1992). In the post-assassination period, however, 'there was a complete turnabout . . . (which) tilted the scales in favour of Congress, and they had smooth sailing' (Rajagopalan, *HT*, 1992).

Another view is that the issue after the killing of Rajiv Gandhi was that of finding an 'alternative' to the dominant party, or sheer 'political change' (Narayanan, *IE*, 1992) in the states. Prabhu Chawla argues that 'Ayodhya had impact in Gujarat and in UP, where it was seen as an alternative to Congress. So what happened in the post-assassination (period was that) people started voting for the forces which were alternative to each other. For example, in Haryana people saw Congress party as an alternative to the JD, or Chauthala, so they voted for Congress party; in UP they saw BJP as an alternative to Congress, so they voted for BJP; in Bihar they saw JD as an alternative to Congress, they . . . were looking for local alternatives; in Gujarat they saw BJP as alternative - the BJP got more seats in Lok Sabha' (Chawla, *IE*, 1992).

Casteism (Singh, *HT*, 1992), terrorism (Sahay, *HT*, 1992), communal tension (Narayanan, *IE*, 1992), Punjab problem (Singh, *IE*, 1992), unemployment (Benedict,

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[4]The term is especially prevalent in the context of Indian politics. A hung-parliament is said to be there if no single party emerges as victor with majority seats, contested in that particular election. In such a situation, often the party with the largest number of seats seeks alliance from its allies to produce the majority whereupon it is invited to form the government.

*IE*, 1992) etc. were some of the other issues which individual journalists said were important during the election campaign of 1991, but these issues were not seconded by journalists other than those whose names are quoted in brackets. Looking back at the content analysis results in Chapter 5, it becomes clear that these issues did not find any prominent place in the coverage of election.

Between the two foreign journalists, both seemed to be poles apart in their analyses of what the 1991 elections were fought on. While Derek Brown's (*The Guardian*) analysis is much in line with what the Indian journalists offered, that of Christopher Thomas' is a bit different. It would be worthwhile to quote both of them in verbatim for good digestion of their views. Derek Brown very eloquently argues that,

> The issues varied, as they always do in all countries, according to region and social class. In the north Ayodhya seemed to be a strong determining factor. In the south, apart from Karnataka, it was hardly mentioned. Overall, it seemed to me that the campaign of 1991 was very similar in style - until the assassination - to that of 1989. The issue was of changing the government, or at least changing the ruling party. In both elections, the incumbent party was perceived to have failed . . . Given the events of previous six months, it was inevitable that the election would produce a new ruling party and a new prime minister. But until the assassination it was entirely unclear about which faction would come out on top. Even after the death of Rajiv, the electorate produced the essentially suspended verdict of a hung parliament.
>
> (Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992)

On the other hand, his British counterpart based at Delhi is of the opinion that the election was fought on economic issues, and there was no ideological issues involved. His analysis goes like this,

> Economics, economics, economics. The whole issue always fought, all that is poverty for the poor. And all your Janam Bhoomis and the all the rest of it were peripheral issues which may affect the vote in certain localities. But

most people vote on the basis of who's going to get better-off, which party will help me. Of course, in this democracy, which is not a democracy in any sense of the West will understand you have things like caste politics and bloc votes and purchase of votes. One of the comparisons I could make in politics in America and politics in India is that there's no ideology. America has no political ideology. It's simply who has got the greatest amount of money to launch the greatest blitz, and to have the most gimmicks. Similarly in India, there's very little ideology and election turns on money; it's turning on the purchase of influence. Issues beyond the economic issues are very much on the fringe.

(Thomas, *The Times*, 1992)

While I am not attempting to dispute what Thomas says (he has, in deed, beautifully analysed and brought out some facts many Indian journalists may not go on record to admit), his assessment of the election issues, however, is a bit intriguing when compared with the content analysis findings offered in Chapter 5. I am not arguing that what has been found in the content of the press must be bolstered by the journalists who covered that election - under the Indian conditions, it is in fact very difficult, for the newspaper content of election campaign was the combined result of tens of journalists in each newspaper, while only a few of them were interviewed. But nevertheless, because most of the items in *The Times*, which Thomas represents, came from himself, and there was, as showed in Chapter 5, not even a single item in the whole of the campaign period which discussed the economic and/or poverty issues. Does it mean that the issues reported as prominent are entirely different than what the reporter thinks *are* prominent? The above statement, and some others, do indicate that journalists, especially foreign ones, report what is in consonance with the traditions of the profession, rather than giving the real feel of the matter, whatever the journalists themselves continue to say. The foreign journalists, therefore, are seemingly likely to adhere to the news values which would augment the prevalent news structure system of their own newspaper rather than their actual appeal or impact on the people of the country where the event takes place.

## 7.6 PROFESSIONAL CONSTRAINTS AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Perhaps few professions are without one or the other type of constraints, which have a bearing on the working of their personnel. Constraints do not necessarily have to be hazards in the way of smooth working, but they, most of the time, impinge on the professional efficacy. It is a fact that in an occupation like journalism, where each day is a dead-line for those who practice it, it is these constraints because of which journalists may have, at times, to compromise their professional proficiency to meet the dead-lines. Besides constraints, there are some kinds of pressures on the journalists which jeopardise their competence leading to their inability to disseminate professional obligations as expected of them by the clientele. All journalists were put questions about the conditions under which they had to impart their duties; the freedom they had; whether they received any directions from 'above'; and the political preferences of the newspaper etc. Since questions pertain to the individual newspapers, it would, therefore, be worth discussing them separately. First, *The Hindustan Times*.

Two biggest constraints all Indian journalists (of both the newspapers, in this case) agreed to have faced were time and space (cf. Golding and Elliott, 1979). Most acquiesced that there was always less time, but more to do and in less space in the newspaper. They also, invariably, inferred that because of the limited space, some stories were trimmed, that is, the last few paragraphs were cut. While on the part of reporters it made them unhappy, though they understood it well, the editorial desk people expressed their helplessness. However, on the question of pressures, external or internal, there was a mixed reaction, more sticking to the rhetoric that they did not have any pressures, from the editorial bosses, management, advertisers or politicians.

Replying to the question of external pressures, Arup Ghosh admits that 'there are certain kind of pressures which are external and which do creep in but I feel that they are handled more at the top level and the impact is felt to the minimum at the level of

reporting' (Ghosh, *HT*, 1992). His colleague, however, argues with a particular reference to elections that there is absolutely no external pressure; and so far as the politicians are concerned, 'they just don't bother about the newspapers what they write at the time of elections' (Rajagopalan, *HT*, 1992).

Arabinda Ghose, the journalist with 34 years of experience, including that with *The Times* of London, brushes off any pressure from within the organisation, but on external pressures, he argues that 'advertisers do not put any pressure on us . . . all political parties try to influence you to write from their point of view. Sometimes they do try to plant stories, particularly when there is something going on within the party; they try to gain our assistance to further their interests' (Ghose, *HT*, 1992). What about the pressures in the garb of 'guidelines', written or unwritten - could it be a euphemism for pressures? Whether or not, a journalist argues that '(though) there are no shackles imposed, rather there are certain subtle undercurrents; there are certain quiet indications given by the editorial authorities and that have to be accepted' (Ghosh, *HT*, 1992). The executive editor of *The Hindustan Times* maintains that there is no direct pressure on the sub-editors and reporters, though it could be on himself or the editor (Prabhu, *HT*, 1992).

The news editor of *The Hindustan Times* rules out any pressure from the editor ('we have very independent editor'), or the proprietors, 'but there have been occasions of political pressure. We try to resist as much as possible but sometimes they have been able to get some stories played down to their advantage' (Vasudevan, *HT*, 1992). He further gives the explanation that major newspapers in India are owned by the industrial houses and they have connections with politicians, who expect something in return from the newspaper magnates. 'There are simple guidelines: well let's go easy on the guy; we can't do anything, for example, in the Bofors issue . . . we didn't go

aggressively compared to other newspapers. . . ' (ibid.).[5] Implicitly though, but it leads to the ubiquitous nexus between the newspaper owners and politicians. Besides how the ownership and control of an organisation affects the working of its employees, the politicians come to exert their pressures through the former for a mutual benefit, I-use-you-use-me. Stated below is the commentary on such relationship, specifically relevant in the Indian context, though may be as acceptable elsewhere.

> Industrial houses find it profitable to own newspapers, not so much for financial reasons as for political influence. Often, the part played by a newspaper in an industrial empire of jute, textiles, cement and automobiles in terms of overall financial resources is small. But a newspaper can provide important advantage to the owners. First, ownership of a newspaper makes an industrial empire less likely, if not immune, to attacks by other newspapers, as the other papers know that they are also vulnerable to similar attacks. Secondly, the threat of exposure often serves to force the bureaucracy to meet the owners' demand. Third, ownership acts as a deterrent to the government, as it has to be wary against action affecting the owners who have the capability and desire to widely publicise such action and embarrass the government.
>
> (Haque and Narag, 1983: 37)

As far as the freedom of expression in *The Hindustan Times* is concerned, the opinion varies from 'full-freedom' (Singh, *HT*) to 'no-reporter-is-allowed-full-freedom' (Ghosh, *HT*) to 'not-at-all' (Sahay, *HT*). Even the executive editor of the paper himself is of the viewpoint that 'there is nothing like an absolute freedom' (Prabhu, *HT*, 1992). He explains that 'when I accepted this job I accepted certain parameters. Now it's not for me and my mouth to say, "I will not do it", (for) I already agreed to do it. But in elections there has been no such instance when I had to prick my conscience' (ibid.). It can be deduced from the responses of the journalists interviewed that though they do not say in so many words, it is implied that they have to work under some sort of

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[5]*The Hindu*, published from Madras, and *Indian Express* were the leading Indian newspapers which were mainly responsible for giving a wider coverage to the issue of misappropriation of funds in the Bofors deal.

pressure from the ownership and control, and through them from some external organisations. It should, however, not be extended to the far end where it leads to frustration among the journalists. As is clear from their opinions, they take it more in their stride and as a part-of-the-game. Although the content analysis shows that *The Hindustan Times* had, within its pages, more media-initiated stories than party-initiated, when compared with *Indian Express*, the proportion of media-initiated stories is less (see Table 5.28, Chapter 5). It leads one to believe that *The Hindustan Times*, on its own, is less likely to contribute to the coverage than its counterpart.

The responses of the journalists in *The Hindustan Times* about what sort of preferences their newspaper have came about rather openly, though not in explicit expression. By and large, they all agreed that the newspaper had a somewhat pro-Congress (I) inclination. One of its chief sub-editors goes to the extent of labelling it 'too pro-establishment, too pro-Congress. . . . there is no written guideline but everybody accepts that *The Hindustan Times* is a government paper and government is (that of) Congress. It has always been' (Sahay, *HT*, 1992). Even better explanation is offered by a very senior journalist who argues, 'it is true that this newspaper is known to be pro-Congress newspaper. The Chairman of the Board of Directors is a Congress member of Parliament. This paper has always been associated with Congress party. We give very extensive coverage to Congress party' (Ghose, *HT*, 1992). However, according to him, 'we do not shut-off any other party; (and) that has not prevented me from writing about any other party at any point of time' (ibid.). The other responses varied from 'somewhat pro-Congress' (Rajagopalan, *HT*) to 'right of the centre' (Ghosh, *HT*) to 'may be sometimes a pro-Congress' (Vasudevan, *HT*) to 'a little tilt towards Congress' (Prabhu, *HT*, 1992). The views of *The Hindustan Times'* journalists are in consonance with what emerges from the contents of Table 5.29 (Chapter 5). It has been revealed that Congress (I) was far more successful (than other political parties) in initiating the main subject of the stories in *The Hindustan Times* (33.3 per

cent) than in *Indian Express* (24.9 per cent). Accordingly, one can argue that this is indicative of the tilt *The Hindustan Times* has toward the Congress (I) party.

What have the journalists working for *Indian Express* got to say on the issues discussed so far in relation to *The Hindustan Times*? Almost all the *Indian Express* journalists came out saying that there was no pressure, though the executive editor spoke of pressures coming from the management and powers-that-be. He argues that, 'editor is always a sandwich between a reader and a management; I have not changed my opinion about any news story. Sometimes, for example, yes certain occasions when your writings have national impact. . . . Proprietor of the paper is the managing editor of the paper; he holds editorial responsibility. As number two to him, I must keep him informed on important national issues which might have impact on the government or on the big business houses . . . but so far the managing editor has not told me not to publish this. . .' (Chawla, *IE*, 1992).

Giving his views on the external and internal pressures the news-editor of the newspaper argues that, 'fortunately there's no management pressure. . . political influence - well that's one thing which we definitely do not like to succumb to, because we have to be very objective and if you are not objective you are not fair to your readers' (Tripathi, *IE*, 1992). K. Benedict argues that there are no guidelines as such, but 'we have to follow a set pattern' (Benedict, *IE*). A somewhat similar expression comes from another journalist who infers that 'freedom of expression is not an absolute term; after all you are functioning within a particular system and every paper is like that, virtually. As a journalist you will be fine, particularly news-wise; comment-wise you may run into trouble. News-wise if you stick to the bare facts - hard news - then your paper will have to carry that. And if you are balanced and fair on the whole - that's the only way I know how to function' (Chaudhary, *IE*, 1992). Though it seems difficult to conclude that journalists working for *Indian Express* enjoy full freedom, however, when read this in conjunction with findings emanating from Table 5.28

(Chapter 5), it appears that *Indian Express*, compared with *The Hindustan Times*, is likely to have more freedom to form the coverage of the election campaign.

*Indian Express*, over the years, has earned the title of being an anti-establishment newspaper (see Chapters 2 and 4). It could be a coincidence that since for most of the time, independent India has had Congress-ruled governments, the anti-establishment image of *Indian Express* has often turned out to be as anti-Congress (I). This is how the executive editor of the newspaper would like to substantiate: 'in 1975, emergency was imposed and we were the target, because we fought for freedom of the press, not against the Congress party.[6] Since Congress (Indira Gandhi) was ruling, we fought Congress party, because that symbolised dictatorship. . . our electricity connections were disconnected. . . it represented some kind of terror, state terror; we stood up against it. . . so that became anti-Congress - we were fighting as anti-establishment. . . ' (Chawla, *IE*, 1992).

Most other journalists conceded that the newspaper is anti-establishment (Singh; Benedict, Tripathi; Chaudhary). How do the journalists go about with that kind of impression of their newspaper? They reveal, 'being an anti-establishment paper it is not a stigma, it's a big strength' (Singh, *IE*, 1992) and that 'advantage of an anti-establishment is more than the advantage of a pro-establishment because you have the freedom to criticise' (Chaudhary, *IE*, 1992). To the question that if the newspaper had preference for any particular party, one vivid comment came as follows.

> We, at times, have likes and dislikes, for example, when Bofors issue came or issue of corruption came, we stood for a particular party because in our opinion then that political party stood for an end to corruption in public life

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[6]The internal emergency was promulgated on 25 June 1975 under Indira Gandhi, who headed the then Indian government. Press was kept under censorship. *Indian Express*, in particular, bore the brunt more than any other publication - pre-censorship was imposed; government advertisements were stopped; plans to buy up *Indian Express* were afoot; its proprietor was subjected to tough laws on income tax, property etc. (for a good reader on 1975-Emergency, see for instance, Nayar, 1977; Pendakur, 1988; Singh, 1979; Verghese, 1978).

and that's what really mattered for us and we certainly gave very big helping hand to that party. Whichever party is in power, if we feel that the establishment is not doing proper work that's assigned to it as a government, I think the best thing one can do is to turn anti-establishment because you have to protect people from the administration's clutches. . .

(Singh, *IE*, 1992)

If the data presented in Table 5.29 (Chapter 5) are any indication, one can observe *Indian Express's* pro- non-Congress (I) parties (except CPI/CPM) stance, which is somewhat in line with the views of its journalists. It has been revealed that *Indian Express* is more likely to include stories whose main subject is initiated by the BJP, JD/NF and SJP, rather than those by the Congress (I) party and CPI/CPM.

## 7.7 WESTERN JOURNALISTS' VIEW[7]

A great deal of literature available on the perception of the Western journalists vis-à-vis Third World countries has been discussed in Chapter 3. In this study, I have the first hand information about how the First World journalists find their working in a developing country; what kind of problems they face while living and working in a culture greatly different from their own; why their newspapers they represent carry less and why what they carry smacks of negativity, etc. The comments of the two journalists, one each belonging to *The Times* and *The Guardian* are summed up in this section.

Speaking about the experiences and problems faced while working in India, the foreign journalist of *The Guardian* says that 'the chief one (problem) is getting reliable information in a short space of time. In India and the sub-continent generally, that particular exercise is complicated by poor telephones, slow and unreliable transport,

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[7]It should be noticed that at several places earlier in this chapter, references have been made to the two foreign journalists on some important but common issues. This section discusses some other, but equally important, subjects pertaining especially to the foreign journalists.

and bureaucratic hassles over visas etc.' (Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992). His colleague from *The Times*, however, faces a different kind of problem centred around language. He argues,

> I was based in Washington for six years . . . New York for some years . . . Ireland for some years. All these are English speaking countries. The biggest problem in a country like India is language. Moving around, using translators, you lose nuances and you can't talk to ordinary people without the intermediating presence of a translator. I find this language barrier a constant hurdle, it freezes people. They see a translator, they see a foreigner and they don't open up. They tell you what they think you want to hear, rather than what you actually want to hear.
>
> (Thomas, *The Times*, 1992)

Despite the big hurdle of language, Thomas, however, speaks highly of the access he has 'within all circles - government, opposition'. 'Everybody wants to talk to the foreign media. So doors open quite easily . . .', he argues, . . . 'but I can never have the access to an ordinary person in a village . . . ' (ibid.). On the question of writing and presenting a news conforming to the prevalent Western values, Derek Brown does not particularly like the question, spurns the idea behind it, and argues that, 'I come from a Western country, and work for a newspaper which is published there. I don't select news on the basis of its conformity to Western values, whatever they are. In fact, I don't select news at all. Nor does anyone else. News happens' (Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992). Christopher Thomas presents his answer from a different perspective. He argues that there are certain issues prevalent in India which, though looked down upon, make news for the people in the West. In his words, '. . . The caste story in the West is always seen as a negative one. Caste is held up as a primitive form of tribalism which discriminates against people . . . In a country as diverse, linguistically and ethnically and religiously as India, it's remarkable that there's not more social upheaval than there is . . . ' (Thomas, *The Times*, 1992).

Both the foreign journalists refused to budge from their position that the Western newspapers, in general, print very little news about the developing countries, and when they did the accent was put on the negative connotation of the event (Chapter 3). The man from *The Guardian* argues that he has collected 'two bulging A3 size books of my cuttings'. He further confronts the issue, 'Of course *The Guardian* is not dominated by Indian news. Nor is it devoted exclusively to Peruvian affairs, or coverage of the international volleyball scene. It is a general newspaper, published in Britain for a mostly British readership . . .' (Brown, *The Guardian*, 1992). He maintains that whatever he has been sending has been carried by his newspaper. No doubt *The Guardian* is not 'dominated by Indian news'; nobody would expect that either, but the analogy Brown draws between India and Peru is somewhat bewildering and unfair. India is not Peru and vice versa, but given the historical context, India is in closer proximity to Britain than Peru. Moreover, there are 840,255 residents in the UK (Census of Britain 1991) who have Indian connection, whereas there is hardly any mention of any Peruvian immigrants. Such a large population of Indian origin, therefore, has a right to know about what is happening to India in terms of not only when its leader gets killed, but also on other political events of great consequence.

The representative of *The Times* defends his point on similar lines. He argues that he covers seven countries and there is only a limited space and when something big is happening in the world, 'then the nuances of Indian politics matter not a jot', and that 'India is not a hard news producing country'. He believes that 'news tends to be negative because news is the abnormal'. He argues that if there is starvation (because of the failure of monsoons), if there is a major war between India and Pakistan, if there is violence, then it becomes abnormal. So, all this will be published in his newspaper.

The foreign correspondent's arguments about the coverage of the Third World countries sends an unambiguous message: if the developing countries want to be in the news, they have to declare a war against their neighbour country; if they want any

representation in the Western media, they will not only have to go to bed (if at all there is one) on an empty stomach, but also might have to die of hunger (perhaps in thousands in number - tens or hundreds may not qualify for being taken a notice of); if the poor countries clamour for any coverage in the Western newspapers, they will have to spread a lot of violence on their lands; and if nothing near to these criteria, then they should be prepared to act funny, or else the reporters will find themselves where the 'naked sadhus' are, 'the children of a snake charmer do not want to adopt their parents' profession', or 'how peacocks dance in India'. There is the famous head-count equation for disasters: disasters in Bangladesh, for example, need thousands or hundreds killed to reach the newsworthiness threshold, whereas those in 'elite' countries will be newsworthy with progressively lower body-counts (Hartley, 1982: 78). It does not then matter what the readers want to read, as Thomas argues that 'we are making value judgements what our readers want'. No wonder what sort of image the readers - most of whom do not have first hand information - paint about India or any other poor nation.

## 7.8 CONCLUSION

The analysis of the interviews with both the Indian and British journalists shows that almost all agree that the audience has great importance for them, though about whether they meet the expectations of their readers, they have come up with mixed responses. However, most admit that they always strive for living up to the expectations, but there is always a scope for improvement. It was particularly noticed that there was a gap between the readers and the journalists, and it was mainly due to the lack of feed back from the former.

Most journalists interviewed say that they have cordial relationship with their sources, which is primarily based on credibility and confidentiality. No journalist denied the fact

that sources sieve information and part with only that portion which suits them. However, all were of the view that they take extra care to avoid the 'planting' of a story, for they double check. During elections, journalists maintain that their sources are the common people, however, their assertion gets refuted by what has been found in the content analysis in Chapter 5.

There are different news values according to which journalists say they select news. By and large, all journalists agree that human-interest and importance take the precedent while they decide news. Journalists also put forward proximity, politics, personality, impact, mishaps as news criteria. Some journalists believe that news is event-based, that is, it depends upon the event, whether it fits in their criteria of news values. However, journalists, it appears, do not rule out the possibility of their subjectivity while deciding the news. There was the view that news values also depend upon the policy and environment of the newspaper. When the elections are around, they keep in mind the prominent leaders and important constituencies. That is why the Indian journalists agree that elections are personality based rather than issue-based.

Most of the journalists are of the opinion that the three major political parties' (Congress (I), BJP, JD/NF) issues of stability, temple/Ayodhya and Mandal/reservation were among the chief issues on which the elections were fought. There was, however, a surprising finding: some journalists said that rising prices/inflation was one of the main issues. Contrarily, the content analysis findings have shown that this theme was given a very low priority. It can be argued that being a low threshold issue it might have been said to be prominent by a few journalists out of their concern, rather than its actual coverage during the elections. There seems to be some more variation; the foreign correspondent says that economics was the main issue around which the elections were contested. However, not only did his own paper not give it any priority, but also the issue was at a low ebb in the overall coverage.

It can be concluded that most Indian journalists face the constraint of time and space. The Indian journalists also agree that there is nothing like absolute freedom in their profession. While most of the journalist-reporters maintain that there was no direct pressure on them, internal or/and external, the news editors and editors do consider that they have to compromise at times. Management and politicians do exert some pressures, but most say that they do not succumb to that. There appears to be the relationship between the ownership and control of newspaper, and politics. Because, it can be argued, the newspapers are owned by industrial houses, they have connection with politicians for their interests, which may impinge, directly or indirectly, on the profession. The analysis also shows that the Indian journalists know well that their newspapers do have, implicit if not explicit, pro- and anti-establishment stance. While the journalists of *The Hindustan Times* indicate that their paper might have a soft approach toward the Congress (I) party (the Chairman of the Board of Directors is an MP of the Congress (I)), most of those from *Indian Express* say that theirs is an anti-establishment paper. Intriguingly enough, most of the journalists argue that they do take into account all political views, and are not biased.

The analysis of the interviews with foreign correspondents indicates that they do have different news values on the basis of which they select news about Third World countries. It reflects from their views that starvation, war, violence hold top priority when they select news. One foreign journalist believes that news tends to be negative and abnormal. While they stick to their views that they have full freedom, they are not without constraints, which take the form of language problem and that of getting reliable information. Though India has close historical proximity with Britain, it does not seem to have any precedent over others in the matter of coverage, for the foreign journalist just equates it with another country like Peru.

# Chapter 8

# CHAPTER 8

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This research set out to study the coverage of India's general election, held in May-June 1991, in both the Indian and British newspapers. The print medium was chosen particularly because radio and television in India are an extension of the Indian government and are known to serve only the political views of the party in power; the press in India, on the other hand, is privately owned and enjoys the reputation of being relatively free (Chapter 4). Two Indian newspapers, namely, *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* and two from Britain, viz., *The Times* and *The Guardian* were selected for the study.

The rationale behind the inclusion of British newspapers in this research lies in two assumptions. First, I was particularly interested in analysing the way the British quality press covers an election in a Third World country, particularly India which has strong historical ties with Britain; it was assumed that an event such as an election campaign spread over several weeks might generate a wider coverage than the one of short duration. Secondly, there are now 840,255 people in Britain whose origins lie in India and it was therefore assumed that the British press would keep them in mind and offer substantial coverage for their sake. This second assumption was based upon the interest the Indian press showed in the 1992 British elections (Singh, 1993). At the same time, it was thought important to look into the way the British newspapers covered the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, which took place during the election campaign.

Lacking in mass communication research in India is the area related to political communication.[1] While, for instance, many commentators in India would be prepared to label a given newspaper as pro- or anti- a particular political party, few would produce any supporting systematic or empirical evidence. While I do not doubt either their intention or their wisdom in analysing the Indian press, it remains a problem that these commentators' impressions are based more upon rhetoric than upon research. This study may attempt to fill in that gap. This is why the study, while comparing the election coverage in the two press settings, also tried, especially in the Indian context, to determine the political outlook of the two Indian newspapers. In particular, the research project was aimed at finding answers to the following questions:

1. To look at the amount and prominence of the election campaign coverage in the Indian as well as the British newspapers;

2. To analyse which actors are given prominence over others;

3. Which issues/themes are given priority by the press;

4. What meanings the visuals convey;

5. How the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi was portrayed in the newspapers of the two countries;

6. What perspective the journalists who covered the campaign have about the coverage;

7. To find out the relative contributions of political parties/candidates, and the press to the campaign agenda.

To answer these questions, the study relied on three approaches: content analysis of the relevant items in all the selected newspapers (Chapter 5); interviews with journalists who actually participated in the coverage of the election campaign (Chapter 7); and a case study of the coverage of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination (Chapter 6). In all,

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[1] It is not only in India but in the South Asian region as a whole that there is 'little published research on mass communication and the electoral process' (Goonasekera and Gilani, 1992: 168).

41 issues (Sunday newspapers were not included) of each selected newspaper were content analysed thus giving a total of 164 issues. All relevant items on/about the election in the four newspapers were coded according to a coding schedule, prepared and finalised on the basis of a pilot study. Since many actors and themes/issues were coded, these were, at the time of analysis, classified, on the basis of similarity, into new groups at the macro level. Nevertheless, while discussing the macro level actors and macro themes, those at the micro level were also analysed and discussed. The results emerging from the various chapters of the thesis can be summarised as follows.

Overall, the press played a prominent role in the coverage of the 1991 Indian election. A total of 3219 relevant items were recorded in the four newspapers. The number of items seems to be quite impressive when compared with the recent election coverage of the British and US elections. *The Times* and *The Guardian* respectively published 625 and 640 stories during their coverage of the 1983 British election, whereas during the coverage of the 1984 US presidential elections, *Indianapolis Star* and *The Louisville Courier-Journal* printed 332 and 371 stories respectively (Semetko *et al*, 1991). The coverage of the 1991 election campaign in the Indian newspapers was quite comprehensive; out of 3219 items coded from all the newspapers, 96.9 per cent appeared in *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express*. Both the British newspapers published only 3.1 per cent of the total items. *The Hindustan Times* was in the lead with a share of 55.8 per cent of the total items, in comparison with *Indian Express*, which had 41.1 per cent of the items. Both *The Times* (1.6 per cent) and *The Guardian* (1.5 per cent) were almost on a par with each other. It has been observed that the total number of items in the British newspapers was not very high as compared with the coverage of the 1992 British election in the Indian press (cf., Singh, 1993).

The analyses deriving from the previous chapters show that both of the Indian newspapers have a good network of collecting news, for the largest number of items were authored by their own staff correspondents/reporters. Both also used a good

proportion of items from the two Indian news agencies, though put together both the newspapers used almost double the amount of material sent in by the Press Trust of India (PTI) than by the United News of India (UNI), showing their greater dependence on the former. It is revealing that the four international news agencies were used but in just .4 per cent of the total 3219 items. At one level, it is, therefore, argued that the 'big four' cannot be held responsible for imbalance or distortion, if any exists, in coverage of the election campaign. It also means that the press of a Third World country does not have to depend on the major world news agencies for news about its own national elections. At a second level, it shows that even the Western press does not, necessarily, need to use the services of the 'big four'. This conclusion, however, should be extended to the Western press in general rather cautiously, because the reason why the British newspapers did not use many international news agency reports seems to lie in the fact that both *The Times* and *The Guardian* have their regular correspondents in Delhi, who keep up the flow of news from India.

It is clearly reflected in the study that the press, while covering an election campaign, does give more prominence to some actors/sources than to others. That elections are predominantly a fight for supremacy among the political outfits can be gauged from the fact that well over half of the actors/sources quoted in the entire coverage of the press were the political parties (Chapter 5). It can be concluded that political leaders in general, and the prospective candidates for prime ministership in particular, are much sought after actors/sources during the election campaign. This is what emerges not only from the content analysis but also from the interviews with the journalists (Chapter 7). It means that VIP leaders have an easy access to the press, while the less known parties and their leaders may have to struggle to get into the news.

It has been previously argued by researchers that the more authoritative the source the greater the access to the press (for instance, Lasorsa and Reese, 1994), and also that the more economic and political power a source has, the more likely he or she is to

influence news reports (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). The Parliamentary elections in India are a national event and therefore the actors/sources quoted tend to be those at the national level. Accordingly, the thesis has demonstrated, there is no important place in the press coverage of the campaign for the regional parties, whereas the national-level parties dominate the political scene. The study further supports the fact that journalists often use official sources,[2] mainly because both have, by virtue of their respective positions, mutual access to each other. However, the influence of the official sources seems to be somewhat less during the election campaign, for then they are quoted relatively less than certain others. This is so because more information comes from the journalists who trail the candidates to their open political rallies. Also, the parliament is constitutionally dissolved (though in the present case, Chandra Shekhar was asked by the President of India to continue until the new government was sworn in) resulting in less official activity, while most leaders are already out in their constituencies.

While the newspapers did differ in the coverage of political parties as actors/sources, the overall trend in all the newspapers was remarkably similar. This shows that the newspapers, by and large, cover the election in much the same way. For example, Congress (I) was quoted the most not only overall in all the newspapers put together, but also when considered individually, followed by the other two major political parties, namely, BJP and JD/NF. It is tempting to conclude that the prominence given in the press to the actors/sources seems to have a bearing on the final outcome of the elections. As it turned out, the order in which the three major political parties in India came in the election mirrored the different degrees of prominence they had each been given in the press.

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[2]The term 'official sources' in the thesis has been employed at two levels, national and state. At the macro level (national) it includes the president of India, cabinet ministers, members of parliament, Indian election commission, civil servants/bureaucrats, military officials/police officials/paramilitary forces. At the state level they include state governor, chief minister, state cabinet minister, civil servants/bureaucrats.

To look into the pattern of the coverage of Rajiv Gandhi as an actor/source and that of the themes associated with his assassination, the whole of the study period was divided into three phases (Chapter 6). It clearly emerges from the data in the study that all newspapers but one quoted him the most in all the three constructed phases, that is, before his assassination, the week after, and after all the ceremonies associated with his last rites were completed. It has been observed that after the political parties, it was Rajiv Gandhi who was the most quoted individual actor in the press overall as well as in the individual newspapers. While there is no doubt that after his assassination Rajiv Gandhi became virtually the only important actor who dominated the stories in all the newspapers, right until the last day of electioneering, it is, however, not possible to say how Rajiv Gandhi, as compared with other VIP candidates, would have fared as an actor, as referred to in the press, if he had not been murdered.

The evidence, nevertheless, underpins the fact that important and powerful individuals - Rajiv Gandhi was the president of the largest political party, which has been in power for most of the time since independence - are very newsworthy from the point of view of journalistic practices. It also suggests that when an important leader is killed, especially in an assassination, he assumes even more significance. It has been shown that despite the fact that the polling dates were only postponed, it was predominantly Rajiv Gandhi who was referred to as an actor, and it was the theme associated with his assassination which dominated in all the newspapers. The preponderance of both Rajiv Gandhi as an actor and his assassination as a theme comes very close to what Dayan and Katz (1992) call a 'media event', which is not a routine, but an *interruption* of routine. Here the coverage of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, and particularly that of his funeral, at the time of which hundreds of international dignitaries were present, can be likened to the coverage witnessed at the funeral of the assassinated J.F. Kennedy. Both leaders had many things in common: they were young; Kennedy was the sitting President, while Rajiv Gandhi was the past prime minister although it was assumed he

would again be prime minister; both were internationally recognised, albeit, not necessarily to the same degree; both also came from similar rich backgrounds.

A further noticeable fact arises from the coverage of the individual leaders as reflected in the British newspapers. The content analysis shows that *The Times* referred to Rajiv Gandhi - both when he was alive and after his killing - even more than any political party, while the Indian newspapers offered half (*Indian Express*), and less than half (*The Hindustan Times*) responses to Rajiv Gandhi in comparison to what they did to Congress (I). In addition to that, both the British newspapers gave, on the whole, about nine times more responses to Rajiv Gandhi than they provided to the second and third most quoted leaders. It appears that the British newspapers singled out Rajiv Gandhi for this extraordinary coverage because he not only belonged to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, but had also been the prime minister of India and had had official visits to Britain, and therefore he was a more well known and familiar personality among the British readers than the rest of the leaders were. British journalists' perception of 'importance', therefore, appears to vary from that of the native journalists, who gave more coverage to political parties than to Rajiv Gandhi, and also gave adequate coverage to the other VIP leaders, who are equally known to the Indian literate audiences.

Seen in isolation, at the macro level the near saturation coverage of Rajiv Gandhi in the British press is consistent with the established fact that the more an event involves elite people the more likely is its inclusion in the news (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). But what is more relevant and important, at least in terms of this thesis, is not what was covered in the British press, but what was ignored, or displaced by concentrating on the items related to Rajiv Gandhi. From the assassination on 21 May until the end of the last polling day on 15 June, for instance, neither of the British newspapers published a single item involving the 'basic issues'; *The Times* did not include any item on

'development issues' either. Nor were there any substantial items on either of the main issues of the three major political parties.

The macro theme 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' received enormous coverage in the press in general. From the day after the murder until his last ceremonies, this theme outnumbered even the otherwise most quoted macro theme 'campaigning'. This shows that the journalists find more newsworthy elements in the personality of an individual. Secondly, the event itself was full of the conditions (elite-centred, importance, human interest, impact, consequence, negativity) needed for an event to be noticed and reported by the journalists. It is so because the journalists have little dispute over these attributes of news. It has emerged from the analysis (Chapter 6) that in the week in which he was assassinated, Rajiv Gandhi was the most quoted actor. It is clear that not only did he fulfil the news criteria of being important and famous, but also there was, in that week no competition among various actors/sources who otherwise keep vying with each other to get into the news and obviously, therefore, he got the maximum coverage.

As far as the coverage of the 'Rajiv Gandhi murder' as a macro theme is concerned, the British newspapers gave it extraordinarily high priority. *The Times*, for example, had on its pages nearly three quarters of the total responses in the week in which Rajiv Gandhi was murdered devoted to this macro theme, while *The Guardian* too offered 58 per cent of the responses to this theme. The figures stood over 10 times and 7 times higher respectively in the British newspapers in respect of this macro theme than the otherwise most popular macro theme 'campaigning'. Noteworthy here is the point that neither of the British newspapers used any of the election items as a lead story in the entire period of campaigning. But, with the assassination having happened, *The Times* and *The Guardian* gave it the lead story on two and three days - and also placed 7.5 per cent and 12.5 per cent of the stories on their front pages - respectively. That the British newspapers did not initially consider any election item worth displaying on their

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front pages is something worth noting in itself. However, of more importance here is the fact that when they eventually did so it was only after India had gone into crisis in the wake of the assassination of one of its leaders. Furthermore, not even a single editorial on any issues of the elections appeared in *The Guardian* in the whole of the campaign period whereas both the British newspapers wrote two editorials each in the space of just one week, after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. This stands in total contrast to what the Indian newspapers wrote in connection with the 1992 British elections; out of the 12 newspapers studied from India, each wrote one editorial about the British election results, while three newspapers wrote two editorials each (Singh, 1993).

That the British newspapers concentrated on the micro themes 'dynasty', 'succession', and 'sympathy factor' further shows how much importance they attached to the themes associated with the Rajiv Gandhi murder, or, for that matter, with the Nehru-Gandhi family. The corresponding figures in the Indian newspapers are substantially lower in terms of the coverage of these micro themes. Furthermore, it has been revealed that there does not seem to be any link between the duration of an event, particularly in a Third World country, and the amount of its coverage in the Western press. This stems from the fact that the 47 day long election campaign, apparently involving a plethora of public issues, did not generate as much interest in the British press as when Rajiv Gandhi was killed.

Another area where the British newspapers stand out strongly is the coverage of Sonia Gandhi, the widow of the assassinated leader. In both *The Times* and *The Guardian*, Sonia Gandhi was the second most cited individual, after Rajiv Gandhi. These newspapers referred to her nine per cent and seven per cent of the time respectively, whereas she got only one per cent of the responses in each of the Indian newspapers. There is no denying the fact that she acquired importance in the wake of her husband's assassination, but the exceptionally high responses referring to her in the British

newspapers can have two plausible explanations. First, British journalists may have found more 'human interest' and 'tragedy' news values in the news related to Sonia Gandhi, which manifested itself in their coverage. Secondly, it is possible they might have referred to her more often in that their British readers might find it easy to identify with the Italian-born lady. The second factor may also have its roots in the proximity factor, due to which Sonia Gandhi might be considered closer to the British audience than any other leader from India.

It is borne out from this research that the press, while covering electoral campaigns, concentrates more on the campaign issues,[3] including who would win and who would lose, rather than other issues. However, this changes when some sudden, unexpected event of great consequence happens, as discussed above. Contemporary topical issues (for example, law-and-order, terrorism, violence of various forms), the study shows, are referred to more in the press than are 'basic issues' like inflation, unemployment, poverty, and 'development issues' such as civic problems, education, agriculture, health welfare, family planning. Given the low ratings such essential issues - affecting the largest proportion of the Indian population - receive in press coverage, it is at variance with what the political parties promise in their manifestos. A study of the manifestos released by all the major parties in India reveals that virtually each one of them had included the basic issues. For example, the manifesto of the Indian National Congress reads, '. . . it pledges an end to spiralling prices. It pledges an end to poverty and unemployment . . . (p. 18). 'Towards Ram Rajya', the officially titled manifesto of the BJP, says, 'the BJP will end inflation and stabilise prices' (p. 18), and that 'agriculture is our first priority' (p. 12). In the same vein, the NF in its manifesto clearly states, 'rural development shall be given special emphasis' (p. 17), and that 'the National Front is

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[3]Besides the predictions about who has more chances of winning than others, the campaign issues, at the macro level, were constructed to subsume the issues/themes related to elections, political alliance, defection, manifestos, countermanding elections, withdrawals, canvassing, rigging, resignation, polling, repolling. Similar findings have been reported before that over half of all the news on US Presidential elections in three networks, magazines and newspapers was about the *game* (Patterson, 1980).

committed to employment generation as the highest policy priority' (p. 25). All the party manifestos also pledge to eradicate poverty, ameliorate women's status, provide better education, improved sanitation, to take measures to check population growth, and so on. However, it is not possible to say with certainty, unless one has had recorded all the politicians' speeches, whether or not the leaders addressed these issues during their public rallies.

By juxtaposing the scattered evidence, it appears that the British newspapers, in comparison with their Indian counterparts, put a little more stress on the themes which have some negative connotation. In the context of the selection of foreign news, Galtung and Ruge (1965) have argued that 'the more negative the event in its consequences, the more probable that it will become a news item' (p. 68). The news value associated with negativity seems to be so deeply embedded in the Western press system that there does not appear to be any change even after the elapse of three decades since this concept was empirically proved to be at work, especially in the choice of foreign news. Why negative is preferred to positive lies in the fact that 'negative news is said to be more *consonant* with at least some dominant pre-images of our time' (ibid.: 69). On similar lines, British journalists argue that war, violence and hunger in the Third World make news for them (Chapter 7).

This can be further substantiated. For example, in quoting the micro theme 'poll violence', *The Times* stood at number one position, leaving the Indian newspapers behind. *The Guardian*, on the other hand, surpassed all the newspapers in the coverage of the macro theme, 'violence, terrorism and law-and-order'. In comparison with 13 per cent responses devoted to this theme in each of the Indian newspapers, *The Guardian* outdid them by offering 17 per cent of the responses. In fact, this is the second most quoted theme, after the Rajiv Gandhi murder, in *The Guardian*. Also, under the same macro theme, both *The Times* and *The Guardian* emphasised the micro theme 'terrorism/violence' and gave it far more importance than their Indian counterparts did.

This is not to deny that there was violence, or that this issue should not have been reported, or should have been under-reported. But given the contrast between the press of both countries in the coverage of this theme, and its relative coverage within the pages of the British newspapers, it seems difficult not to take notice of this evidence. While it may not be a sufficient contingency *per se* to label the British press as distorting the image of a Third World nation, there are nevertheless indications of this in that there is likely to be some substance in what has already been observed about the international media that they focused on the violence during the India's 1991 election (Rubinoff, 1993).

From the interviews with the Indian journalists and the content analysis of the newspapers they represent, there is an indication that *Indian Express* has a tilt towards the opposition, particularly the one opposing the Congress (I) party. It is evident that this newspaper gave little less coverage to Congress (I) when compared with what *The Hindustan Times* gave. On the other hand, the latter gave more attention to Congress (I). What is also clear is that *The Hindustan Times* used more items initiated by the Congress (I) party than the rest, whereas the BJP was more successful in initiating a larger proportion of stories in *Indian Express*, than in the other newspapers. On the evidence of this study, therefore, it can be said that on the whole, *The Hindustan Times* appears to have an inclination towards the Congress (I), the party which the Chairman of *The Hindustan Times'* Board of Directors represents in the Parliament. Most of the journalists spoken to in *The Hindustan Times* also indicate, albeit hesitantly in some cases, that their newspaper has a pro-Congress (I) stance. On the other side, *Indian Express* comes closer to being described as a paper of the opposition. It is possible that since *Indian Express* has had to undergo much scrutiny during the Congress (I) ruled governments, particularly at the time of internal emergency, it may have developed some slant toward the non-Congress (I) parties.

Comparing the results of this thesis with those of the opinion polls conducted during the election campaign by independent organisations, it appears that the press has a powerful role in setting the agenda for the public. The study has amply demonstrated that the three main issues on which the three major political parties, namely, Congress (I), BJP and JD/NF, contested the 1991 election were given, relatively, less priority in the press. The same results came about from the surveys, conducted by independent organisations, in which the public gave less priority to these issues. At another level, however, a dichotomy vis-à-vis the agenda-setting function appears because in the same survey nearly half of the respondents (Chapter 5) gave top priority to the issue of rising prices, whereas this issue was given very low priority in the press coverage. It is argued that because inflation is a low threshold issue, it would remain known and be of great concern to the public, even when it does not get reported vigorously in the press. This is why, notwithstanding that content analysis results do not bear it out, rising prices as an issue remains at the top of the public agenda.

Most of the Indian journalists have said that time and space are their main constraints. Talking about freedom of expression, most agree that they have nothing like absolute freedom, and that they have to work under certain guidelines, albeit unwritten and unspoken. From the evidence available from the content analysis findings (Chapter 5) and the interviews with journalists (Chapter 7), it appears that *Indian Express* is likely to present election campaign related stories more on its own than *The Hindustan Times* is likely to do, for the former has more percentage of media-initiated stories than the latter. The corollary of this is that *Indian Express*, as compared with its Indian counterpart, is likely to have more freedom to form the campaign agenda. The fact that *Indian Express* is more likely than *The Hindustan Times* to initiate not only the main subject of the election related stories but also the photographs brings the former closer to its tendency to play a pragmatic role, while the latter is likely to be nearer to the sacerdotal role.

It emerges that Indian reporter-journalists may not normally have to undergo direct pressures, internal or external, though it has been gathered from their statements that they know there is nothing like absolute freedom of expression. Rather there are certain subtle undercurrents the professionalists have to keep in mind. It was found that normally those higher up in the editorial hierarchy do not give blunt guidelines to their staff, but, nevertheless, they too can find themselves faced with similar guidelines in their own work. This is especially so when the issues concerned involve the government or the big business houses. However, the Indian executive editors argue that in the first place when they accept to take up their jobs with a particular newspaper management, they obviously prepare themselves to work within a certain environment, and therefore it does not behove them to grumble later.

Semetko *et al* (1991), in their comparative analysis of party and media roles in American and British elections, have argued that the British quality newspapers journalists have a sacerdotal role - this role of theirs is associated with their deep belief in the party system and giving more straight news as emanates from the parties and candidates rather than focusing on their own assertions and judgements, which is a pragmatic role embedded more in the US press - while they cover their own elections. However, they are unlikely to replicate that role while covering the election campaign of a Third World country. Though both the Indian and British press carried more media-initiated items than party-initiated, the British newspapers, in comparison with their Indian counterparts, have been found to include a very large number of media-initiated stories (Chapter 5). This is in consonance with what British journalists express about not liking to interview politicians too often (Chapter 7), and also that the foreign journalists are less likely to attend the daily political party press conferences.

The foreign journalists also face some constraints while working in a different socio-cultural environment than their own. British journalists working in India argue that they have full freedom from their employers and are happy to continue working in

India for, according to them, the Indian government poses few restrictions and thereby allows them more freedom of working than available in many other Third World countries. They have, none the less, a big problem of language, due to the lack of which they cannot communicate directly with illiterate rural folk for first hand information. They have said that the common man in the street does not open up to a foreign correspondent, especially in the presence of an interpreter, and most often says what he thinks would please the foreign reporter, thus depriving the journalist of the real touch. The language factor is a universal problem for journalists working in another country whose main language is different to that of their own. Morrison and Tumber (1985) have argued that foreign correspondents, especially those from the non-English speaking countries, working in London had to face the language problem, as a result of which the press officers were unwilling to go beyond 'professional helpfulness', and avoided giving 'off-the-record' comments.

India was under the British colonial rule for a very long time and it is natural to have deep historical links between the two countries. Not only that, India is an important nation in the Commonwealth, headed by the Queen, whereas there is a lot of educational, cultural and trade exchange between India and Britain. Notwithstanding all that, however, the coverage of the Indian election campaign lasting 47 days was given a low profile in the British press. It also appears that the British press is likely to give more coverage to an event which provides them with a combination of newsworthiness as embedded in their news practices. This is not only what has come up in the findings of the content analysis, but also what British journalists clearly stated as being 'what makes news'.

Who is responsible for the formation of campaign agenda? The thesis findings suggest that setting the campaign agenda - as is visible from the coverage of India's 1991 election - is predominantly the function of the press. The main subject of over 40 per cent of the total coverage is the creation of the journalists. On the one hand, this

indicates that the press contributes more than the political parties to the formation of a campaign agenda. On the other hand, it also implies that during the coverage of an election journalists do not depend as much on the sources as, perhaps, they otherwise would do. In other words, it appears that during the election coverage, the role of 'primary definers' (Hall *et al*, 1978), which places the media persons at the secondary position, seems to be diminishing. Rather, the journalists occupy centre stage during the coverage of an election campaign. However, there is a sort of about turn insofar as the initiation of visuals is concerned. The thesis has demonstrated that political parties/candidates are at an advantageous position in initiating any visual images. This puts in particular the Indian press in the footsteps of British quality newspapers, which are found to portray, visually, the political parties in the British election; the latter have more party-initiated visuals than media-initiated (Semetko *et al*, 1991).

Having said that, it can be concluded that it is in the main the journalists who considered the 'basic' and 'development' issues like inflation, unemployment, poverty, population control, agriculture, rural development, sanitation and health, less important than the intricacies of the on-going campaign itself. While it has been demonstrated in the thesis that the British newspapers in their coverage concentrated more on the violence and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, which can be attributed to the Western news culture, it is the Indian journalists themselves who are responsible for not underpinning the issues which are very important for the Indian masses. India is a developing and predominantly agriculture country. It also has a major problem in controlling the growth of its population. However, the Indian press did not cover these issues with any vigour. Nevertheless, since this study concentrated only on the specific period of elections, it is not possible to say with certainty that Indian journalists always tend to emphasise and prioritise the issues in the way as they have been found in this thesis.

Appendix A

Coding Schedule of the Coverage of

India's General Elections

1. Item No                                    [ ]1
                                              [ ]2
                                              [ ]3
                                              [ ]4


2. Paper (code one)


    1. The Times                              [ ]5
    2. The Guardian
    3. The Hindustan Times
    4. Indian Express


3. Year                                       [ ]6
                                              [ ]7


4. Month (code one)                           [ ]8



5. Date                                       [ ]9
                                              [ ]10


6. Day (code one)                             [ ]11

7. Page No                                                    [ ]12

                                                              [ ]13


8. Position of the Item (code one)


    1. Front Page                                      [ ]14

    2. Inside Page

    3. Back Page


9. News Classification (code one)


    1. Elections '91/Lok Sabha Elections 1991           [ ]15

    2. Overseas/International                           [ ]16

    3. National & Regional/National/States

    4. National & Foreign/Foreign

    5. Pollspaek

    6. Delhi Poll Scene

    7. City

    8. International News (Front Page)

    9. International News (Back Page)

    10. Editorial/Comment & Analysis

    11. News Analysis/Comment/Opinion

    12. Article

    13. Letter to the Editor

    14. Review

15. Business and Economy

16. Features

17. Profile/Personalities

18. Constituency Profile

19. Obituries

20. Sport

21. In Brief/City Briefs/Capital Notebook/Poll Briefs

22. Others


10. Type of the Item (code one)


1. Lead Story                                    [ ]17

2. News Story                                    [ ]18

3. Editorial

4. Article

5. View Point

6. Review

7. Letter to the Editor

8. Analysis/Comment

9. Photograph/Cartoon/Drawing

10. Interview/Profile

11. Advertisement

12. Speech

13. Others


11. Number of Visuals (code number of each type)

1. Photograph                                    [ ]19
                                                 [ ]20

2. Cartoon                                       [ ]21

3. Others(drawing, map, diagram etc)             [ ]22

12. Author/Source (code one)

    1. Special Correspondent                     [ ]23
    2. Political Correspondent                   [ ]24
    3. Correspondent/Reporter
    4. Psephologist/Poll agency
    5. Diplomatic Correspondent/Diplomatic Editor
    6. Foreign Editor
    7. Joint Correspondents
    8. Foreign Staff
    9. Reuter
    10. AP
    11. UPI
    12. AFP
    13. Joint News Agencies
    14. UNI
    15. PTI
    16. Joint Correspondent and Agency

17. Expert (academic/politician/analyst/diplomat/Legal)

18. Newspaper Reader

19. Bureau/Staff

20. Cartoonist/Photographer

21. ENS (Express News Service)

22. Not Specified

23. Others

## 13. Location of the Source/Author (code one)

1. London                                              [ ]25

2. Washington/New York                                 [ ]26

3. Other City of the World

4. Delhi

5. An Indian State Capital

6. Other Indian Cities

7. Any Other Place in India

8. India's Neighbour countries

9. Not Specified

10. More places than one

11. Others

## 14. Initiater of the Main Subject of the Item (code one)

1. Party-Initiated                                     [ ]27

2. Media-Initiated

3. Others-Initiated

15. If Party-Initiated, which Party? (code one)

    1. Congress(I)                           [ ]28

    2. BJP

    3. JD/NF

    4. CPI/CPM

    5. SJP

16. Initiater of Visuals (Photograph/Cartoon) (code one)

    1. Party-Initiated                   [ ]29

    2. Media-Initiated

    3. Others-Initiated

17. Who is in the Picture (code one)

    1. Congress(I)                           [ ]30

    2. BJP                                     [ ]31

    3. JD/NF

    4. CPI/CPM

    5. SJP

    6. Rajiv Gandhi

    7. L.K. Advani

    8. V.P. Singh

    9. CPI/CPM leaders (H.S. Surjeet/Jyoti Basu

    10. Chandra Shekhar

11. A.B. Vajpayee

12. Others

18. Tone of the Visual (code one)

1. Favourable                                         [ ]32

2. Unfavourable

3. Neutral

19. News Source/Actors quoted, interviewed or referred to (main sources/actors)

1. Indian President                         1   2

2. Indian Prime Minister                    ☐☐

3. Indian Center Ministers                  3   4

4. Member of Parliament                     ☐☐

5. Indian Election Commission               5   6

the officials thereof                       ☐☐

6. State Governors                          7   8

7. State Chief Ministers                    ☐☐

8. State Ministers                          9   10

9. Congress(I) Leaders/Party                ☐☐

10. National Front Leaders/Party

11. Janata Dal Leaders/Party

12. Samajwadi Janata Party Leaders/Party

13. Bhartya Janata Party (BJP) Leaders/Party

14. CPI/CPM

15. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)/Party

16. Rashtrya Samajwadi Party (RSP) Leaders/Party

17. Indian Officials (Civil Servants/Bureucrats)

18. State Level Officials/Civil Servants/Bureaucrats


REGIONAL PARTIES


19. Telugu Desam Party (TDP) Leaders/Party

20. DMK Leaders/Party

21. AI-ADMK Leaders/Party

22. Asom Gana Prishad (AGP) Leaders/Party

23. Akali Dal Leaders/Party

24. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)/Party


INDIVIDUALS (MAIN ASPIRANTS FOR PM'S OFFICE)


25. Rajiv Gandhi

26. Chandra Shekhar

27. V.P. Singh

28. A.B. Vajpayee

(AFTER RAJIV GANDHI'S MURDER)

29. P.V. Narasimha Rao

30. Sonia Gandhi

31. Arjun Singh

32. N.D. Tiwari

33. Sharad Pawar

34. Pranab Mukherjee

EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS

35. LTTE

36. Kashmir Militants

37. Punjab Militants

38. Shiv Sena

39. Vishwa Hindu Prishad (VHP)

OTHERS

40. World Leaders

41. India's Neighbour Countries/Their Figures

42. India's Neighbour Countries' Officials

43. Psephologists/Opinion Poll Organisations/Opinion Leaders

44. Experts/Commentators/Analysts/Intellectuals

45. Indian Diplomatic Officials

46. Military Officials/Police Officials/Para Military Forces

47. Indian News Agencies/Other Madia

48. International News Agencies/Other Media

49. India's Neighbour Countries' News Agencies/Other Media

50. Civil Liberties Organisations/Leaders

51. Independent Candidate

80. Others

20. Themes/Issues of the Item

1. Elections

2. Politics

3. Terrorism/Violence/Separatism

4. Prime Minister's Office

5. National Unity and Integrity

6. Mandal Commission Report/Reservations

7. Casteism (Scheduled vs Non-Scheduled)

8. Religion (Hindu/Muslim/Sikh/Christian)

9. Political Alliance/Coalition

10. Defection (Changing Parties)

11. Manifesto of the Party

12. Countermanding Election

13. Janam Bhoomi/Babri Masjid/Ayodhaya Case

14. Kashmir Problem

15. Punjab Problem

16. Assam Problem

17. Sri Lanka/Tamil Problem

18. Demonstrations/Strikes/Bandhs/Dharnas/Unrest/Law and Order Problem

19. Communalism/Riots/Communal Violence

20. Corruption/Malpractices/Embezzlements

21. Rajiv Gandhi's Assassination/Last Rites/Immersion of Ashes

22. Dynasty/Dynastic Rule

23. Succession to Rajiv Gandhi

24. Political Murders/death (killing) of candidate

25. Poverty

Primary

1   2

☐☐

Secondary

3   4

☐☐

Tertiary

5   6

☐☐

Fourth

7   8

☐☐

26. Civic Problems (drinking water, roads etc)

27. Unemployment/Employment

28. Center-State Relations

29. Civil Liberties/Democratic Rights/Social Justice

30. Science/Technology

31. Judiciary/Legal/Courts/Law

32. Indian Border Issues/Relations with Neighbour Countries

33. Foreign Policy

34. Education

35. President's Rule

36. Economic/Finance

37. Withdrawal/Expulsion/Retire

38. Secularism

39. Stability

40. Women

41. Constitution

42. Rising Prices

43. Campaign/Convassing

44. Division-of-waters Issue

45. Autonomy of the Media/Freedom of Press

46. Agriculture

47. Commerce/Industry/Import/Export

48. Communications(Telephone,Roads etc.)

49. Health/Welfare

50. Family Planning/Population Control

51. Military/Defence

52. Rigging/Booth Capturing/Sabotage

53. Poll Predictions/Analysis

54. Resignation

55. Voting/Polling

56. Environment

57. Rural Development/Development

58. Repoll

59. Sympathy Wave

60. Poll Violence

80. Others

Appendix - B

Coding of Headlines, sub-headlines,

lead sources/author's name

Item No                                                    [ ]1

[ ]2

[ ]3

[ ]4

Headline:

Sub-Headline:

Lead (First Sentence):

Source/Author's Name:

Appendix - C

Coding of Editorial

Item No                                                    [ ]1
                                                           [ ]2
                                                           [ ]3
                                                           [ ]4

Editorial Title:

Main Points in the Editorial:

Appendix - D

Coding of Visuals

Item No                                         [ ]1

                                                [ ]2

                                                [ ]3

                                                [ ]4

Photograph Caption (Specify):

Description of Photograph:

Cartoon Comment (Specify):

Description of Cartoon:

Appendix - E

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## JOURNALIST-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

The main responsibility of a journalist is to inform his readers truthfully, objectively and speedily.

(a). Where do you keep your readers in the ladder of importance?

(b). Do you think you, through your reporting, have been justifying what your readers expect of you?

(c). Have you had occasions when you thought you were not being able to live up to your responsibility towards your readers. If yes, what was that? What or who, do you think, was the main hindrance.

(d). Did you come across any specific instance vis-à-vis the audience while covering the General Elections in 1991?

(e). So far the audience is concerned, how, in your view, your paper fared in relation to other rival papers and broadcast media in the coverage the General Elections.

## RAJIV GANDHI'S ASSASSINATION AND ELECTIONS

Rajiv Gandhi's murder amidst the election campaign was a big event in the whole process of electioneering. It left the media speculating as to what will happen to the Indian democracy. Many said the Congress(I) benefited through the sympathy vote that came in the wake of his murder.

(a). How do you view the assassination and the coverage thereof in your paper vis-à-vis other Indian newspapers and the broadcast media?

(b). In your view, what effects did it have on the overall outcome of the election results (sympathy vote etc.).

## SOURCE-JOURNALIST RELATIONSHIP

Sources in deed are very important for journalists. Nevertheless, it is debatable who, in the end, uses whom.

(a). How would you view this relationship of yours with your sources. Please elaborate this especially in the context of elections.

(b). Don't you think too much dependence on sources lends the latter too much, at times undue, importance which he may misuse for his vested interests.

(c). It is said sources regulate the flow of information. They disclose only the facts they want to see appear in print, thus posing an indirect restrictions on the working of a reporter. What is your opinion on this issue?

## NEWS VALUES

(a). What, according to you, makes news?

(b). Do you have different news values while you cover elections?

(c). What kind of relationship do you have with your editor?

## PRESSURES/CONSTRAINTS/CENSORSHIP

(a). Do you feel that you have complete freedom in whatever you think is worth reporting? If not, please explain how and why you think otherwise.

(b). Have you had any pressures more from the editor/management or from the people outside the paper. How do you tackle them?

(c). Does your story generally get through, as you had written it, without any significant changes in that? If not, what do you do? (protest or/and yield)

(d). It is indeed a difficult question, but how happy you really feel with the working of your paper. I mean, given the opportunity, would you switch over to some other? or would continue to work because, you think......

Particularly to the Foreign Reporters

(a). What kind of experience have you had of working in a foreign country of different culture than your own? What sort of problems do you have to face while doing your official duty.

(b). It is a commonly held view that `news which does not conform to the dominant social values of the West will not be selected, and if selected will be critically presented and framed in ethnocentrism'; what is your reaction?

(c). Despite the fact that you are based in Delhi, yet not much is published about India in your newspaper. Is it that you send less or that it does not get into print. Please elaborate on the either reason.

## ABOUT YOURSELF

Name:

Qualifications:

Experience as a journalist

Appendix - F

## LIST OF JOURNALISTS INTERVIEWED

| | NAME | NEWSPAPER |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Benedict, K. | *Indian Express* |
| 2. | Bhushan, Ranjit | *Indian Express* |
| 3. | Brown, Derek | *The Guardian* |
| 4. | Chaudhry, Neerja | *Indian Express* |
| 5. | Chawla, Prabhu | *Indian Express* |
| 6. | Ghose, Arabinda | *The Hindustan Times* |
| 7. | Ghosh, Arup | *The Hindustan Times* |
| 8. | Narayanan, V.K. | *Indian Express* |
| 9. | Prabhu, A.N. | *The Hindustan Times* |
| 10. | Rajagopalan, S. | *The Hindustan Times* |
| 11. | Sahay, Ashok Mohan | *The Hindustan Times* |
| 12. | Singh, Dev Sagar | *Indian Express* |
| 13. | Singh, Guriqbal | *The Hindustan Times* |
| 14. | Thomas, Christopher | *The Times* |
| 15. | Tripathi, P.C.M. | *Indian Express* |
| 16. | Vasudevan, S. | *The Hindustan Times* |

Appendix - G

Item Classification

| | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian | Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elections '91/ Lok Sabha Elections 1991 | 452 (25.2) | 412 (31.2) | 1 (1.9) | 3 (6.3) | 868 (27.0) |
| Overseas/ International | - - | 1 (0.1) | 43 (81.1) | 12 (25.0) | 56 (1.7) |
| National/ National & Regional/State | 134 (7.5) | 46 (3.5) | - - | - - | 180 (5.6) |
| Foreign | 32 (1.8) | 36 (2.7) | - | - | 68 (2.1) |
| Pollspeak | - | 4 (.3) | - | - | 4 (.1) |
| Delhi Poll - Scene | 93 (5.2) | 52 (3.9) | - - | - - | 145 (4.5) |
| City | 73 (4.1) | 76 (5.7) | - - | - - | 149 (4.6) |
| International Front Page | - | - | 1 (1.9) | 6 (12.5) | 7 (.2) |
| International Back Page | - | - | - | 3 (6.3) | 3 (.2) |
| Editorial/ Comment & Analysis | 36 (2.0) | 35 (2.6) | 3 (5.7) | 5 (10.4) | 79 (2.5) |
| News Analysis | - | 5 (.4) | - | - | 5 (.2) |
| Article | 9 (.5) | 4 (.3) | - | 2 (4.2) | 15 (.5) |
| Letter to the Editor | 67 (3.7) | 49 (3.7) | - - | 2 (4.2) | 118 (3.7) |
| Brief/ City briefs/ Capital Notebook/Poll Briefs | 55 (3.1) | 33 (2.5) | - - | 2 (4.2) | 90 (2.8) |
| Business | 6 (.3) | 3 (.2) | - | - | 9 (.3) |
| Personality | - | 25 (1.9) | 1 (1.9) | - | 26 (.8) |
| Constituency | 17 (.9) | 26 (2.0) | - | - | 43 (1.3) |
| Obituaries | 13 (.7) | 3 (.2) | 1 (1.9) | 1 (2.1) | 18 (.6) |
| Sport | 11 (.6) | 6 (.5) | - | - | 17 (.5) |
| Others | 797 (44.4) | 507 (38.3) | 3 (5.7) | 12 (25.0) | 1319 (41.0) |
| Total | 1795 (55.8) | 1323 (41.1) | 53 (1.6) | 48 (1.5) | 3219 (100) |

Table shows the item classification in four newspapers; figures in parentheses represent percentages within the newspapers.

Appendix - H

Type of Item

| | Hindustan Times | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lead Story | 33 (1.8) | 27 (2.0) | 2 (3.8) | 3 (6.3) | 65 (2.0) |
| News Story | 1292 (72.0) | 966 (73.0) | 32 (60.4) | 29 (60.4) | 2319 (72.0) |
| Editorial | 36 (2.0) | 33 (2.5) | 3 (5.7) | 2 (4.2) | 74 (2.3) |
| Article | 7 (.4) | - | - | 1 (2.1) | 8 (.2) |
| Viewpoint | 2 (.1) | - | - | - | 2 (.1) |
| Review | 1 (.1) | - | - | - | 1 (.0) |
| Letter to Editor | 67 (3.7) | 51 (3.9) | - | 2 (4.2) | 120 (3.7) |
| Analysis | 189 (10.5) | 72 (5.4) | 7 (13.2) | 9 (18.8) | 277 (8.6) |
| Photograph/ Cartoon/Drawing | 96 (5.3) | 71 (5.4) | 7 (13.2) | - | 174 (5.4) |
| Profile/Interview | 37 (2.1) | 47 (3.6) | 2 (3.8) | 2 (4.2) | 88 (2.7) |
| Advertisements | 34 (1.9) | 54 (4.1) | - | - | 88 (2.7) |
| Speech | 1 (.1) | 1 (.1) | - | - | 2 (.1) |
| Others | - | 1 (.1) | - | - | 1 (.0) |

Table shows the type of items in newspapers; figures in parentheses represent percentages within the newspaper.

## Appendix - I

### Macro-Actors in Newspapers

| | Actor/Source as a group | HT | Indian Express | The Times | Guardian | Sum of N | Percentage of Responses* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Political parties | 2580 | 2129 | 60 | 76 | 4845 | 52 |
| 2 | Aspirants for Prime Ministership | 809 | 733 | 45 | 43 | 1630 | 18 |
| 3 | Official Sources at the National Level | 583 | 414 | 16 | 12 | 1025 | 11 |
| 4 | Official Sources at the State Level | 199 | 125 | 1 | 0 | 325 | 4 |
| 5 | Militant Organisations | 140 | 153 | 10 | 9 | 312 | 3 |
| 6 | Regional Parties | 148 | 120 | 1 | 3 | 272 | 3 |
| 7 | Individual Leaders for Leadership of the Congress(I) | 78 | 95 | 27 | 24 | 224 | 2 |
| 8 | Neighbour Countries and their officials | 42 | 29 | 4 | 2 | 77 | <1 |
| 9 | World Leaders and International News Agencies | 31 | 18 | 3 | 3 | 55 | <1 |
| 10 | Others/Miscellaneous | 302 | 179 | 18 | 15 | 514 | 6 |
| | Total | 3409 | 2353 | 132 | 125 | 9279 | 100 |

## Appendix - J

### Macro Themes in Newspapers

| | Macro Theme/Issue | HT | Indian Express | The Times | The Guardian | Sum of N | %age of Responses |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Campaigning | 1380 | 1034 | 32 | 20 | 2466 | 41 |
| 2 | Rajiv Gandhi Murder | 455 | 307 | 55 | 50 | 867 | 14 |
| 3 | Violence, Terrorism and Law & Order | 445 | 297 | 14 | 21 | 777 | 13 |
| 4 | Religion & Caste and Communal Disturbance | 308 | 154 | 10 | 15 | 487 | 8 |
| 5 | Mixed and Others | 227 | 122 | 4 | 2 | 355 | 6 |
| 6 | Ram Janambhoomi/Babri Masjid/Ayodhya | 188 | 120 | 3 | 3 | 314 | 5 |
| 7 | Mandal Commission Report/Reservations | 102 | 98 | 1 | 1 | 202 | 3 |
| 8 | Stability | 113 | 69 | 7 | 11 | 200 | 3 |
| 9 | Basic Issues | 109 | 84 | 4 | 1 | 198 | 3 |
| 10 | Development Issues | 77 | 55 | 2 | 1 | 135 | 2 |
| 11 | Foreign Policy | 5 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 18 | <1 |

Appendix -K

Macro Themes - Mixed and Others in Newspapers

| | HT | Express | The Times | Guardian |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Politics | 61 (2) | 23 (1) | 1 | 0 |
| PM's Office | 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Centre-state Relations | 6 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| Civil-Liberties | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Judiciary | 30 (<1) | 14 | 0 | 0 |
| President's Rule | 26 | 29 (1) | 0 | 0 |
| Women | 13 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| Constitution | 13 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Water-Disputes | - | - | - | - |
| Media Autonomy | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Military/Defence | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Environment | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Others | 71 (2) | 18 (<1) | 3 (2) | 2 (2) |

Figures in the table show the number of items in each newspaper having the themes.

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